

Four burning questions...

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 February 2018

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] Well, if you had the opportunity to ask God one question, what would it be? Why, God, did you make mosquitoes? That's a good question.

Or why do men have nipples? There's lots of questions, lots of things that we wonder, and that we would want to ask God. I wonder what your burning question is, that you would want to ask God, if you had one chance, one question, to ask him a question, what would it be?

Well, in this morning's passage, we find the disciples have just that opportunity. They've got an opportunity to ask their most burning questions to Jesus after supper the night before he died.

And he had just announced that he is going to die. And so really, this is the last chance that they have to ask him the questions they've been wanting to ask him. And they ask some really important questions.

And Jesus obliges them. So this is after supper. The foot washing has happened, which we looked at last week. They've had their meal. Someone's brought the coffee around. And they're all just sitting back.

[1 : 0 1] And now is the time. Now is the time they ask Jesus questions. And they probably asked him a number of questions. But four of those John has recorded for us to read this morning.

And these four questions that are recorded that the disciples asked are recorded for us because they are vital questions, not only for the disciples, but for us this morning as well. They're questions that humans have had in every age.

They're questions that are at the heart of what we wonder about this world and about creation. And so what we're going to do this morning is we're going to take each of those four questions in turn.

We're going to look at them. We're going to understand what the questions are actually asking. And then we're going to look at what Jesus answers. And I trust that we will all benefit from that. So the first question that is asked is, what's on the other side?

Now this is one of the most basic human questions. There's nobody who doesn't wonder or has not at one point in their life wondered what's beyond this life, what's on the other side of death. And that's why Peter asks in verse 36, Lord, where are you going?

[2 : 0 9] Okay, he knows that Jesus is going to die. Jesus has made that clear. And whether or not he was specifically asking, where are you going after you die? That is the question Jesus answers.

And he starts by saying, where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later. Okay, so the place that Jesus is going is a place that they can't go.

They are not allowed to go yet. They have no access to it because it's a place that's beyond this world. Now, how do we know that's what he's talking about? Well, because he elaborates further on in chapter 14, verse 1.

Read it with me. Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. My father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am. So this is an extended answer to Peter's original question that inspired it.

[3 : 13] Jesus is telling Peter and the rest of his disciples just where he is going. And he says, I'm going home. I'm going back to my father's place. I'm going back to where I came from, where I belong, where I existed for eternity past.

That is where I'm going. The most incredible place in all of existence. The place where God's glory is at its most intense.

That's what God's house is like. Think of what you have in your house. Your choice of decor and your furniture and maybe some pictures that you've chose to put on the wall.

Maybe the color that you've painted your interior walls. Your house is a place, a space that reflects some of who you are. It reflects your tastes and your preferences and your personality.

So imagine for a second God's house. Imagine how awesome that would be. The creator of the stars. Imagine where he lives.

[4 : 16] A place that reflects his character and his glory in everything that you see. How epic would that be? A place of holiness and perfection.

A place, as the psalmist says, of joy and eternal pleasure. How could it not be if it's the place where God's glory resides? But it's a place that you can't go to.

It's a place that I can't go to yet, Jesus says. Which is really no surprise. If we know ourselves, deep down inside, we would probably admit that we don't really fit in there, do we?

How could we deserve to be in a place like that? God's house. In fact, after saying to Peter that he can't go to this place yet, Jesus tells him why.

When he points out the fact that Peter's about to deny him. He points out the fact that Peter is a failure. Very gently, but very honestly.

[5 : 19] He's explaining there why Peter's not the type of person fit for God's house. Have you ever wondered? I mean, if you read this, why Jesus goes on from talking about, you know, answering, why in answer to Peter's question, where are you going?

Jesus says, well, you're going to deny me. Why? Jesus is making the point that Peter isn't worthy of the place that he's going. Yet. Because what is surprising is what Jesus says next, which is you will follow later.

That is the surprising. The surprising bit isn't that Peter won't follow him now. It's that he will follow him later. So we've got to ask why. What's going to change between now and then?

Why is Peter not able to follow now, but can follow later? Well, what's going to change? The cross. What's going to happen the next day when Jesus dies?

That needs to happen first. That's what's going to change the situation from Peter not being able to follow to Peter being able to follow.

[6 : 22] And that's why Jesus says, I'm going to prepare a place for you. Now, how is he going to prepare a place? He doesn't mean he's going to, you know, go to the place and, you know, pick up the stuff that's lying around and clean it up a bit and make the bed.

That's not what he means. He means he is going. And in his going, he's going to be preparing for Peter to be able to come to this place. Where is he going?

To the cross. That is how he's going to prepare that place for Peter. By dying on the cross. To make God's house ready for the sinful fallen Peter.

Jesus first needs to die for Peter to take those sins so that he can go there. And so that's what's on the other side of death. To answer the question that Peter asked.

What's on the other side? God's house. The place where God dwells in eternity and has in eternity passed. That is on the other side of death. But Jesus also made the point that we don't just go there automatically.

[7 : 32] Like people seem to think today. You know, a pastor at a funeral might say that Uncle George has gone to a better place. Have you heard that? Even though he didn't know Uncle George and his drinking habit and how he swears at his spouse.

Truth is, Uncle George actually isn't fit for God's house at all. And that pastor has no right to assume that Uncle George is just going there automatically.

Because the Bible does not teach universal salvation. And we must get that right. The Bible does not teach that everyone, when they die, goes to a better place. Not at all. Rebels to God.

Blatant sinners who disregarded God and his ways all their life. They don't go to be guests in God's house. In fact, Jesus says elsewhere, For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Okay, so for the question, what's on the other side?

[8 : 40] The answer is God's house, which Jesus prepares for humans to enter, but only a few find it. Not everyone goes there. And so the next question, which we should be asking is, well, how do we get there?

If only a few find it. How do we make sure that we are able to go there? That a place is being prepared for us? Well, that's exactly what Thomas asks next, isn't it?

How can we know the way? Question number two. How can I make sure a place is prepared for me in God's house? How can you make sure a place is prepared for you in God's house? And that's a question that religion has been trying to answer for thousands of years.

The history of religion is basically the history of humans trying to answer the question, how do I get there, to God's house, after I die? And the answers range from going and confessing your sins to a priest each week, to praying three times a day and giving money to the poor, and going to Mecca, you know, that'll surely get you a place in God's house, to attaining a certain level of enlightenment, to qualify, to get a place in God's house.

Everybody has a different answer. What is it for you? What do you think is going to be the way that you make sure you have a place prepared for you? How do you think you're going to get to heaven?

[10 : 04] By coming to church? By singing songs? By keeping the Ten Commandments? How's that going, by the way? Although, you see, when Jesus was asked, how do we get there?

He didn't give any of those answers. He throws all of those religious answers in the bin. And in a famous quote, and a very offensive quote to religious people all over the world, Jesus says, there is only one way to get to heaven.

Verse 6, Jesus answered, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. And that answer makes sense if we understand the answer to the previous question.

If what he just said about God's house is true. That we can't get there unless he prepares a place for us. That he is the only human fit for God's house.

And so he is uniquely qualified to take other people there as well. That's what he's saying. And that's why there is only one way, and it's him. Because he is the only one who can actually get there and prepare a place for you.

[11 : 07] It's like those army obstacle courses. I don't know if you've ever seen, or if you were in the army, and you did obstacle courses, that one of the obstacles was this tall wall. A very big wall that no normal person, especially with a big army pack on, would be able to climb up.

It's just too tall for you to be able to reach the top. And that's the point of that obstacle. It's there to encourage teamwork. In that one person who's really good at jumping takes their pack off, and they get to the top.

And then they scramble up, turn around, offer their hand down for the next person to come, and the next person to come. That's the teamwork that is encouraged. But in the same way, you see, Jesus, the only human who actually deserves heaven, who can get to heaven, and the only one who's not weighed down by sin, is the only one who can turn around and pull you up there as well.

That is why he is the only way. That's why he doesn't say, I will show you the way. It's not like he's standing next to the wall going, oh, if you just grab there, and then you'll be able to.

No. He doesn't come to earth to show us the way to heaven. He is the way. If he was just here to show us the way, just here to teach us, just here to enlighten us, like some great sage, religious leader, like all the others, just here to tell us the way, tell us what to do, then that would mean that it's a matter of knowledge and performance, and once you know the way, Jesus can step out of the picture.

[12 : 34] And that's why he says, I am the way. There is no way apart from the person of Jesus and a personal relationship with him. which comes through belief and not through performance or knowledge.

You know, if you are coming to church because you want to know the way, and you think by reading the Bible, you will find Jesus telling you the way, a certain lifestyle to adopt, a certain pattern of behavior to follow, you will not find that.

All you will find is Jesus himself, and you've got to decide whether you're going to let him into your life, or not. You're going to decide whether you're going to pursue a personal relationship with him or not.

Not for what he can tell you, but because he is the only way. And Jesus is at pains to stress this point, that believing in him alone is the way to the Father.

Do you notice how many times in this passage he talks about the importance of believing? Not performing or knowing, but believing.

[13 : 43] Verse 1, Believe in me. Verse 10, Don't you believe? Verse 11, Believe me when I say. Verse 12, Whoever believes. Verse 29, I have told you these things so that you will believe.

And later on in chapter 20, John says the purpose that he wrote this entire gospel of John is, quote, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

And that's the reason that belief is so central. It's because we can't qualify ourselves for heaven. We need to stop trying. And we need to start believing in the one who can.

Just as much as that soldier at the obstacle course, trying to climb up with his heavy pack, needs to come to the point of giving up. And then looking to the one who is offering his hand down and admitting that he can't do it and grabbing that hand.

Have you come to that point yet with Jesus in your life? Have you come to the point of realizing that you are unfit for heaven? Coming to terms with that, no matter what you do, no matter how good you are, you are never going to be fit for heaven.

[14 : 59] You're never going to be fit for God's house. And you know that. I know that. Your sins, that you know all too well, weigh you down. They disqualify you from God's house.

Have you come to the point of realizing that? Or are you still thinking that you can get there by your own good works and your religious performance? Because there needs to be a time when you give up doing that and you look in faith to Jesus who did it for you, realizing that he is the only way, and you grab onto him.

You forget your own performance and your own good works and you grab onto that hand that he's offering you. You embrace Jesus in your life. You let him take over. You let him pull you up. Because faith in Jesus is the only way to God's house in answer to that second question.

But the thing is, faith is not easy. Now we think, oh, faith is simple. You know, it seems too simple. You just believe. But actually, it's not easy to genuinely, in your heart of hearts, believe something.

It's easy to come to church and pretend you believe it and say all the right things and sing all the songs. But to really believe it and to embrace that belief as central to your life and how you live day to day, that's hard.

[16 : 17] Because it's not just something you choose to have. You don't wake up one morning and say, I think I'm going to believe in this or that. Belief is something that grows deep within you. And we tend to want evidence before we truly believe something, before we embrace it as a truth in our lives.

And so the next question asked by Philip is, where's the proof? Where's the proof? Okay, that's not exactly what he says, but I think it's at the heart of his question.

His actual question is verse 8. Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us. But you've heard it before in another way, haven't you? Why doesn't God just show himself?

Have you heard that? I'll believe in God when I see him. I need to see it. And it's a fair question, actually. And I'm sure that we've all wondered at times, why doesn't God make himself more obvious?

Well, how does Jesus respond to that? Let's see. From verse 9. Have a look. Jesus answered, Don't you know me, Philip? Even after I've been among you such a long time.

[17 : 25] Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and 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. 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.

Okay, so, Philip is saying, you know, why doesn't God just show himself? Where's the proof? And Jesus says, Don't you get it, Philip? I'm the proof. I'm standing right in front of you.

And everything I've done so far, the works that I've done, are the proof that you see and you have seen. The works. You know, Philip, remember the time I turned water into wine.

Remember the time I saw you sitting under the fig tree before I met you. Remember the woman at the well and how I knew everything about her. Remember how I healed the cripple at the pool and fed 5,000 men with five loaves and two fish and walked on water.

[18 : 29] Remember that, Philip? And healed a man born blind. Oh yes, and there was that little issue of raising a man from the dead. Remember that, Philip? And you're still asking for me to show you God.

Well, just open your eyes because he's standing right in front of you. But that's the thing. That's the point. You see, Philip, if despite what he saw, if he still wanted to see more in order to believe, then that is the proof that seeing is not believing, is it?

That true belief comes from a different source than what's in front of our eyes. People will often say to me, you know, well, okay, if God exists, why can't he just show himself?

Obviously. And then I'll say to them, well, he did 2,000 years ago. And then they'll say, oh, but, you know, that was 2,000 years ago and we can't see him today. What about today? Well, then that would have to, that would mean that he would have to appear to every generation in every place all the time.

And, well, quite frankly, he's got better things to do than that. But, the point is, even if he did that, even if God did appear physically like he did 2,000 years ago, in every generation, at every time, to every person, people wouldn't believe any more today than they did 2,000 years ago when he was here.

[19 : 47] And they didn't. Many didn't. So, what is it that causes someone to truly believe? That's really the question we've got to answer.

If it's not our eyes, if it's not evidence that we see in front of our eyes, what is it that will cause you to believe or me to believe or anyone to believe?

Well, Jesus goes on to tell us from verse 15. If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, 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. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you before long.

The world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Okay, so for those who love Jesus, they will see him even when they can't see him.

[20 : 48] That's what he's saying. Because he will send his Spirit to be with them and convince them of the truth even if their eyes can't. That's what the Holy Spirit does.

That's why he sends the Spirit. To give us a belief that our eyes can't give us. After all, we can't even really believe everything that our eyes do see, can we?

I mean, you remember those, if you've seen those optical illusions with lines that look skew, but they're actually straight. You know what I'm talking about? Or like black and white dots on different backgrounds, but they're actually all the same shade of gray.

To show you that your eyes actually trick you. And so if we can't necessarily believe what we can see, maybe it's possible to really believe the things that we can't see. And that's what Jesus is saying.

It is because seeing with our eyes is really not that important to belief. That's not where true belief comes from. True belief comes through our heart and through our mind and that's the level that the Holy Spirit works at.

[21 : 51] He bypasses all the need for, you know, physical and visual evidence and he goes straight to the heart. That's where he works to give you and me belief. But now, how does he do that?

If it's not through visual evidence, how does the Holy Spirit, what tools does he use to give you true, life-changing belief? Well, Jesus explains a few verses later from verse 26.

He says, The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I've said to you. Okay, so the disciples were thinking, what's going to happen when Jesus goes?

How will we know the truth? How will we stay in the knowledge of what he's been teaching us for the last three years? Jesus says, Well, I've already told you all that you need to know. And the Holy Spirit is going to come and help you remember it perfectly.

Now, that's talking to the apostles. That's a special gift Jesus gave the apostles. But that is, because Jesus promised that to them, because he gave them a supernatural power to remember everything he had spoken, that's the reason we don't need Jesus to be with us physically in front of our eyes in order to believe in him.

[23 : 02] Because we have his words. God's word remembered by the apostles and preserved in the Bible. That's what the Spirit uses to give us saving faith. This is his tool to give you and me saving faith.

And to give the people who, God willing, we want to believe, who don't yet believe. How is the Spirit going to do it? Through your clever arguments?

Through taking them to a flashy church with good music? No, through this. And this alone, this is how the Holy Spirit will put belief in someone's heart. God has given us a means of bringing true belief to others in this world as we open his word and share his word and bring our friends and family to where his word is being opened and explained.

This is the supernatural tool that the Spirit will use to bring people to faith. And that is why, look with me in your Bibles back in verse 12, Jesus said what seemed to be a rather strange thing and it doesn't really make much sense until we understand the context.

In verse 12, he says, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing and they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.

[24 : 20] What? Whoever believes in Jesus will do greater works than he did when he was on earth. That's what he's saying. That's insane. How can we do greater works than raising Lazarus from the dead?

Well, because even that, even that miracle and all the miracles Jesus did, did not give saving faith to people. And we see that.

People saw it and they turned away. Saving faith, faith that enables you to have a place prepared for you in God's house could only come once Jesus died on the cross.

And so all of his pre-cross miracles could never give saving faith. And only once his spirit came into this world to convince us of that and give us saving faith.

And so taking that message of the cross to other people today can save them like none of Jesus' miracles ever could. and that is why we can do greater works than even he did because greater works means conversions.

[25 : 31] And Christians have everything they need to do those greater works today. You have all the tools at your disposal if you're a Christian to do greater works than Jesus did because the work you and I do can bring saving faith to others.

And not just people like me preachers and stuff but you ordinary Christians are able to do those greater works if you let God work through you and in you to do that.

Isn't that exciting? That this week if you pray for opportunities and you are ready you are able to do greater works works that count for eternity works that are far more important than any works on earth that you could do career wise or for the country works that have eternal consequence works that have repercussions in heaven you can do those works this week don't you want to?

Don't you want to be involved in that? By passing on the gift of saving faith to someone else when you share God's word with them and there's many ways to share God's word with people there's verses you can memorize there's booklets and tracts that you can pass on to someone there's talks that are recorded explaining scripture that you could give to someone which they wouldn't normally listen to but they will now because a friend suggested it to them there's things that they can read there's over coffee you can open the gospel of John using the word one-to-one booklets which are very easy to go through anybody can do it and you can share the word with them and that is the tool that the Holy Spirit will use God willing to give that person saving faith and that is how you can do greater works even this week and when God works through that then that will be all the evidence they need and then the fourth question which I won't take long on but it follows on from this the fourth question is why then do only some people believe and that's a good question if God reveals himself through the Spirit then why doesn't

God reveal himself to everyone and save everyone have you ever wondered that and that's the heart of Judas' question in verse 22 but Lord why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world well Jesus' answer is simple he says 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 and so the reason God doesn't save everyone is because not everyone loves God and God doesn't want people in heaven for eternity who don't love him and so he doesn't give them the faith that is necessary to save them now does that mean we are saved through our love for God that it's something we need to generate within ourselves to be saved no that's not what it means after all even our love for God comes from God himself as a gift but it does mean that the proof that you are saved if you are saved the proof of that will be that you love God that you really love God that you don't say you love

[28 : 41] God but you love him in your heart of hearts and if you don't love God then you needn't complain that God doesn't give you saving faith and a way to him because you wouldn't want that anyway because God's house is going to be filled with those who love him genuinely and voluntarily and not everyone in this world does and that's the plain truth so the question you've got to ask yourself this morning is do you love him genuinely because you see as we as we end instead of us asking questions to God this passage ends up posing a question that each of us need to ask ourselves do I really love God well how will I know if I do really love him not by how loud I sing songs or how passionately I preach but in whether I obey him in my daily life anyone who loves me will obey my teaching Jesus says that is the proof of love that is how you will know if you love him too and whether he has given you the faith that saves do you actually want to please him in your daily life is that your first priority do you want to obey him when you are tempted to sin do you say no I love

God and this sin will grieve him and Jesus died for this sin and I love him so much that even though I want to sin I'm not going to because if that is your response if if your desire to obey Jesus not to be saved but because you love him is strong each day that is proof that that love is genuine that is proof that he has given you the faith that saves and if that is true of you he has promised my father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them I pray that that will be true of you let's pray Lord Jesus we thank you for answering our questions we thank you that you came to show us what is on the other side of death when you not just taught on it but you rose again to prove it to be true Lord we thank you most of all for making a way for us to be in

God's house one day through your death on the cross thank you for turning around and offering us a hand down so that we could join you thank you for preparing a place for us and Lord we pray that you would help us to believe I pray for every single person in this room this morning that you would give us saving faith faith which causes us to do the good works you have prepared for us to do this week faith which causes us to love you and which causes us to obey you and we pray this all through the power of Jesus name Amen