

Teaching Script



Questions Jesus Asked #1

Scripture Focus: John 11:1-27 - Jesus Raises Lazarus (Question in vs. 26)

Bottom Line: FAITH IS ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP MORE THAN A RELIGION

Question: To Mary: "Do you believe this?" - John 11:26

Questions are a funny thing, aren't they? Think about it.

- If someone you don't know asks too many questions, you feel like you're being interrogated.
- If your mom asks too many questions, you feel like you're in trouble—no matter your age!
- If you spend time with someone and they don't ask *any* questions, you feel like they're not interested in you, only in themselves.
- If your boss asks too many questions, you get nervous.
- If someone else's boss asks a bunch of questions, you may think he or she is interested in hiring you!

I have a three-year-old daughter and she loves to ask questions. Actually, it's just one question. In fact, it's just one word:

"Why?"

We have conversations that go like this:

"Sweetheart, you're so beautiful."

"Why?"

"Because God made you that way."

"Why?"

"Because it was His delight to create you."

"Why?"

"Because He knew I couldn't handle a boy!"

"Why?"

After a while, I simply run out of answers. I know that she's probably only asking this question to keep my attention and engagement. But it's still a funny and odd thing.

See, questions have all kinds of intention behind them. Some motives are pure, and some are not-so pure. Some questions are innocent, and some are loaded. But spoken by the right person at the right time, questions can be a powerful thing. If you've ever watched a great documentary, you've seen how questions can move people, illicit a response, and sometimes bring forth new truths and realizations.

In this series, we're going to talk about questions that Jesus asked. Now, hearing this, you may think: *Wait, Jesus didn't need to ask questions. He is God! He just has answers.*

But when you look through the Gospels, Jesus did indeed ask questions. Some rhetorical, some to spark dialog, and some to lead people toward an answer.

Jesus is the greatest teacher of all. When He was on Earth, crowds would gather to hear Him speak—and He would command, persuade, incite, confuse, and influence those who listened. He was an amazing storyteller. He was direct when He needed to be, and subtle at other times. He was puzzling and elusive when the situation called for it. He could also be forceful and authoritative. The way Jesus taught was fascinating.

But what's interesting is that Jesus loved to ask questions. A lot. And He certainly didn't need to or have to. He could've simply explained everything. He could've told a story that illustrated every point. He could've peered into people's souls and said *exactly* what they needed to hear.

But He didn't always do that.

One of His incredible tactics was to ask the right question at the exact right time. Sometimes people were confused. Sometimes they were offended. Sometimes they immediately got the point. But He not only got people thinking, He stirred their faith. He looked into their hearts and pulled something out.

In this series, we're going to focus on questions Jesus asked that stretched people's faith.

TENSION

What's interesting about faith is that a lot of us—especially in church—seem pretty assured of our faith. We believe in God. We adhere to the values of Christianity. We believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again on the third day. Faith by theory is a given for many of us.

But faith by theory is one thing. Faith in practice is another. I know that for a lot of my life, I believed in God and what He represented. But when it came down to living out my faith and making it a personal part of my existence, a lot was lacking. I didn't question the existence of God or the value of the Bible. It just had no bearing on my everyday life. And if you're anything like me, there may be some reasons why faith is more of an idea than it is a practice.

First, **faith is easy when life is easy. When life is difficult, faith is difficult.** Think about all the successful athletes who acknowledge God when they've won. Or the musicians and actors who talk about their belief in God when they've reached the pinnacle of their craft. What about the people who lose? What about the people who never make it to the top—the people we never hear about?

I've observed this behavior in many people in church and in faith. I've noticed it in my own life. When my prayers are being answered, when my kids are healthy, and when there's money in the bank account—praise God! But when my dad was extremely sick, my faith was shaky. When I had no money in the account and no work on the horizon, my doubt loomed large. Many people walk away from faith, not because they question some aspect of Christianity, but because they experienced terrible things. Or they got burned by the church. Their circumstances put their faith to the test. And in my case, that wasn't always a test I passed!

Faith can also be more sentimental than it is personal. Maybe our faith is a byproduct of our parents' faith or our pastor's faith. It's just something we do because we're supposed to do it. It's a tradition. It's an expectation. It feels good to be a part of a community that encourages us and gives us hope. And all that is great. But sometimes, faith is simply another thing in our lives that helps us cope with reality (or even escape it). It's not *our* reality. It's not woven into every aspect of our lives.

And sometimes faith feels like it exclusively belongs to the super-Christians. There are probably people in your church who seem to be masters of faith. It seems like they never doubt. They're confidence in God and His Word never wavers. They seem to remain unshakeable in the face of everything. I used to see people like that and think, "I could never have a faith that matches their faith. I don't know enough. I don't pray enough. I'm not strong enough."

But here's the cool thing. Today we're going to look at a question Jesus asked that can not only boost our faith, it can actually simplify our approach to faith.

TRUTH

Now, if you're unfamiliar with Scripture, the Bible is divided into two sections: The Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament chronicles events that happened before Jesus arrived on Earth. The New Testament documents when Jesus walked the Earth and the beginning of Christianity and the church.

The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels. These are the accounts of Jesus' life when He lived among us. One of those Gospels is the book of John. It was written by a close follower of Jesus, and many people believe that it was written to a wide audience, meaning he wrote to believers and unbelievers alike. And unlike the other Gospels, the Gospel of John isn't directed at a Jewish audience. It seems to have been written for everybody.

John documents a moment that includes one of Jesus' greatest miracles, and also a question that still matters for us today. Here's how the story begins:

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick” (John 11:1-3 NIV).

Notice how they appeal to Jesus’ emotions: “Lord, the **one you love** is sick” (John 11:3 NIV). Two things:

- Jesus *did* love him. Jesus was very close to Lazarus’ entire family.
- You and I would be the same way if someone close to us was sick. We’d appeal to God in any way we thought He’d listen and respond to.

Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus’ sickness would not end in death. Then He and the disciples waited two more days before heading back to Lazarus. Why did Jesus wait? I’m not sure. Maybe it was because it was dangerous for them to travel, and Jesus knew it wasn’t His time to be arrested and crucified yet. Maybe He was setting up the miracle to be more dramatic and memorable. Maybe His Father told Him to wait. But whatever the reason, Jesus didn’t respond right away.

And that’s important for us to see. **When we appeal with all of our hearts for God to step in and work in a situation, it doesn’t mean that He’s always going to respond right away.** Yes, He always hears us. He always cares about us and loves us. But He won’t always answer our prayer in the time we want or with the answer we want. This is why it’s so important for our faith muscles to be strengthened for times like this.

Jesus eventually arrived in Lazarus’ hometown. John continues.

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days (John 11:17 NIV).

Jesus was too late. In fact, He was WAY too late. There were already friends and family gathered at the house of Mary and Martha to comfort them. John captured this next detail:

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home (John 11:20 NIV).

I imagine that Mary was upset with Jesus. She may have been thinking, “We appealed to Jesus to come help. He loves Lazarus. But He took His time getting here.” Again, we’ve all been there. **When life doesn’t go the way we want, when God doesn’t show up in the way we expect, we tend to take a step back from Jesus.**

And then, John records a powerful conversation between Jesus and Martha.

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:21-26 NIV).

Jesus made some huge statements here and then said, “Do you believe this?” (John 11:26 NIV).

In this moment when emotions were running high and faith was running low, Jesus asked Martha a pivotal question. This wasn’t about religion or doctrines. In fact, she had just talked about how Lazarus would “*rise again in the resurrection at the last day*” (John 11:24 NIV). Jesus knew that she *believed* in the right things. She said the right phrases. **He wanted to know if she believed in HIM.**

And this is our first big takeaway from a question that Jesus asked . . .

Faith is about a relationship more than a religion.

When it comes to faith, Jesus wants us to trust Him. More than believing in ideas and doctrines, Jesus wants us to put our confidence in who He is.

Martha answered His question this way.

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (John 11:27 NIV).

Martha’s answer focused on the Person of Jesus, not the right phrases. Whether things looked good or bad, Martha’s faith was anchored in Jesus as the Source of life after death *and* life on Earth.

Eventually, Mary joined Martha and Jesus. They all wept together (including Jesus). Jesus asked to go to the tomb. He performed an incredible miracle and Lazarus walked out of the grave alive! In that moment, no one could question the power of Jesus.

APPLICATION

So, how can this miraculous story relate to you and me? What can we take away from it?

Well, the first thing we can do is ask ourselves the same question Jesus asked Martha: **“Do you believe this?” (John 11:26 NIV).** Do we believe and place our hope in the ideas, doctrines, and traditions of Christianity? Or do we trust in the Person of Jesus? Whether things go our way or not, do we have confidence in His power? Do we receive His love for us and trust Him as the Source of life?

The next question I want you to ask is this: **What’s my Lazarus?** What’s an area of life where your confidence is being shaken or tested? In what circumstance are you tempted to “stay in the house” and withdraw from Jesus because things aren’t going your way?

I want to encourage you to invite Jesus into that grave. Like Martha, go out and meet Him. Tell Him how you’re feeling. Be real with Him. And then take Him to the place where your faith is struggling.

LANDING

God wants us to have a full, abundant life. Not just after we die and join Him, but right here and now. He is our Messiah. Let’s lean into the Person of Jesus in every area of our lives, especially the areas where it seems grim or difficult. **Faith is about a relationship more than a religion.** Jesus isn’t inviting us to be perfect and know everything. He’s inviting us to put our hope and trust in Him. Church, doctrines, and beliefs are good. But ultimately, Jesus is stretching our faith to be about a personal relationship with Him.

Small Group Discussion



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can questions be powerful?
2. Why do you think Jesus asked so many questions while He was on Earth?
3. Read John 11:17-27. What thoughts do you think might have been going through Martha’s mind after Jesus asked her, “Do you believe this?”
4. As the speaker shared, “Faith is more about relationship than religion.” Do you feel like Christianity is often portrayed as a relationship or as a religion?
5. Do you feel like you approach faith more as a religion or a relationship? Why?
6. Since God values relationship, what role do you think obedience plays in your relationship with God?