

## **QUESTIONS THE LORD ASKS – ‘WHERE ARE YOU?’**

**Gen 3:8-13; Rev 3:14-22**

The story is told of a minister who went to do a pastoral visit at the home of a member of the church. He knocked on the door but there was no response, even though he could here the sound of someone moving about inside. He knocked again, but again no response. So he took out one of his business cards and wrote on the back, ‘Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in (Rev 3:20) The next Sunday he found the same card in the pulpit. The person had added this verse, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, but I was naked, so I went and hid (Gen 3:10)

The first question that the Lord asks in the Bible is the one we read in Genesis – ‘Where are you?’ Adam and Eve have disobeyed God by eating the fruit they should not have eaten. So they go and hide from God. But God comes looking for them and asks them the question, ‘Where are you?’

Now God doesn’t really need to ask the question, does He? God knows all things and He knows very well where Adam and Eve are. The question is really for the two of them. It’s a question to make them think about their own situation. It’s a question that would get them thinking about why they are where they are; about how they got there and if they want to remain there, trying to avoid God.

Basically, God is asking them, ‘Where are you in your relationship with me? Where do you stand with me?’ And there really is no more important question than that, is there – for them and for us? How do you/I answer God’s question, ‘Where are you?’

Adam and Eve are at the one extreme – totally removed from God; actually, hiding from Him; trying to avoid Him. The other extreme is someone who lives constantly in a close, intimate relationship with God. I guess it would be true to say that all of us are at some point between those two extremes.

Recently I came across some thoughts by St Bernard of Clairvaux, a Christian of long ago. He spoke of 4 degrees of love. He begins with what he calls ‘Love of self for self’s sake.’ This is the case of the self-centred person who only really cares about themselves and their own needs. ‘Love of self for self’s sake’. The second degree is what Bernard calls ‘Love of God for self’s sake’. This is the person who displays some love for God, but it is really for selfish reasons – loving God for what we can get from Him; what He can do for us. ‘Love of God for self’s sake’. The third degree he calls ‘Love of God for God’s sake’. Here we love God for who God is; not because of what God can do for us. The final stage is ‘Love of self for God’s sake’. This is the person who thinks of themselves only in terms of what God can do in them and through them. The person’s own needs are forgotten. They are lost in God. As one of our hymns puts it, ‘Lost in wonder love and praise.’

Where are you? Where am I?

What sometimes happens is that we try and compromise –we give part of ourselves to God, but we try to retain some for ourselves. But that’s not what Jesus had in mind. He said in effect, ‘Give me all; I don’t want bits of you: bits of your time, bits of your work; I want YOU.’

Perhaps you know that old hymn, ‘O the bitter shame and sorrow, that a time could ever be, when I let the Saviour’s pity plead in vain and proudly answered, ‘All of self and none of Thee.’ In the second verse the writer speaks of ‘some of self and some of Thee.’ In the third, ‘less of self and more of Thee’. The 4<sup>th</sup> verse says, ‘Higher than the highest mountain, deeper than the deepest sea; Lord Thy love at last has conquered, grant me now my supplication, ‘None of self and all of Thee’.

This is how the author C S Lewis puts it. ‘Jesus meant us to go in for the full treatment. It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are hankering after is harder. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird, but it is a jolly sight

more difficult for it to learn to fly while it is still an egg. We are like eggs, he says, but one cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.'

We heard the message of the Lord to the church at Laodicea in the book of Revelation? He says to them, 'I wish you were either hot or cold. But because you are lukewarm, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.' The problem with lukewarm is that one becomes complacent. One thinks to oneself, 'I'm okay. I may not be hot, but at least I'm not cold.' One feels self-satisfied and happy to stay as one is. Cold is actually better, because then one can't fool oneself into thinking one is okay; one knows very well one is not. And therefore, there is still the chance that one will be motivated to change and become hot.

If we are honest, there is sometimes a fear about being fully surrendered to the Lord. Maybe we feel like we are signing our name to a blank cheque – we don't know what God may demand of us. Or maybe we are fearful of a commitment which we feel we may not be able to fulfil. So there can be a sense of hesitancy and uncertainty. And, yes, it is true that there is a cost to discipleship. But what we may forget is that there is also a cost to non-discipleship. With non-discipleship we forfeit a great deal – we forfeit the peace of Christ in our hearts; we forfeit the sense of God's presence with us; we forfeit the power to stand against evil, and lots more.

Francis Fenelon, another Christian of long ago said this, 'What foolishness to fear to be too fully God's person. It is really fearing to be happy. It is fearing to love God's will in all things; it is fearing too much comfort in God's love...'

Jesus says to us as He said to those members of the church at Laodicea, 'Listen, I stand at the door and knock. For those who hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they will eat with Me.' Jesus wasn't speaking to unbelievers; he was speaking to members of a church – people who had some connection with Him. But they hadn't fully opened the door of their lives to Him. Jesus wanted more for them. He uses the picture of sharing a meal with Him – a symbol of intimate fellowship. And that is what He desires for each of us. And it is not something to be feared. It is really about falling head-over-heels in love with the one who loves us more than we can imagine.

At the end of Matt 11 there is that lovely passage where Jesus says, 'Come to me, all you that are heavy-laden...' The 'Message' version puts it like this, 'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.'

That place of deep closeness is as close as the handle of the door of our hearts. He stands knocking and asks, 'Where are you?'