

27. What Do You Seek?

Young John was a seeker. Whatever he was seeking, he hadn't found it as son of a wealthy fisherman who fished in the sea of Galilee and who had at least a second, perhaps first, home in Jerusalem. That was why, in about the sixteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar in Rome, John was not fishing in his father's boats nor visiting the important buildings in Jerusalem where, if he wasn't recognized, he was at least a frequent enough observer that he knew how to look like he belonged there. No, John was in neither of these places where he probably should have been, at least in his father's opinion. Instead, he was in the Judean wilderness with the wild-eyed, roughly-dressed prophet they called the Baptist.

One day, a Galilean man, walked up to the Baptist and was baptized by him. The Baptist identified this Galilean as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" and "the Son of God." (Jn. 1:29, 34) When this Galilean came back the next day, the Baptist again called Him, "The Lamb of God." John and his fishing partner Andrew (who was also here in the Judean wilderness) left the Baptist and walked after Jesus. "Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, 'What do you seek?'" (Jn. 1:37-38) It is very apparent that John didn't even know what he sought – nor did he and Andrew know exactly what they had found. Andrew told Peter they had found "the Messiah" (Jn. 1:41) – but it would be only three years later that Andrew and John would see their Messiah hung on a cross and they would be devastated. (Mk. 16:10) It is not hard to imagine that Jesus' first question to him came to John's mind when the Baptist wanted to be reassured that Jesus was the Messiah and Jesus asked the crowd, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see?" (Mt. 11:7) And since, decades later when John wrote his Gospel he would still remember even the time of day when Jesus asked, "What do you seek?" (Jn. 1:39) – it is actually difficult to believe that John did not dwell on this question many, many times when Jesus' body was still in the tomb.

Consider the turmoil that John's soul was in. For three years, Jesus had told His disciples not to overtly call or publicize Him as the Messiah. Seeing their very few numbers and knowing the brutality with which Rome eradicated those who rebelled and yet knowing in their hearts that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah-King, they must have concluded this was just some sort of clandestine training period which would end with them having seats of great power and authority in return for their having faithfully followed Him in His "obscurity." (see Mt. 20:21) Why, only a week before His crucifixion, the crowds at Jerusalem had welcomed Him openly as the Messiah-King. (Lk. 19:38) What was it John had sought that had made him vulnerable to this now-dead charlatan? But then the resurrection came and John, with the other disciples, became witnesses of His glory and power. (Jn. 1:14) Whatever it was that John sought, from his persistent endurance under persecution and torture and his consistent witness to Christ's resurrection throughout the rest of his life, it is quite evident that he found it in the God who loved him. (Jn. 21:20)

Most people who are confronted with this question, "What do you seek?", at least know that they want, even need, an answer in life. But the nature of humanity after the fall is such that, though we believe there must be an answer and we are confronted routinely with the inescapable fact that we have questions, we have great difficulty even knowing what the question is. What we seek is an answer to questions we're not exactly sure what they are! Some seek

- meaning and significance,
- security and safety,

- peace and contentment,
- belonging and connection,
- wholeness and satisfaction,
- love and fulfillment.

These, like John, are seeking to find out who they are and where they fit in. Their frustration at finding no answers within drives them to prophets like John the Baptizer and to Messiahs like Jesus. How fortunate John was to find the true – so many have found false prophets and false messiahs and been content with these deceptions. But John found the truth and wrote it down, with the help of God, so “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” (Jn. 20:31)

But Jesus came to show that one cannot look at one’s self and find life, that one cannot simply “express” one’s self (as some today use the term) and be what one was made to be. Jesus clearly showed that the only way to really live was to die. Jesus said, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mk. 8:34-37) This is the “price” we must pay for Christ’s salvation as one cannot be *saved from* one’s sinful, wicked self while simultaneously *holding on to and retaining* one’s sinful, wicked self! One can be the unregenerate, unchanged “old man” of the flesh or one can be the new creation in Christ – but one cannot remain both.

We should note well the response that Jesus gave to Andrew and John in contrast to the response He would give to the men who would later volunteer to follow Him. When Andrew and John are asked, “What do you seek?” they answer with a question of their own, “Where are You staying?” Jesus responds, “Come and see.” (Jn. 1:38-39) But when someone else said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go,” Jesus answered, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” And when another said the same thing but wanted first to say goodbye to his family, Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Lk. 9:57-58, 61-62) At least Andrew and John’s question, which differs from the first’s boastfulness and the second’s reservations for his family, showed that God had already been showing them that the foundations of their lives were not as sturdy and trustworthy as they would want and need. As Jesus would later teach His disciples, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” (Jn. 6:44) Andrew and John’s question – unlike the other two “volunteers” – showed, at least to Jesus, that they were in the process of being drawn to the Father.

Jesus also said to His disciples to seek *first* the kingdom of God and the things that our Father knows we need would be given to us. (Mt. 6:33) Though Jesus gave this teaching in the context of material possessions, there is no reason to believe this does not apply to our emotional needs as well. Is not our Father the “God of *all* comfort”? (2 Cor. 1:3) As we progress into our life in Christ, we will experience deep desires, perhaps even frustration, some of which comes from the Spirit of God. Paul wrote, “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up in life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God...” (2 Cor. 5:2-5) Just as God drew us *to* Christ, He continues to draw us deeper *into* Christ. This causes us to be seekers, sometimes of what we know not, but the point

is not to make us frustrated seekers (though frustration may exist for a time) but rather to prepare us to receive reward for God rewards “those who diligently seek Him.” (Heb. 11:6)

This *is* part of our human existence after the fall. Paul also wrote, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” (Rom. 8:18-23)

John did not “find himself” or the answers he needed by looking at himself. He found what was lacking in his life by looking to Jesus. John, after being with Jesus and following Him by His Spirit for many more years, would be the one who most emphasized the need to love one another as Christ loved us. “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (1 Jn. 3:16) The strength Christ showed by voluntarily going to the cross (“Your will be done, not Mine” – Mt. 26:42) is the strength of character He imparted to John and the same strength of character He will impart to us after we submit to His Kingship.

If we seek ourselves – any part of our fallen, flesh nature, no matter how small or subtle – we will never find God. We will be like the rich young ruler who had sought to obey God’s requirements all his life. But when Jesus touched upon the one thing he couldn’t bring himself to let go of, he walked away from Jesus. (Mk. 10:20-22) How many “pastors” and travelling “apostles” and televised talking heads today do not follow Jesus because they cannot give up their “ministries” from which they derive their own satisfaction for power, prestige, preeminence or significance? How many “church”-ite “pew potatoes” refuse to leave their pew (let alone their “church”!) because they think they still need to be “fed” and they can’t find any better ear-scratching spiritual guru at any other “church”? (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4) How many who know enough to make their exodus from the “church” balk at having to endure the wilderness because that’s where Christ says they need to go? How many of these who refuse to follow Christ into and through the wilderness imagine themselves “leaders” in the body of Christ because they *call* their little house “church” ekklesia?

Whatever we give up we will be more than compensated for – of that we can be certain. Jesus said, “*Everyone* who has left houses or brothers or sisters or fathers or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.” (Mt. 19:29) Whatever it is that we unconsciously seek – rather, whatever our lack within actually is for which we perceive our neediness if not our actual need – it will be satisfied and filled by Him “who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23) if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. If we are unwilling to put Him first and foremost and indeed as our all, then we are walking in unbelief, doubting that He will keep His word to preserve us and provide for us as we take up our cross and follow after Him.

Jesus said, “Which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat?’ But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink?’ Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those

things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’” (Lk. 17:7-10)

Anyone who thinks he brings something of value, worth or use into the kingdom of God does not yet know himself as he ought. There is *no* good thing that dwells in our flesh. (Rom. 7:18) The new man is “created according to God in righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph. 4:24) It is our privilege to put off the old and put on the new but our simple obedience to God leaves us no room to boast. If we think we have something to boast of, it is only evidence that we have failed miserably in putting off the old and are seriously deluded about what the new is!

All that we bring into the equation of God and man is need. In our flesh we don’t like this but the sooner we come to the recognition of our moral and spiritual bankruptcy, the sooner we can reject our flesh, be changed and filled with His fullness. This is the example we see in John and it is his testimony that we too can believe and have this same life in Christ. If we have no such life, the fault is ours and ours alone. God has never – and never will – turn away those who diligently seek Him. Rather, He rewards such as these. (Heb. 11:6)

Let he who has ears hear.

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