

## THE CORE QUESTION

Acts 22:10

### The Second Sunday after Epiphany

When the Apostle Paul met Jesus, he had two questions. The first question according to his testimony in Acts 22:8 was the question of identity. He was knocked off his horse, blinded by a brilliant light, and heard a voice asking,

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Instead of answering the question, Saul, as he was known before he became Paul, ignored answering the question and, instead, asked his own question.

Who are you, Lord?

Obviously, he knew the answer to his own question since he addressed the speaker of the voice, "Lord." When the voice answered,

I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are  
persecuting.

the now blind Saul asked his second question. He could have played the game of denial by saying, "When have I ever touched you to do harm?" Or, he could have said, "Hey, don't blame me. I am just following the orders of the Jewish council in Jerusalem." But, apparently, he figured it did not make much sense to play games with a God who had just laid him out in the road and left him blind and powerless. So, Saul skipped all the middle stuff he might have asked or said and got right to only issue which he figured really mattered. And so, we hear Saul's second question,

What am I to do, Lord?

It is a question we have paraphrased in recent months as we have asked the question, "Lord, what do you want me to." Saul must have figured that if the Lord went to such lengths to get his attention, there must be a reason for it. There must be something He wanted Saul to do. The only thing which made any sense to Saul at that moment was finding out what the Lord wanted him to do and then start doing it. Like Moses. Elijah, Jonah, and a host of others, Saul of Tarsus learned not to mess with God.

In the beginning of our walk with Jesus, this question, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" really is our question. I can remember a day of beginning one May night a little over 40 years ago. In the quietness of my bedroom at the parsonage in Alamo I knelt down and invited Jesus in to my life. A little earlier in the evening I had heard a visiting preacher preach a word which impacted my life. There was no blinding light or voice from heaven as Saul of Tarsus experienced. There had not even been an altar call. There in the solitude of my bedroom while my family was going about their usual evening routines, I realized that God loved me. I realized that Jesus did die so that I could have life. I said "Yes" to Jesus because I knew it was the right thing for me to do. Two things were given to me that night. The first thing was a verse of scripture from Psalms 118:14 which says,

The Lord is my strength and my song  
and has become my salvation.

I was also given a call to preach which I did my best to wiggle out from under for the next six months.

Being a preacher was the last thing I wanted to do with my life. I was like the young country boy who fell madly in love. She was a beautiful girl who lived just across the ridge down in the next valley. Every Saturday he would make the journey across the way to see the girl of his dreams. When he was with her he would speak of his love by saying, "To be with you I would climb the highest mountain, I would swim the widest river." When they came to that moment of sweet and tender parting, he would tell her, "I'll see you next Saturday if it doesn't rain." I remember telling God I would do anything, except preaching. It was the first time I can remember really being confronted with what is a core question for any believer, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" I certainly did not respond in the beginning as I should have. Like Jonah I knew what to do, I just did not want to do it.

The scripture is clear that the Lord has something for all of us to do. There are no exceptions. He expects us all to be involved in what He seeks to do in the world. Actually, He equips us to do just such a thing. The scripture says in I Corinthians 12:4-7 this very thing. In that section of God's word we hear it saying to us,

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same  
Spirit, and there are varieties of services, but  
the same Lord, and there are varieties of  
activities, but it is the same God who activates  
all of them in everyone. To each is given the  
manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

In plain English the Word of God is telling us that the Holy Spirit blesses each one of us with some spiritual gift which is useful for building up the body of Christ. And in another place in the first chapter of the same letter, this Word directed to the church says,

...you are not lacking in any  
spiritual gifts...(I Corinthians 1:7)

What the church needs for its ministry is provided by the Holy Spirit. It is provided by giving each believer some gift so that the ministry of God can be accomplished.

Three things are obvious here. First, the Holy Spirit is in charge. He is the One who is at work in blessing the church for its ministry. Secondly, He has chosen to enter into a partnership with each one of us to accomplish the work He desires to accomplish. The third thing obvious is that we need to ask the question, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" believing that He truly does have something He wants each one of us to do.

For some of us this is a hard thing to do because we have gotten things turned around in our relationship with Jesus. In the beginning we may ask, "Lord, what do you want me

to do?” but we quickly move to a different issue. Instead of asking what we can do for Him, we quickly get to the place where our walk with Jesus is all about telling him what He can do for us. We say, “Lord, I need you to give me some help on this exam. Lord, I need you to help me with this problem at work. Lord, I need you to help my wife or husband understand me better. Lord, I need you to make me well. Lord, I need you to do what I need you to do.” Instead of continuing to ask, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” we come to a place where our whole relationship with Jesus is defined by what we are telling him to do for us. It would seem that we have this image of Jesus sitting there in heavenly places asking each one of us, “Hey, tell me what do you want me to do for you today?” Somewhere along the way, we tend to lose sight of what was once for us an all consuming desire to do whatever it was that we could do to please Jesus. What we have becomes a very me-oriented faith.

In a Jesus centered church the core question is never, “Lord, what can you do for me today?” but “Lord, what do you want me to do for you.” In a Jesus centered church, Jesus and His will is at the very center of our life. And in a Jesus centered church, we will not rest until we know in our hearts what it is that He wants us to do. We will do it not because it is our duty, but because it is important to us to be faithful to God. It is not just the ordained whom the Holy Spirit calls into ministry, but each one of us have been baptized into faith in Jesus Christ. When we are touched by the baptismal waters, we declare to God, “You can count on me to be about Your work in this place.” And at the same time we declare to the body of believers, “You can count on me to be a partner with you in the varied ministry of Christ in this church.” He has a place for each and everyone of us. It is time for us to find it, claim it, and be about it.

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