

Luke 22:66-71
Confirmation Bias
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This morning I am continuing a series of messages entitled, "Relatable Dilemmas." These sermons follow the events of Jesus' arrest, as they are depicted in the Gospel according to Luke, and what we see in these events that took place 2,000 years ago are questions that are as relevant today as they were then. Today we're confronted by the question: what does it take to believe? This is the first of Jesus' three trials he will undergo, this one is with the religious leaders. Next week we will look at the second trial, which was before Pilate, and in two weeks, the third trial before Herod. Pay close attention to the questions that are asked of Jesus in each of these trials. Because it's in the questions where we discover the pathway to faith.

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, ⁶⁷“If you are the Christ, tell us.” But he said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe, ⁶⁸ and if I ask you, you will not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” ⁷⁰ So they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?” And he said to them, “You say that I am.” ⁷¹ Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.”

The title of this morning's sermon is a little misleading. This is what happens when you submit your title on Wednesday and then sometime between then and Sunday morning the Spirit takes a left turn with the text and leads in a very different direction. That's what happened this week. So here goes.

The Sanhedrin, this was the group of Jewish elders and priests before whom Jesus stood. They are the first to put Jesus on trial after he was arrested. But it is important to remember the Sanhedrin was filled with devout and committed religious leaders. In Jesus' three trials, it's the Sanhedrin who ask the questions seekers ask. These are the same questions asked by people who are genuinely searching for the truth of who Jesus is.

I wonder what your most pressing question of Jesus is? Do you want to know why life has gone the way it has, or how long you have to wait for that thing you hope for to become a reality? Do you want to know if the risk you are taking for the good of your family, and the hard work you're putting into it will matter? You can't go through life without paying attention, and paying even a little attention will invariably lead to us asking these questions.

We ask these questions of Jesus for the same reason the Sanhedrin asked them. It is because we are looking for our answer, we're looking for our salvation. Something within us knows that the life we are living is not the one God intended for us, somehow we've lost our way—and we know it. The Bible calls it sin, we all face it. The book of Romans tells us that we're all culpable, even and especially the most devout among us.

The first question the Sanhedrin asked Jesus was "If you are the Messiah, tell us." The word messiah, or Christ, means to be anointed by God to bring salvation to the people. The purpose of

this salvation was to restore their spiritual, political, and social lives to the good creation God had in mind all along. So a lot was riding on the messiah.

At first the Hebrews believed God would anoint a new king in the line of David to be this savior. But after the Davidic dynasty was lost, some began to think the messiah would be a priest, prophet, or eventually a rabbi. For centuries and centuries the people continued to wait and ask, "When will the anointed savior appear?"

By the time of Jesus the hope of this messiah is almost a distant memory. Very few people were still asking that question. The late New Testament scholar Raymond Brown conclusively demonstrated that there was no longer a single national expectation about this messiah in the first century. No one was really talking about the messiah, and it doesn't show up in the other literature of this era. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, was so prolific, but he never uses the word messiah. So, when Jesus began his ministry, people had grown so accustomed to living without God's saving presence and hope in their lives—they just said: well I guess this is the best we can hope for.

Maybe that's an experience you can resonate with. You've prayed and prayed for the deliverance of your marriage, work, or health. You have asked God so many times to intervene in your child's life. You have bowed your head in church and prayed, "Thy kingdom come..." But it has been so long now that, to tell the truth, it would startle you if it really happened.

This was the great obstacle for the religious leaders who had Jesus on trial. Essentially what they were asking was, "Is it really wise, Jesus, to get the people's hopes up? Tell us are you sure you really want to make that claim?"

Now the fascinating thing in this text is that Jesus does not answer their question by saying, "Yes. I am the messiah." In fact, throughout the gospels, Jesus never says, I am the messiah. It is always others who ask this question or, sort of stumble upon it accidentally. And every time that happens, Jesus tells them don't tell anyone.

Why is that? Why does Jesus keep this a secret? Why doesn't he just come right out and claim in his own words to be the Savior? For the same reason he won't say it to the Sanhedrin. "If I tell you," Jesus said to them, "You won't believe."

No one has ever believed Jesus will restore their lives, forgive their sins, reunite them with God because he claims to be the anointed messiah. The reason some people come to believe is because they are daring still to look for salvation.

In Luke 11:9-10, Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." The reason that Jesus told us to keep asking is not because with persistence we get what we want, but in the process of asking we rediscover the longings for a savior that were buried under so many layers of cynicism and desperation.

Asking, searching, knocking on the door are all essential to the human condition. They are ways of remembering that we all long to know the presence of our creator. One of the great dangers of

contemporary society is that we have so many resources that we think we can just get what we want without having to ask. But whether we realize it or not what we really want is not all the stuff we keep cramming into our crowded life. No, what we really want is God himself.

In that 11th chapter of Luke, Jesus goes on to say that if your child asks for a fish, you are not going to give a snake instead, and if your child asks for an egg, you won't give a scorpion. If you know how to give good gifts to your children, Jesus says, don't you think the Heavenly Father knows how to do that?

We have three children, and trust me, they all feel perfectly free to ask what they want. It's a daily conversation. I may not always give them what they ask for, but in the interplay between their asking and my deciding how to respond, there is a connection that takes place where they know that even if I say no, they realize that the no comes from our love for them. As every parent knows, what you most want to give your kids is not what they are asking for, but yourself.

Similarly, in the act of asking, praying, banging on the door of heaven, we nurture our identity as a people who need to receive what only God can give -- which is God. Again, in the 11th chapter of Luke, Jesus says that when you ask of the Father, he will give you the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Spirit is always to bind you to all the grace you've already received in the Son. And the ministry of the Son is to bring you home to the Father.

The second question the Sanhedrin asks of Jesus is are you the Son of God? But this is a term that Jesus never applies to himself. The term Jesus uses prior to resurrection is that he is the Son of Man, which is used 80 times in the gospels, emphasizing that Jesus identifies with us.

Jesus knows you. He has taken on every one of your longings and needs as the Son of Man. But according to Luke, no human ever understands that Jesus is also the Son of God who can do something about our needs. The angel states he is the Son of God to Mary. The devil states it in his temptation. The demons state it when Jesus casts them out. Even the Heavenly Father himself states it when Jesus is baptized.

So why doesn't Jesus say this about himself? For the same reason he won't say that he is the messiah. In order to believe you have to ask.

When the Sanhedrin ask him if he is the Son of God, Jesus responds with, "You say that I am." This infuriated the religious leaders, and they said, "See we have heard it ourselves from his own lips." But it wasn't the lips of Jesus. It was those who asked the question who revealed his sacred identity as Son of God.

Even when the question isn't asked in doubt, it still reveals the longing for a revelation of God among us. And it is in the longing, yearning, hoping, that we find the answer is before us. Yes, Jesus is the Son of God, the anointed Messiah, the response of God to the yearning buried deep in your soul.

Whatever it is that you are asking for, the Spirit of God proclaims, you have already received God's response in Jesus the Christ. So while we are asking heaven for what we want, the question that God is asking of us good religious folks is, "Why are you looking for more than Jesus?"

This week we lost one of the great ambassadors for Jesus Christ, this country and the world has ever known. In the funeral service Friday afternoon, that some of you may have seen, you saw person after person give testimony to the fact that Dr Graham never wanted to be known by leaders and politicians as a great man, he wanted others to see the greatness of Jesus. Don't look at me, don't admire me, admire, no, worship Jesus. He is the savior he is the Lord. Look to Jesus.

Are you looking for direction in life? You've been given direction, Jesus says, "come and follow me." You can follow him as a business person, homemaker, student, or as the leader of the free world. I don't know that God cares so much what you do, as long as you follow Jesus wherever you are going.

Are you looking for health? Then you have to throw your life into the miracle working hands of Jesus who'll make it clear that most of all you need healing for the sin-sick soul.

Are you looking for love? Then you will never be free to receive the love of others until you have first received the love of a Savior, because otherwise you aren't looking for love from others, you're looking for salvation. And lovers make terrible saviors.

After every question we ask, the Spirit will point to the Savior we have already received, and renew us in the sufficiency of his grace. Salvation never comes from Jesus and politics, or Jesus and money, or Jesus and a new job. Just Jesus. When we see that, we can follow him to our working lives, our family lives, and our community lives with abounding hope. For in him all the hope of heaven and earth have already come together. But to fully enjoy this salvation, you have to recover the longing and ask...