

# Questions God Asks

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Preacher: John Adams

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's my pleasure today to get to introduce again someone who's no longer a stranger to our church. He's been attending our church occasionally for many years since he was even a teenager.

This is John Adams, the son of Pritchard and Dana Adams, who still are lifelong missionaries in Haiti.

John was born there, grew up there, and now teaches school in Jacksonville, North Carolina. And you know he's a courageous man because he teaches seventh grade.

Courageous. So anyway, we're just glad to have him back with us this morning. And yesterday we persuaded him to come up earlier and spend the day with us. And so we've had a good time of fellowship with him already.

And anyway, John, glad to have you here. And by the way, I just found out that in appreciation of your being here today, that some members of the church donated \$600 today to Rehoboth, which is the name of the ministry in Haiti.

[ 1 : 12 ] So we praise God for that. And you can take that good news to your parents. OK, good. So, Brother John, come and share what the Lord's put on your heart. All right.

Good morning. Can you all hear me? Yes. All right. Well, thank you for your generosity. And thank you for the warm welcome. I think the last time that I spoke here, it had been about three or four years since my last visit.

So it's a real privilege to be able to come back so soon after only a few months. And every time I come back here, I feel a little older. My brother lived with the O'Briens for a little bit.

And Jennifer was about that tall, I think, when he lived with them. And now she's a mother. And so I look a little older. I look a little older. Thank you. To my seventh graders, I look like I'm from, you know, the time when the earth was still cooling, I think.

But it's good to be with you. I want to speak to you today a little bit about the questions of God.

[ 2 : 24 ] Not the question of God. Sometimes you hear people stage a debate or something on the question of God. Does God exist or does he not? What was the evidence for and against?

But the questions of God. Become more and more interested in the questions that God asks people in the Bible. And there are a lot of them. And each one of them is kind of fascinating in its own right. When I was a kid, like I said a long, long time ago, there was a hit song on the radio. And I remember hearing it often. It was called One of Us.

It was by a singer named Joan Osborne. And it was, you know, what if God was one of us was like the hook, the chorus. And one of the lines in the song says, what would you ask God if you had just one question?

And the more I read the Bible, the more I kind of think maybe that question is backwards. Maybe the question is, what would God ask us, you know, if he had just one question? What would he be wanting to ask us?

[ 3 : 27 ] So let's start in Genesis chapter 3. I'm going to kind of look at three different questions that the Lord asks people in the Bible. And I'll read the first passage.

We'll read Genesis chapter 3, verses 6 through 12. It says,

We'll just stop there and pray for a minute. Lord, I thank you for the privilege of being here this morning. I thank you for your faithfulness in my life and in so many other people's lives here this morning.

I just thank you, Lord, that when we wander, you pursue us and you often come to us not with a harsh word of condemnation, Lord, or, you know, a reprimand.

But you come to us in a questioning mode, in a mode that seeks to seek and to save that which was lost. And I just ask you to do that work among us this morning. In Jesus' name.

[ 5 : 20 ] Amen. So I guess the first thing that interests me about the questions of God, God's questions in the Bible, is why an all-knowing God would ask questions in the first place.

You think about it. He already knows the answer to every possible question. And so why would he even ask a question? Why wouldn't he just say or tell us whatever it is he wants to tell us?

And, you know, I was thinking about that. And I was thinking, well, human beings oftentimes often ask questions they already know the answer to as well. Like, that's actually, you know, pretty useful in a lot of different places in life.

Like Pastor Matt mentioned, I teach seventh grade. And I've discovered that they're not the best at listening to everything that you say. And you have to repeat yourself and say the same things over and over and over.

One of the things that I've discovered over time is that oftentimes it's stickier to ask a middle schooler a question rather than just tell them whatever it is they're supposed to be doing.

[ 6 : 20 ] So instead of saying, you know, you need to raise your hand and ask, you know, permission before you do that, a lot of times it's stickier to say, is this the right way to get my attention? Are you where you're supposed to be right now?

And it kind of like forces them to reflect a little bit before they answer. And so when we read the questions of God, knowing already that God is all-knowing, that he doesn't have to ask anything to learn anything, you can kind of move from that to the observation that if God asks a question in the Bible, it's not because he doesn't know the answer.

It's often because the person he's asking doesn't know the answer yet or isn't fully aware of what they need to be aware of. Questions are useful tools because a lot of times they're less threatening than statements.

You know, a question can kind of gently lead somebody to acknowledge a difficult truth. Or a good question can challenge a person to question their own deeply held beliefs or reexamine strongly held beliefs.

And asked at the right time in the right way, a wise question can clarify the stakes for someone and maybe challenge them to make a decision that is rather difficult.

[ 7 : 31 ] And you'll see each of those dynamics at work in the three questions that we'll look at today. Each one of these questions reveals something both about the Lord and about the person that he's questioning.

And so in the first question, you'll see the Lord coax Adam out of hiding. In the second question that we'll look at, you'll see the Lord call a rebellious prophet, Jonah's motives, into question.

And in the third question, you see Jesus, who is God in the flesh, challenge a man who's been lame for 38 years to take a step of faith. So the first question that we just read in Scripture that God asks comes after the first sin.

So Adam and Eve have sinned by eating the fruit that God commanded them not to eat. Their eyes have been opened and suddenly they become aware that they're naked. They hear the sound of the Lord in the garden and their instinct is to go hide themselves from his presence.

And the Lord calls to Adam and just asks him the simple question, where are you? And why would the Lord ask Adam that? Does he not know where Adam is? Of course he knows where Adam is.

[ 8 : 37 ] But Adam doesn't know where Adam is. God isn't asking for Adam's physical location either. He's asking a question that has layers. It's a spiritual question.

And Adam seems to get that right away because in his response, he doesn't respond with where he is physically. He responds with his state of mind. He says, I'm afraid because I realized that I was naked, so I hid.

And God asks a couple of follow-up questions to kind of nudge Adam toward a confession of his sin. You know, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree that I told you not to eat from?

These questions teach us something about Adam and by extension about all people who become separated from God through sin, which sin separates us from God and it creates distance.

Where there used to be love in Adam's heart, now there's fear. Where there used to be innocence in Adam's life, now there's an acute awareness in his heart that there are parts of him he doesn't want God to see.

[ 9 : 38 ] And where there used to be fellowship between him and the Lord, now there are secrets. And these questions also teach us something about the Lord who is asking the question. And they reveal the Lord as somebody who pursues us.

And it's not the other way around. Sometimes you hear about man's search for God, or man's search for meaning. But really, we don't search for God. We might search for answers. We might search for a sense of fulfillment. But we really never search for God as God is, or for the glory of God, unless the Lord first comes and changes us, and does something in our hearts that changes us.

Because we really instinctively, as sinners, hide from God, as God reveals himself in Scripture. Another thing this question reveals about the Lord that is really interesting to me is that God is not manipulative.

It's interesting to compare the questions God asks in this chapter with the other person who's asking questions in this chapter, who's the serpent. The serpent also asks questions.

[ 10 : 45 ] But the serpent's questions are manipulative. They're designed to confuse. Whereas God's questions are designed to clarify the situation that Adam and Eve find themselves in.

The serpent asks questions that lead Eve to question things that she already knows are true. Whereas God's questions lead Adam to acknowledge something that he already knows is true. The Scripture says that God is not the author of confusion. He's the author of peace. And God's where are you seeks to dispel confusion and to restore peace in Adam's life.

Once Adam becomes aware that he's hiding, then he knows that he is afraid. And once he can name that fear, then he knows why. And he can trace that back to his source. And so the serpent accuses God in his question.

He implies that God is deceitful. He implies that God is trying to pull one over on Eve and that Eve is naive for trusting the Lord. Whereas the Lord's question guides Adam to the truth without any gimmicks, without any sort of undue pressure, Adam is free to respond truthfully to this question or deny its truth.

[ 12 : 00 ] And several years ago, I heard somebody ask this exact same question to somebody who was caught in a very terrible sin. And it was just interesting to hear it in a very different context.

So in 1989, a guy named James Dobson, who was a Christian counselor, interviewed a man named Ted Bundy on death row.

And Ted Bundy, I don't know if his name is well-known anymore, but at the time he was infamous because he had committed over 30 murders. He had murdered 30 women. And from the Pacific Northwest to Florida, he'd spent years hiding his true self from everybody who knew him. And eventually he was caught and he was convicted and he was sentenced to death for his crimes. And he had spent about a decade on death row by the time that he granted the interview to Dobson.

And when he was interviewed by Dobson, he was scheduled to be executed the next day. And toward the end of the interview, Dobson asked Bundy that same question, specifically about the last murder that he had committed, which was of a 12-year-old girl in Florida.

[ 13 : 08 ] And he asked him, what were you thinking at that time? Where were you, Ted? Where was your mind? And in response, Bundy just says, I can't talk about that.

And he sounded a lot like his forefather, Adam. I was, I'm afraid because I know I'm naked. And so I hid myself. And like the Lord, Dobson offers him the opportunity to bring himself into the light. But he doesn't force him. When, you know, he refuses to answer the question, Dobson moves on. So with hours to go until his execution, he still wouldn't bring himself to any sort of acknowledgement of his sin.

And so, you know, the opportunity is there for a moment and then it's gone. The Lord isn't going to force anybody to do the right thing. Sin creates secrets.

Secrets create shame. And so the Lord asks a question that invites Adam out of hiding. Without any pressure, without any shame, without manipulation, the Lord offers Adam an opportunity to bring himself to the light.

[ 14 : 13 ] So the second question that we will look at comes from the end of the book of Jonah. And in that chapter, by the end of the book of Jonah, Jonah's already been swallowed up.

He's already been vomited out by the fish. He's already gone to Nineveh and preached the message that God wanted him to preach to them. And they've responded to that message.

They've repented. They've sought the Lord. And then Jonah does something that's very anticlimactic. You would think he'd be overjoyed that, you know, he's done what God asked him to do and it's borne great fruit and he's seen success.

But instead, he goes up on a mountain overlooking the city and then he starts to kind of hope against hope that there will still be some sort of judgment. God will send fire from the sky. Maybe Nineveh will, you know, maybe they'll take back their repentance and then God will nuke them. And so once Jonah realizes in the book that Nineveh is not going to be judged, he's furious. Because the whole reason that he fled God's call in chapter one was because he knew the Lord would show Nineveh mercy if they responded to his message.

[15:27] And he's so despondent that he actually tells God, I wish you would just take my life. Would you just kill me? And God comes to him and all God says to him is, do you do well to be angry?

Do you think you're doing the right thing by acting like you're acting right now? You know, do you think you're justified in your anger is what he's saying. And the question is just a brilliant question because it just cuts right to the heart of the matter.

You know, it reveals right away who Jonah is. He is an angry man. In chapter four, verse one, it says that. In the ESV it says, when Jonah sees the people repent, it displeased Jonah exceedingly. And he was angry. Literally the text says, it was evil to Jonah. And so basically what Jonah's deal here is that Jonah believes that God has gotten this one wrong.

He thinks that God is a bad ref. He's a crooked judge. He believes that he firmly believes that he is in the right and God is wrong on this one. He knows God is all powerful, so he won't win the fight.

[16:38] So he says, just kill me because based on the merits of the case, I should win, but I'm not winning. And so just take my life. And that we've probably all felt that way at one point or another in life towards the Lord.

It's a form of spiritual blindness. You know, I've heard people say at different points in my life, you know, I feel, I just, I don't understand. I feel God has treated me very unfairly. You know, I trusted God and God didn't come through.

You know, I trusted God with this, this marriage and then the marriage fell apart. And so, you know, now I'm angry at God for not warning me ahead of time that this wouldn't work. And a lot of times when I've heard people say things like that, later on, other information comes out about that person that reveals that they weren't actually the completely innocent actor that they were depicting themselves to be.

And so sometimes when you learn more information about them and they know that you know that information about them, they're often a lot humbler and a lot easier to talk to. And, you know, it's not always the case that somebody's in sin if they're angry at God.

Job, you know, is said to be a righteous man and he was quite angry at the Lord for what he had gone through, but he just couldn't see the whole picture. But in Jonah's case, he's not right.

[17:59] He's not justified. He's really angry at the Lord, but he's blind to the whole picture because God has already shown him great mercy.

You know, when Jonah cried out to the Lord from the belly of the fish, God spared his life. But when God does the same for the Ninevites who cry out to him, he gets so mad that he wants to die.

And, you know, it's probably because he saw his own sins as kind of small potatoes compared to what they did. Nineveh was a very wicked city. These people were very brutal. They oppressed Jonah's people repeatedly.

They were very cruel. They were merciless. And it probably was very difficult for Jonah to treat this oppressor nation with mercy.

And yet the Lord has shown him mercy. And at this point in the story, the Lord could have argued with Jonah. He could have pulled rank on Jonah, you know, put him in his place.

[18:58] Who is Jonah to determine where the line of no return is? You know, who is Jonah to decide when the Lord can show mercy and when he cannot? He could have shamed Jonah, you know, reminded him of his own sin.

Instead, the Lord just asks him that question. Do you think you're right to be angry? And then he leaves Jonah out there on the hill overlooking Nineveh, hoping against hope that God will change his mind and rain down fire.

And he even shows him a little more mercy. He causes a plant, it says, to grow up over him and give him shade while he waits there. And the text emphasizes how happy that makes Jonah. He says he's exceedingly glad to find the plant. A few verses earlier, the text had said he found God's mercy to Nineveh exceedingly evil. But he doesn't ever question God's mercy to him. He accepts it without blinking. But at dawn the next day, God decides to turn up the heat on Jonah, literally. First it says he sends a worm to kill the plant.

[ 20 : 03 ] And next he sends a scorching east wind to make it hotter than ever. And once again, Jonah erupts in anger. And he asks God to take his life again. And once again, God asks him the same question, just adding three words.

He asks him, do you do well to be angry for the plant? And Jonah yells back at God, yes, I do well to be angry for the plant. And then God kind of lowers the boom on him.

He says, you pity this plant that sprang up in a night and was gone in a day and that you did absolutely nothing to create. But you don't want me to pity Nineveh, which is a city of 120,000 people who don't know their right from their left.

And really, God could have been more direct than that because really, Jonah doesn't pity the plant. Jonah pities Jonah. Jonah is full of self-pity and self-righteousness.

He has infinite pity for himself and his own needs and absolutely no regard for the needs of 120,000 people created in God's image who don't know their right from their left and need mercy.

[ 21 : 11 ] So what does that line of questioning reveal to us about the Lord? First, I think it reveals that God always knows our hearts better than we do. Jonah thinks he is motivated by justice.

He's got a strong sense of justice. These people have done wrong. They have been wicked. They should be punished. But he's very quick to accept the Lord's mercy to himself.

He doesn't insist that God gives him what he rightly deserves. Lord, I have done wrong. I should be punished. He never says that. He's full of mercy just for one person, Jonah.

He only gets angry when God shows mercy to other people. Second, this question reveals to us that God is slow to anger. In fact, Exodus 34, verse 6, where God kind of gives the big reveal to Moses, actually lists that as one of God's primary qualities.

He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

[ 22 : 18 ] The Lord is unbelievably patient, both with Jonah and with Nineveh, and his patience pays off in both cases. In Nineveh's case, the city repents, and those people are reconciled to the Lord.

And the fact that Jonah's story is written down and preserved for us implies that Jonah also eventually came around and repented. And so, in the end, the Lord's patient, humble questioning bears the best kind of fruit, which is a life changed from the inside out.

There's one more question we'll be looking at today, which is in John chapter 5. In John chapter 5, Jesus goes up to a feast in Jerusalem, and while he's there, he visits a public pool, the pool of Bethesda, and it says in the text that it was a pool around which people who had all sorts of physical disabilities would congregate, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

And when he visits this pool, he sees a man lying there who's been an invalid. He's been lame in his legs for 38 years. And Jesus walks up to this man, and all he asks him is, do you want to be healed?

Which is a very strange question to ask somebody who's been lame for 38 years. I mean, he hasn't been able to walk for 38 years. That's as long as I've been alive.

[ 23 : 45 ] Does Jesus not know that the man wants to be healed? No. I mean, John actually makes a point of saying in the text that Jesus did know ahead of time that he wanted to be healed.

So why does Jesus ask this question? And first, it seems that he asks this question to get the man's attention and kind of challenge him to take a step of faith, to reckon with who Jesus actually is.

And you see in his response that the man is a little bit slow to catch on to what Jesus is asking because in the man's mind, he can only be healed if he gets down to the water. Because it says there's an angel that stirs the water every now and then and the first person who gets into the water is healed.

And so in the man's mind, I've got to get down to the water so I need somebody to help me down to the pool if I'm going to be healed. And in response, Jesus just challenges him directly to believe in

his word.

He just says, get up, take up your bed and walk. And the man does and he's healed. And another thing, the reason that Jesus might ask this question, which is implied kind of by what happens later in the story, is that he invites the man to count the cost of being healed.

[ 25 : 01 ] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a German theologian during the Second World War, he wrote a book called *The Cost of Discipleship*. He talked about how the grace of God is free, but it will also cost you everything that you have.

Once the man is healed, he will no longer be an object of pity. In fact, he's immediately kind of confronted by Jewish religious leaders who hate Jesus and who tell him it's unlawful for him to be carrying his mat on the Sabbath like Jesus told him to do.

And so he learns right away that following Jesus means freedom, but it also means real pushback from people who don't follow Jesus.

And a few verses later, Jesus will go find the man again, and he will tell him something interesting. He tells him, sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. Now the text doesn't tell us what happened, perhaps for the man's, to help the man avoid embarrassment.

But it seems that this man's paralysis may have been the result of some kind of sinful decision, whatever that was. And so Jesus comes to the man and he challenges him, now that you have been healed, live worthily of this healing.

[ 26 : 19 ] Walk out this healing in righteousness. If your legs are restored, you will have to lead a different kind of life from the life that you led before. Now notice what Jesus is not asking the man to do here.

He's not asking the man to work for his healing. He's not asking the man to earn anything. That was beyond the man's ability. There was no way he would ever have been able to earn his healing.

But what Jesus is asking or telling him to do here is, or really asking, are you ready for your life to change? So today, in a different context, what the Lord might ask people would be something like, do you really want to be healed from that porn addiction?

Because I will heal you, but if I heal you, it will mean a different kind of life from the one that you've led before. You won't be able to go to the same places. You won't be able to have the same friends. You won't be able to order your life in the same way. You'll need to live in a community of accountability from now on. Or do you really want to be reconciled to your spouse?

[ 27 : 31 ] Because I can heal your marriage. I can heal that broken relationship. But if I heal it, the rest of your life will look very different. It will look like crucifying yourself daily.

No more living for yourself first, or putting your own needs first. From now on, you live for the interests of that other person first. Not to earn the healing, but because that's what a healed person does.

That's how a reconciled person lives. Do you want to be forgiven of your sins? Jesus might ask us today. Because everyone's sins, even yours, even mine, can be forgiven.

But here's what healing looks like. Forgive other people when they sin against you. No more grudges, no more keeping track of offenses, no more passive-aggressive behavior from now on. You're going to keep short accounts, and you're going to be lavish. You're going to go beyond what is deserved in your grace towards others. What is this question, do you want to be healed, tell us about Jesus?

[ 28 : 36 ] I think if I had to underline one thing that it tells us about Jesus is that Jesus is eager to be generous to those who know their own need, those who acknowledge their own need.

Jesus says that in the Beatitudes. He says, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The questions of God are wiser than the wisdom of men.

To the guilty, the Lord comes and he asks, where are you? Because he wants them to be found. To the unforgiving, the self-righteous, the Lord comes and he asks, is your anger justified?

because he wants to give them peace. And to the cripple, the Lord comes and he asks, do you really want to be healed? Because I can help you, but walking out that healing will make you a different kind of person.

So to return to what I said earlier, I really don't think it's what would you ask God if you had just one question. I really think a better question is what would God ask you or me if he had just one question.

[ 29 : 44 ] Maybe he's been trying to ask questions for a long time. We were doing a devotional at Pastor Matt's house and he mentioned a question that the Lord has been asking him on a regular basis and it kind of made an impression on me.

And he said that one thing the Lord often asks him is whose time is it in your life? In your life you have a set amount of time, but who does that time belong to?

Does it belong to you? Or does it belong to me? A lot of times he said I will offer the Lord my life at the beginning of the day and then something totally unexpected that takes me out of my routine happens and I start to feel a sense of being upset at the fact that I'm being pulled out of my routine and the Lord will just ask whose time is this?

Is it your time or is it my time? I think the questions of God are wiser than man's wisdom as it says in 1 Corinthians one the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and his weakness is stronger than man's strength.

I think we could often learn from that in our evangelism. Sometimes what somebody needs is not information. Sometimes they might already know the information. Sometimes what they might need is a question that kind of confronts them or brings them to a point of realization.

[ 31 : 08 ] Years ago I was in Paris and I was on the streets with some African believers who were sharing the gospel with people at a busy transit center and there was a man who had just gotten off the bus who said he was an atheist and they spent a few moments kind of going back and forth with him and everything they said to him every argument they made every point that they brought up he had an answer ready made.

And I remember one of the older people in the group just looked at him and just asked him do you have peace in your heart? Like are you at peace? And the man had been very kind of cocky and quick response and he just kind of caught that question caught him.

And you could tell that the answer was no. He did not have peace. And I don't remember how the conversation ended. I don't think he ended up becoming a believer that day.

But I know that that question caught in his soul for a minute and made him reflect on where he was in life. And sometimes a question can be a lot more powerful than an argument or a statement.

Sometimes a question might be what we need in our personal relationships, our family relationships, where we've been kind of grinding unsuccessfully for years with somebody who's at odds with us.

[ 32 : 30 ] And maybe sometimes just kind of following the Lord's example and asking a humble question might be what it takes to get things moving in a different direction. Let's pray in conclusion.

Lord, I thank you for your word. Your word is so wise. Your questions are so humble and so simple. And yet, Lord, they're so transformative.

And I just ask, Lord, that if you're trying to ask us something this morning, that your question would come through loud and clear and that we would answer in the way that you want us to, Lord.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. May the Lord bless you.