

## **2022 Theme - Extraordinary God + Ordinary People = Transformed Lives**

### **Sermon Series - Extraordinary Discipleship**

#### **Sermon Title - Questions and Doubts are Part of The Process**

#### **Sermon Text - Matthew 11:28-30**

#### **Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry**

Was it the nails that held Jesus to the cross? Not hardly, He could have called on the legions of angels and they would have rescued Him in a heartbeat and made small work of those soldiers with their swords, whips, and spears. My sin, and yours, is why He was on the cross and it was His love for you and me that held Him there! He knew if He didn't take the penalty for our sins, we would have to pay, and it would take you and me an eternity of separation from God to pay for our sins and that was unacceptable to God. So He sent His Son Jesus to make a way, the question that remains is whether or not you will place your faith in the work Jesus did for you in His life and through His death on the cross! Will you give Him a chance? I know you may have questions and that's okay, some of Jesus' disciples had questions too and one person that you wouldn't think would have questions. We're going to talk about questions and doubts and discover that they are a part of the process of becoming a disciple of Christ! Let's pray.

The disciples, some were fishermen, Peter, James, John, Andrew, and maybe others like Nathanael and Thomas who went fishing together after Jesus' death. Matthew was a tax collector and Simon the Zealot was a political discontent. The others, we don't know what their occupation was. However, we do know some things about the disciples based on their actions or their words, more specifically, their questions, disciples like Nathanael and Thomas. And when you study the Gospels you discover that the disciples were constantly questioning Jesus about different things. They were after all students of the greatest teacher ever to grace this planet so it was only natural they would ask questions! One sad thing is that we've been told that we are to never question God. If a person holds to that philosophy then real communication with God is shut down. When you don't understand something or wonder about something or struggle with something, you will not turn to God because you've been taught not to ask questions and to just accept everything that comes your way as God's will. This shuts spiritual growth and can cause resentment with God! I remember when my kids were young and were filled with questions. As a loving Father, I wanted them to be able to ask me questions about anything and know that I wouldn't get mad at them. I knew they were learning and growing and I wanted to help them. God is the most awesome Heavenly Father and He wants us to be able to come to Him with our questions, our doubts and our fears. We're going to look at several examples of questions the disciples had, but we're going to start out with a surprising question from a surprising person!

#### **Questions: Example One**

Are you really who You claim to be?

Matthew 11:1 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

Matthew 11:2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples

Matthew 11:3 to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Matthew 11:4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see:

Matthew 11:5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

This was John The Baptist who had Baptized Jesus...

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

John 1:30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'

John the Baptist was in prison for standing up for the truth against Herod the ruler of Galilee. He would eventually be executed. Maybe he was wondering why Jesus had not already ushered in the kingdom of God on this earth. I don't know, but I know that Jesus didn't get angry at him or say "How could you ask such a question?" He simply said, "go back and report to John what you hear and see!"

John was in prison and awaiting execution. It's human to ask questions! But his question was not mean spirited, just honest! And God doesn't mind honest questions! But Jesus did say...

Matthew 11:6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

We don't need to let our questions and our doubts cause us to stumble! We need to let them lead us to a deeper understanding and relationship with our Lord and Savior, which is what I'm sure happened with John the Baptist once he got the good news of what Jesus was accomplishing! And John's plight may have been on Jesus' mind just a few verses later when he said...

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Does that sound like someone who is going to yell at you, or criticize you, for asking a genuine question when you are weary and burdened? Didn't he say "learn from me?" And if you're going to learn from someone, doesn't that include permission to have questions and to ask questions? And didn't Jesus say He was gentle and humble in heart? Didn't He say you would find rest for your souls? Didn't He say "My yoke is easy and my burden is light?" Yes He did! He didn't say the world's yoke was easy or the world's burden was light, but He was saying that His desire was to teach you truth and to walk beside you and help you carry your burdens. When He said "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" I believe He was saying He wanted to come along

beside you and help you carry your load! A yoke was placed between two animals like oxen, mules, or horses to cause them to work together to pull a load! Let me just tell you that when you yoke your life up with Jesus, it will change your life! He will not only help you bear your burdens and pull your load, but He will teach you and guide you and help you with the most difficult questions of life. You may not get all of the answers you want the way you want them, but if He doesn't answer a question, He will give you the strength to get through whatever trial you are facing and will give you the peace to trust Him with the details and to give you the answers you need and if He doesn't give you an answer, you don't need to know, you just need to trust!

Having said that, you need to understand that a lot hinges on your motivation for asking questions and we'll talk about that in a few, but you need to know that God can handle even your toughest questions. Honest questions, like "does He really exist?" "Does He love me?" "Does He have a plan for me?" "Why would He allow tragedy to be a part of our existence?" "Why did my loved one have to die? I know we all die, but why now?" Some of you may not know that Mr. Wilbert Terry went home to be with Jesus this past Wednesday night! Remember, we baptized him back on July 29th. He was 99 years old and would have celebrated his 100th birthday in January. His daughter Janis was planning a big birthday bash for him here at the church. I'm grateful I had talked with him on Tuesday night and prayed with him. I know Janis and me too, were asking, "why Lord, why now? We were so looking forward to honoring Mr. Wilbert on his birthday!" I told Janis, "I guess the Good Lord had an even bigger birthday party planned for Mr. Wilbert in glory!" Our faith and trust in Jesus and our hope for a future in glory doesn't take away our pain or grief in this world, but it does help us get through it and brings us a joy the world doesn't understand! This is what extraordinary discipleship is all about! God's Word puts it this way...

1 Thessalonians 4:13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

So let's encourage one another with those precious promises of God's Word. Let's move on to...

### **Questions: Examples Two, Three and Four**

You might remember that Jesus had started talking to the disciples about His eventual death in Jerusalem and the disciples were confused and sad at the same time. This is what Jesus told them...

John 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.

John 14:2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

John 14:4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

Such powerful words of hope given by Jesus to his disciples to give them hope and peace and comfort. But wouldn't you know it, they had questions and doubts about what Jesus had said. And the name of one of the disciples has become synonymous with the word doubt. *He was the show me the way guy...*

John 14:5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:7 If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

There's so many times that I want the details! "Okay, Lord, I'll trust You, but I need all the details and if you could have them on my desk by morning, that would be great! Thanks Lord!" And sometimes, I just wonder how the Lord puts up with me! Right? But He gently reminds me of this...

2 Corinthians 5:7 For we live by faith, not by sight.

And...

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

So I have to remind myself that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and as long as I've got Him, I've got everything I need and He will show me the way! Doubting Thomas needed to know this, but Thomas was not the only one with questions. *Philip was the "show me the Father" guy...*

John 14:8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

John 14:9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

John 14:10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

John 14:11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

I think we need to ask ourselves the question: Is Jesus really enough? Is Jesus really who He said He was? Did Jesus show us the heart, the intent, the will and the love of The Father or not?

Jesus continued teaching them, when another of the disciples asked a question. Judas, not Judas Iscariot, was the "Who else are you gonna show guy?" Jesus said...

John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

John 14:22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

John 14:23 Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

What a blessing! "Anyone" can come to Jesus! And the beautiful thing is this: If someone chooses to obey Jesus and become a disciple, Jesus said...

John 14:23 ... My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

How does that happen? Jesus had already told them a few verses back...

John 14:15 "If you love me, keep my commands.

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—

John 14:17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

### **Questions: Example Five**

Nathanael, who most scholars believe was also the disciple listed as Bartholomew, had a pretty interesting question when he first heard about Jesus! He was the "This can't be true, can it?" guy!

John 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

John 1:46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

John 1:47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

John 1:48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

John 1:49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

John 1:50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."

John 1:51 He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

When you ask questions, I believe Jesus is saying to you, "Come and see!" I once had a t-shirt as a teenager that a lady made for me. She had opened a little Christian book store/gift shop, and she made t-shirts with little tubes of fabric paint. My t-shirt simply said, "Give Jesus a Chance!" Down through the years I've asked many doubters, to do just that! Simply give Jesus a chance. If it doesn't work out for you, then at least you gave Him a try. I've come to believe that those who truly give Jesus a chance will become disciples. Why? Because Jesus was honest with His followers and is to this day. He never promised a rose garden, or a life of ease, but He did promise a life of purpose, mission, vision and motivations for living life that are simply powerful! He promised to never leave a follower alone or without His help or presence! And as we'll see in our series coming up in January, Jesus lived His life as an example for us to follow in all of these areas! When it comes to Nathanael it's interesting to note what A.B. Bruce said about him. It's a bit long, but every word is so powerful that I could not improve on it and didn't want to leave out a word of it...

"It is remarkable that this man, so highly endowed with the moral dispositions necessary for seeing God, should have been the only one of all the five disciples who manifested any hesitancy about receiving Jesus as the Christ. When Philip told him that he had found the Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth, he asked incredulously, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" One hardly expects such prejudice in one so meek and amiable; and yet, on reflection, we perceive it to be quite characteristic. Nathanael's prejudice against Nazareth sprung not from pride, as in the case of the people of Judea who despised the Galileans in general, but from humility. He was a Galilean himself, and as much an object of Jewish contempt as were the Nazarenes. His inward thought was, "Surely the Messiah can never come from among a poor despised people such as we are from Nazareth or any other Galilean town or village!" [8] He timidly allowed his mind to be biased by a current opinion originating in feelings with which he had no sympathy; a fault common to men whose piety, though pure and sincere, defers too much to human authority, and who thus become the slaves of sentiments utterly unworthy of them. While Nathanael was not free from prejudices, he showed his guilelessness in being willing to have them removed. He came and saw. This openness to conviction is the mark of moral integrity. The guileless man dogmatizes not, but investigates, and therefore always comes right in the end. The man of bad, dishonest heart, on the contrary, does not come and see. Deeming it his interest to remain in his present mind, he studiously avoids looking at aught which does not tend to confirm his foregone conclusions.

Bruce, A.B.. Training of the Twelve "Principles for Christian Leadership" (Brighton Christian Classic Series Book 6) . Brighton Publishing LLC. Kindle Edition.

Wow! You see it's not asking questions that is bad. It's not about having honest doubts and questions that are bad. It's when we never stop doubting and believe. It's when the questions are not about a sincere search for truth and are more about questioning the very integrity and truthfulness of God. It's when the questions are less about discovering truth and more about finding excuses to remain in our present sinful lifestyle rather than allowing God to change our hearts and our very being. That's when it's bad! Honest questioning is not a bad thing. It's when the questioning becomes a tool to simply dismiss all demands of the gospel, God's Word and spiritual truth in one's life so one can continue living in sin and disobedience. That's the problem. That's when doubting and questioning become sinful. Questioning and doubts are a part of life and a part of discipleship, but at some point we have to make the decision of whether or not we will walk by faith and place our trust in the purpose, the motivation and the integrity of our Creator God who loved us so much that He created us in His own image and likeness and gave us choices and refused to force us to make good choices. But when we made terrible choices He still loved us and sent His One and Only Son Jesus who knew no sin to be sin for us! And why would He do that?

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 6:1 As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

2 Corinthians 6:2 For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

### **Questions: Example Six**

Thomas was the "I need proof guy!"

John 20:24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

John 20:25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

John 20:26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

John 20:27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

John 20:28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

John 20:29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

So, as I said a minute ago, it's not wrong to ask questions and everyone has some doubts naturally, but as Jesus told Thomas, at some point you have to stop doubting and believe, or decide you're just not going to believe! Both decisions have consequences! When Jesus told Thomas to put his finger on the scars, to look at His nail-scarred hands, and to touch His side, Thomas realized that Jesus had not been there when he made his statement about not believing unless he could do those very things. But Jesus knew what Thomas had said because Jesus knows hearts! Thomas makes the decision to stop doubting and believe. He decided to give Jesus a chance and made a powerful confession of faith...

"My Lord and my God!"

Sometimes we want proof, but God is rarely going to give that kind of tangible proof. We must take a step of faith and the amazing thing is this: Once you step out on faith rather than walking by sight, God will show you things. Take the step of faith and see how God will respond to you! Give Jesus a chance! Again, Jesus told Thomas to stop doubting and believe. At some point you have to make a decision. You're either going to believe God and His Word, or you are going to walk away from God! You can't just ride the fence forever. Now I want to give you a very powerful example, one you may not have thought about...

### **Questions: Example 7**

Jesus had siblings. One of his brothers was a guy named James. Not James the disciple. You might remember this...

Matthew 13:54 Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked.

Matthew 13:55 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?"

Matthew 13:56 Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

Matthew 13:57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home."

And speaking of Jesus' own home, Mark's Gospel tells us this...

Mark 3:20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

Mark 3:21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

And John's Gospel tells us...

John 7:5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

But something happened to James. Paul the Apostle tells us that James was one of the first to see Jesus after His resurrection. And we read in Acts that right after Jesus ascended into heaven they went back to Jerusalem and gathered in the upper room and that the brothers of Jesus were there! James becomes a leader in the New Testament Church and goes on to write the Book of James. In this book of the Bible James, a person that sure had his questions and doubts about Jesus, talks about how we have to at some point come to a conclusion and stop doubting. I don't believe James was saying that we should never ask questions, but I believe he remembered how difficult it had been when he had no faith and questioned everything all the time about his brother Jesus. Because of his experience and the inspiration of The Holy Spirit, he wrote this...

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

James 1:3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

James 1:4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

James 1:6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

James 1:7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

James 1:8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Did you notice he said if you lack wisdom you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault? In other words, God is not going to fault you for asking honest questions and being honest about not knowing stuff! He understands that we are human, we are children, and we sometimes struggle to understand! But if you remain in unbelief and refuse to walk by faith in the goodness, the integrity, the righteousness and the wisdom of God, you will be like the waves of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind! Remember, without faith it is impossible to please God. God wants to help us, to teach us, to disciple us, but He will not force us to walk in His purposes, to accept His promises, to be covered with His protection, to receive His provision, to live in His peace, and to overcome by His power! We have to choose to believe and step out on faith, and place our trust in The One who created us and loves us more than we could ever imagine! When asking for wisdom, don't doubt that He will give you that wisdom. The greek word used here, *diakrinomenos* has a second meaning - "to debate!" Sometimes a person asks God for wisdom, but immediately starts debating God and they fall back on their own plan instead of trusting God's plan and wisdom that they just prayed for! That happens when we start debating and doubting whether or not God even cares about us. And that takes us to our last example of how questions and doubts are a part of the discipleship process!

**Questions: Example Eight**

Mark 4:35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."

Mark 4:36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

Mark 4:37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

Mark 4:38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

Mark 4:39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

Questions and doubts come the most furious when in the midst of the storms of life! But if your questions are honest questions and if you're honest about your doubts, then God will help you with your questions and your doubts and He will rebuke the wind and tell the waves to calm down. Oh, and He will use that as a teaching moment with a question of His own to you...

Mark 4:40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Mark 4:41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Andrew is going to sing a song he wrote that invites you to come and see, and receive the Lamb of God into your life by faith. I know you've got questions, that's okay, just give Jesus a chance. I'll be back in the youth room, along with some other counselors if anyone would like to talk with us! Andrew, lead us!