

When Questions Remain

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[0 : 00] The truth is that though we are a diverse group this morning, one thing that we share in common is we all have questions. Questions about life in general and questions about our lives in particular for which we have no answers.

And most, if not all of the questions that really matter are big questions. And because they're big questions, they're directed to God.

And when we consider the nature of these questions, most of them are why questions. They're not what questions, they're not who questions, they're not even when questions.

Even though we have a lot of when questions, they are why questions. They're the most asked questions, they are the most weighty questions.

We ask God big why questions like, why do you allow suffering? Why do you allow evil? Why is it that the wicked often seem to prosper while the righteous seem to suffer?

[1 : 23] Why do you allow hurricanes that kill people and destroy property? Why did you allow the poor? Why did you allow the poor? Why did you let Hurricane Irma devastate the Leeward Islands and merely brush the Bahamas?

I think for most of us this morning, the questions that are most important for us are personal questions. We wonder why am I suffering?

Why did my marriage break down? Why have you not healed me? Why did you not protect me? Why can't I find a job?

Why am I always depressed? Why aren't you answering my prayer? And the list goes on. Why are you answering them?

And as important as these questions are and other questions, God never promises to answer them. He never promises that he will answer them in this life.

[2 : 29] He never promises that he will even answer them in the life to come. But the good news this morning is that although God does not promise to answer our questions, God does provide us with perspective.

He gives us perspective to unanswered questions in his word, many places in his word. And one of those places is Psalm 131. And so for the remainder of our time this morning, I want us to consider Psalm 131 and I want us to learn from the example of the Psalmist David.

How we can live with unanswered questions in our lives. So please turn to Psalm 131. If you have not yet done so.

And I am reading from the English Standard Version. If you have another translation, you also read a little differently. Psalm 131. The psalmist writes, O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.

My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

[3 : 50] But I have calmed and quieted my soul. Like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Let's pray together. Father, what a privilege it is to be able to pray to you at all, but to address you as our Father.

Lord, we have gathered in this place. We have gathered in Jesus' name.

Lord, we have come to the moment where we look to hear from you through the preaching of your word. Lord, we ask that you would speak to us in the context of all of the realities that we face.

In the context of all that is going on, I pray that you would, from the pages of your word, speak to our hearts in this moment. Lord, I pray that you would grant us the perspective that we need to live with questions about life and our lives that aren't answered.

[5 : 39] Yet we must live and continue and carry on looking to you and trusting in you. Father, help us this morning to be able to do that as we consider your word.

Lord, I ask that you would grant me abundant grace that you know I desperately need. Would you grant me grace to proclaim your word and grant us all grace to hear your word?

Father, would you do these things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. So the question we wanted to consider this morning is, how do we live with unanswered questions?

How do we live with unanswered questions? Or to make it more personally, how should you live with unanswered questions? And perhaps to bring it into focus a bit more, how are you living with questions?

Unanswered. Questions that aren't answered. Perhaps you've had for quite some time. You've prayed about. You've talked with people about. You've read God's word.

[6 : 57] But you still don't have answers to those questions. But in Psalm 131, the psalmist seems to have been facing some big issues.

He seems to have been facing some big issues that he didn't understand. Perhaps he had questions that he had no answers for. And in these three verses, I believe that there's much to help us as we similarly deal with unanswered questions.

So in our remaining time this morning, drawing from these words of the psalmist, I want to commend to us three ways that we should respond to unanswered questions that loom large in our lives.

And perhaps this can even help us as we interact with people who no doubt will have questions. I think this would help many of us as parents or guardians of young children who would ask us questions about the devastation they're probably seeing on television and over social media about these powerful storms that are coming our way and that have come our way.

Well, first of all, when we consider these three verses, one of the ways that we live with unanswered questions is we are to respond with a humble heart.

[8 : 29] We are to respond with a humble heart. That's what the psalmist does in verse 1 of this psalm. Notice again what he says. O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.

My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. Friends, that is an admission.

That is an admission that there are things that are too great. There are things that are too marvelous for us. There are things we don't understand.

And to admit that and to truly accept that is an expression of humility. And in this first verse, the psalmist gives us three different expressions of pride.

First, it's a heart that is lifted up. Second, it is eyes that are too high, that are raised too high. And third, it is occupying oneself with things too great and too marvelous to understand.

[9 : 45] What he says is, O God, I am not proud. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. So another way that we can understand what the psalmist is saying is to see that being occupied with big questions that by their very nature can only be answered by God is an expression of pride.

It is an expression of pride when we are occupied with those big questions that only God can really answer.

And it is an expression of humility to say, I don't understand. It is an expression of humility to recognize that there are things that we simply do not understand.

Now I think it's important for us to recognize what the psalmist is not saying. The psalmist is not saying that we must not question God. It's perfectly fine to question God.

Servants of God, saints of God, in Scripture and in history have questioned God as they sought to understand situations they were facing. For example, we find in Psalm 44, verses 23 through 26, the psalmist writes, Awake!

[11 : 10] Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself. Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

For our soul is bowed down to the dust, our belly clings to the ground. Rise up. Come to our help. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. So the psalmist is not saying that we must not question God.

What he is instead saying is that we must not occupy ourselves with things too great for us, things too marvelous for us, which would include our unanswered questions.

So in other words, it's okay to bring before the Lord our questions and even pour our hearts to him concerning them. But we must not let those questions preoccupy us.

We must not let those questions become an obsession for us. So it's okay to ask them. It's okay to ponder them in our hearts.

[12 : 15] But we must guard against our hearts becoming proud and being lifted up before the Lord. And I think this is especially an occupational hazard for pastors because somehow there is a view by people and there's a view among pastors that they're supposed to know everything.

And so one of the things that tends to happen is in times like these where there's suffering all around and Matthew came last time and didn't come this time, a reporter takes a microphone or picks up the phone and calls the pastor and says, hey, what do you think about this and why is this and why is that?

And because they have not embraced the wisdom of Psalm 131, they seek to speculate or seek to give an answer. They seek to occupy themselves with things that are too marvelous. Things that are just beyond their reach on a top shelf that they could never reach but they speculate about it and do more harm than good by simply saying, I don't know.

But here's what I do know. I want to ask you this morning, how are you living with your unanswered questions?

How are you responding to God? Are you living with humility before God? Are you living with a humble heart before God?

[13 : 54] Trusting Him even where you don't have answers for your questions and not being preoccupied with those questions.

And again, a simple way to test or to determine if our hearts are humble before the Lord or proud before the Lord is to consider how we're handling the questions for which we have no answer.

Do we place them before the Lord and wait for Him to answer in His way and in His time? Or are we preoccupied with them, keeping them before us rather than before God?

Some of you may be wondering, how do I know if I'm preoccupied with the questions I have? How do I know whether I am being proud or being humble with regard to the questions I have?

Let's consider the second aspect. The second way we should respond, I think it would shed more light to detect whether our hearts are humble or proud before the Lord.

[15 : 09] The second way that the psalmist teaches us to respond in the face of unanswered questions is this. We should respond with a quiet trust. We should respond with a humble heart.

He says now, we should respond with a quiet trust. Look at verse 2. The psalmist begins his words with the conjunction, but.

So let's connect what he says in verse 2 to what he already said in verse 1 so that we can make sure that we don't miss it. Starting in verse 1 again, O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.

My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. Now verse 2, but I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

We also look closely with the psalmist as he's saying in verse 2. First notice his honesty. The psalmist is honest in verse 2. He is disclosing to us that he was not always calm, that he was not always quiet about the great and marvelous things that he didn't understand, those things that brought him unrest and those things that brought him disquiet.

[16 : 33] And this should be obvious simply because of the exact words that he uses. He had to calm and quiet his soul.

He doesn't say to us, I am like a weaned child with my mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. If he said that, we would never see his process.

We would think, well, he is just that way. He was always that way. But he doesn't say that. He says, but I have calmed and quieted my soul.

The psalmist had to come to this place and brothers and sisters, we have to come to this place. If our souls are raging and our souls are noisy, we need to come to the place where we, like the psalmist, quiet and calm our souls.

To communicate his posture, the psalmist uses a figure of speech that we call simile, where he likens himself to something else.

[17 : 52] That's what a simile is. It likens something or someone to something else. He says, I'm like a weaned child with its mother. Now, obviously, the psalmist was no child when he wrote these words.

He was a grown man. But he says, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. The psalmist uses this picture of a weaned child, with his mother to communicate quiet trust and the quiet trust in particular that he had come to in the Lord.

And I think most of us know that weaning is a process by which babies gradually come off of milk and they begin to eat solid food. And I think that most of the mothers who've had more than one child can attest to the truth is that weaning is very different for children.

It's sometimes shorter for some and longer for others. Sometimes harder for some and easier for others. And those of you who have breastfed babies, you know that sometimes when a baby is not weaned, that baby will cry murder when he or she wants to be breastfed and they don't care where you are.

You could be in the car or on the line at the bank and they want to be breastfed and they'll cry their heads off until you feed them and people will look at you and wonder if you're mistreating your child or not taking care of your child.

[19 : 31] That's where unweaned children behave. And I think the psalmist captures how we sometimes can act when we want to have answers to the questions that we have, questions that perplex us.

And the psalmist rightly chooses this vivid image of an unweaned child whose universe revolves around getting the milk that he or she wants in the moment.

On the other hand, the weaned child is a bit more mature. The weaned child has had some experience over time of his mother caring for him and feeding him and the weaned child is more patient to wait for food.

He fully expects to be fed because experience has shown him over time that he will be fed. But when we consider this illustration of the psalmist about this weaned child, there's one particular aspect of it that we mustn't miss.

It's not just a child who has been weaned that the psalmist is pointing us to. The psalmist is pointing us to a weaned child with its mother.

[20 : 57] A weaned child who is in his mother's presence. And really that's comfort enough. The presence of a mother brings quiet trust to that child though he or she has been weaned.

And so it is for those of us who are children of God, those of us who have matured and have come to learn to trust in the Lord. And we sing that song, It is so sweet to trust in Jesus.

Just to take him at his word. Just to rest upon his promise. Just to know, thus says the Lord. We learn to trust in Jesus.

And as long as we stay near to the Lord, as long as we are in his presence, then we come to a place of quiet trust and a place of quiet rest.

But the questions remain. They don't go away. but we hold on to our quiet trust in the Lord. And the same way that a baby grows and gets to know his or her mother better and grow in trust, then we too are to grow in trusting God as we grow in knowing God.

[22 : 22] The more we know him, the more we trust him. But you know, as beautiful as this analogy is about this wean child with his mother, like all analogies, it breaks down.

It's not a perfect analogy. And the reason is that with the weaned child, when a child has been weaned, he is weaned, he's done with it, he's over it, and he's trusting his mother and he's not going to act like an unweaned child child, because he can ask for food and he knows when the mother says I'll give it to you in five minutes, then they can wait for it.

But with us it's not the same. You see, we go back and forth sometimes. There are seasons when we are trusting the Lord, there are seasons when we are like a child that's been weaned, and our questions are not preoccupying us, and we're not pulling our hair out over them.

We don't have answers, but we're trusting God. And then there are other times when those questions get the better part of us, and we are like that unweaned child, and we are screaming murder because we're not hearing from God in the way that we want to hear from God, and we are relating to him as if he will not feed us the way a mother would not feed or neglect a child.

And so for us it's not this permanent place that we come to, it is the battle. Sometimes it's a daily battle. Sometimes in one day we can have both experiences.

[24 : 01] We're in the morning, we're trusting the Lord, but by the time the day is ending we are anxious, and we are wondering, and we're preoccupied with all of our questions, and we wonder whether God will take care of us, or whether God even hears us.

God will trust us. And so we go through this process again and again, coming back to this place where we are trusting God, like a child that's been reamed.

Do you know what enables us to be able to be at this place of rest, this place of quiet, when questions could be swirling all around?

It is this, it is believing in the absolute sovereignty of God, and believing in the absolute goodness of God.

You see, in the midst of all that has happened in the region, I mean, I looked at some of the footage of, I saw footage that watching people walk through rubble, watching people walk through rubble that you couldn't tell what it was.

[25 : 17] And hearing the anguish and hearing them cry out, and you have no answers for that. But here's what you know, you know that there is a sovereign God. But not only is there a sovereign God, you know that there's a God who is good.

And what keeps us quiet, what keeps us at rest in the midst of all the questions and all the confusion, is this unswerving belief in the absolute sovereignty of God.

And the absolute goodness of God. And brothers and sisters, we must believe both. It's not enough to believe that God is absolutely sovereign. We must also believe that He's absolutely good.

See, because God can be absolutely sovereign, but if we don't believe that He's absolutely good, there's this lurking thought in the back of our minds that perhaps His power would be used not for our good, but for our ill.

And so we really can't fully trust Him. And then it's not enough to believe that God is absolutely good if we don't believe that He is absolutely sovereign, because He may be fully determined to do good to us, only good to us, but not powerful enough to bring it to pass, because there could be some other power, some other force out there that prevents the goodness that He wants to bring to us.

[26 : 56] And so what we need to hold on to in our personal lives and in the broader context of all that we're seeing happening with these storms and with suffering and all the other issues in life that we have no answers for, we need to be able to hold on to these two convictions that God is absolutely sovereign.

And that God is absolutely good. And brothers and sisters, we can't hold on to those in the midst of not having our questions answered. We can't say to a person, I don't know about that, I don't know why that is, but here's what I do know, God is sovereign.

Because if He's not sovereign, then He's not God. And if He is not absolutely good, if He is not 100% without the slightest effect in terms of goodness, then again He is not God.

He's not the God who deserves our worship and our allegiance. He's not the only way we can trust Him and we hold on to the two of those things.

I remember a number of years ago, many years ago now, there was a man in the church that I grew up in. A hurricane, very similar to what we are seeing, devastating the region, came to this island and destroyed his farm.

[28 : 33] He had a large commercial farm. Destroyed the crop that he had that was soon to be harvested. He lost it all. And obviously it wasn't insured. And he was absolutely convinced that God was sovereign and God could have stopped it and God didn't stop it and he was angry with God.

But he wasn't persuaded that God was good. He wasn't persuaded that because God is absolutely good, however God works in our lives, He works for our good.

He wasn't persuaded about that. He was only absolutely persuaded that God is sovereign, God could have stopped it and God didn't stop it. And so he became bitter.

He ceased attending church. He did not want anything to do with the church. He didn't want to have anything to do with the people who were in the church. And he isolated himself and he died as a bitter, isolated man.

Because he only believed that God was all powerful and all sovereign, but he doubted God's goodness. Brothers and sisters, God is both absolutely sovereign and good.

[29 : 56] And in addition to that, God is near. He is near. And oftentimes we miss God's goodness because we're looking in the wrong places.

You see, again, God is good this morning, not because we were spared from the hurricane. God is good today. The people in Barbuda, the people in St.

Bart, those who belong to Christ, they must rise up today and they must say, for the Lord is good and his mercy endures forever, even though they have had enormous losses.

God is good to us this morning, not because he spared us the ravages of Irma. God is good. If you want to look, if you want to see where God has poured out the evidence of his goodness, we need to look back to a place called Calvary.

Where Jesus Christ came, where Jesus Christ went and ascended that hill and Jesus Christ, with no sin of his own, took on the sins of sinners and he died as a substitute in their place and he bore the punishment that they deserved so that God could give mercy to sinners who didn't deserve it.

[31 : 24] God displayed his goodness on Calvary's cross. And that's where we need to look. We mustn't look around at transient things that could change in a moment.

We mustn't look around at these trappings in our lives that, yes, they make our lives comfortable, but they are not the end-all and be-all of life. Life goes on without them.

God's goodness is not measured in those things. Yes, they're gifts from him. We thank him for them. But they're not evidences of his goodness.

The greatest evidence of his goodness. the sending of his son to die in the place of sinners. And in that he drew near to us through Jesus Christ.

And we must never, ever forget that. Just imagine what that must look like for a person who has come to trust in Jesus Christ, whose sins have been forgiven.

[32 : 29] And in the moment of trial, in the moment of loss, they're more conscious of some temporary loss than they are of the eternal life that has been given to them through Jesus Christ and through his sacrifice on the cross.

So I want to ask you this morning, are you mindful of God's sovereignty? And of God's goodness in your life? And in the face of unanswered questions, is your soul calm and quiet in the presence of the Lord?

Because you truly believe that no matter what goes on, he is absolutely sovereign. No matter what goes on, he is absolutely good. And he has displayed that good on Calvary's cross.

So in the face of unanswered questions, first, we are to respond with a humble heart, we are to respond with a quiet trust. And third, finally and briefly, we are to respond with a steadfast hope. Look at verse three. Notice that the psalmist transitions from a personal prayer to God to a general instruction to God's people.

[33 : 55] He says, O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever more. The psalmist is in essence calling the people of God to see that God can be trusted.

God can be trusted. And that they therefore can root their hope in him. It is this ongoing, steadfast hope in the Lord that will also help us to calm and quiet our souls even when the unanswered questions get the better part of us and we are tempted to become disquieted.

And brothers and sisters, anyone or anything that changes is not worthy of our enduring hope and our steadfast trust.

Anyone or anything that changes isn't worthy for us to oppose hope in it. And anyone who doesn't know everything is not worthy of enduring and steadfast hope.

But God does know all things. And he knows the answers to the questions that we have. But for reasons known only to himself, he keeps those things as secrets.

[35 : 20] Listen to what it says in Deuteronomy 29, 29. The secret things belong to the Lord, our God. But the things that are revealed belong to us.

and to our children forever. That we may do all the words of this law. I want to read that again.

The secret things belong to the Lord, our God. But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever. That we may do all the words of this law.

What is the writer saying to us? What is Moses saying to us? He's saying to us that what God reveals to us is sufficient. What God reveals to us enables us to do what he has commanded us to do.

And see, this is what is important for us to know. There's nothing that we don't have the answer to that is essential to us fulfilling what God requires of us.

[36 : 31] Moses makes it very clear that we may do all the words of this law. All the words of his word. All the words of his will for us.

He has revealed it to us so that we might do it. But God doesn't hide the fact that there are some things he doesn't tell us. He doesn't hide the fact that there are things that we will not know. He has secrets. And they are his secrets. But there are things that he has revealed to us that belong to us and they belong to our children forever.

and we are called to hope in him and to trust in him. So really the reason that we don't have answers to many of our questions, the questions that dog us and the questions that we wonder about, is they may be desirable but they're not necessary.

The answers to those questions are not necessary. not for doing God's will. And I'm sure you may have said it or you may have heard people say it, boy, when I get to heaven, I can't wait to ask the Lord this question or that question.

[37 : 53] But you know, truth be told, if we get to heaven, it wouldn't matter. If we get to heaven, we would not be preoccupied with those questions.

So on earth, the answers are not necessary and in heaven, they won't matter. They won't matter. we're getting ready to run Christianity Explored again.

And during the first session of Christianity Explored, we ask this question. This question is asked of the participants in the course. If you could ask God one question that you knew he would answer, what would you ask him?

And over the many sessions that we have done Christianity Explored, I've heard some profound questions that people said they would ask the Lord.

[39 : 03] As I close this morning, I want to share with you the most important question that anyone can ask in this life. The most important question that anyone can ask in this life.

It's the same question that the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas in Acts chapter 16 verse 30. And it is this, what must I do to be saved?

What must I do to be saved? See, this question gets to the heart of the most important reason that we are on this earth.

The most important reason that we are on this earth is to prepare for the life to come and all that that entails. And so the most important question is, what must I do to be saved?

It is important because our eternity hangs on it. For those of us who have come to Christ, those of us who have put our faith in Jesus Christ, we should take comfort this morning that in the midst of all the questions that we have that are not answered, this is not one of them.

[40 : 20] This is not one of them. You could imagine someone who is away from the Lord. Their very breath is in God's hands.

Their very days are numbered on this earth. They don't know the Lord. And this is not a preoccupation for them. This question, what must I do to be saved, is not even on their radar. They're asking all kinds of other questions. By God's grace, that's not the reality for those of us who have trusted in Jesus Christ this morning.

That question has been settled by the grace of God. We have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. But if you hear this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ and you're preoccupied with all the other questions, I want to say to you this morning that this is the question that is most important for you to ask and have answered and that is, what must I do to be saved?

And really to a large extent this morning, if you're here and you don't know Jesus Christ, what you've been doing is you've been listening in on a conversation. It's really not a conversation that was directed to you prior to this point.

[41 : 45] Psalm 131 is God's word to God's people to help them to live with the unanswered questions that pertain to this life. And so up to this point, if you don't know Jesus Christ, all of that really you were just kind of listening in.

But the most important question for you this morning to consider is, what must I do to be saved? And if this is the most important question, then the answer to that becomes the most important information. And the Bible calls it good news. In response to the Philippian jailer's question, Paul said to him, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

And that's not just having some academic belief that, yeah, Jesus lived and he's in the Bible and so, yeah, I believe that he lived. No. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is to stake your very life on the claims that he has made.

It is to put your trust in him for who he says he is and who scripture says that he is, that he came to this world to give his life as a ransom for many.

[42 : 59] He came to this world to be a substitute for sinners bearing their sins and enduring God's wrath for those sins so that those sinners may receive pardon and they may receive reconciliation to God.

And that is what you must do. You must turn from sin, you must trust in Christ. And you can do so with the full assurance that God will keep his word where he says, whoever comes to me, I will not turn away, but I will receive and I will forgive.

And so like the Philippian jailer, you can receive those words of promise as well. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved, you and your household.

My prayer for you this morning is that if you're here, you don't know Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Savior, that before you leave this place today, you will settle that issue. Before you leave this place today, you will humble yourself and you will bow your heart before Almighty God and you will ask for his forgiveness.

And you will allow those other questions to fade in the background and deal with this unique and eternal question, what must I do to be saved?

[44 : 28] If that's your desire to do that today, I would love if you would want to, to talk with you after the gathering, to pray with you, to encourage you, answer whatever questions that you may have.

But I say to you today, settle that most important question before you leave today. Let's pray.