

Three Questions

Undoubtedly this is the day of the questionnaire. Quiz programs were never so prevalent and popular as today. For several years one of the best known programs on the radio was called "Information Please." It consisted of all sorts of questions being put to a team of experts, and their knowledge tested on a wide variety of subjects, at the expense of the company who sponsored the program. At other quiz programs, huge sums of money and valuable prizes are given away to those who are fortunate enough to be able to answer the questions put to them.

The question and answer method of teaching is recognized as being one of the most successful means of imparting knowledge, and consequently is widely used in our schools today. This was the system adopted by Socrates, the great Grecian philosopher of the third century B.C. He used it with great skill, not only to impart knowledge to his pupils, but also to impress them with the consciousness of their own ignorance. In fact, he once remarked: "I have spent all my life bringing people from a state of unconscious ignorance into a condition of conscious ignorance," and surely this was time well spent. The first step into the Hall of Knowledge is the admission of one's own ignorance. God Himself will only undertake the education of those who are prepared to admit their need of His instruction, for we read: "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool [or own his ignorance] that he may be wise." (1 Cor. 3:18)

The Bible is full of questions and answers, some asked by men and answered by God, and some asked by God and answered by men. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest of all teachers, during the brief recorded period of His public ministry, as found in the four Gospels, is described as asking over one hundred questions. Let us briefly examine three questions, each of which relates to the most important matter of salvation.

The first question is found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter thirteen and verse twenty-three, where it is recorded that person asked the Savior: "Are there few that be saved?" We shall call this:

I. AN INQUISITIVE QUESTION

The questioner's motive may be inferred from the answer the Lord gave him, for He replied: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, then shall ye begin to stand outside and say: 'Lord, Lord, open unto us!' But He shall answer and say unto you: 'I know not whence ye are!'"

In these intensely solemn words, our Lord rebuked the idle curiosity that undoubtedly prompted the question. Apparently there was no seriousness on the part of this inquirer, he was merely indulging his flair for statistics. It mattered nothing to him whether few or many would be saved; but it was a vitally important matter to the Son of God, who had left the glory of heaven to come into a world of sin and shame to seek and save that which was lost, knowing full well it would cost Him untold suffering and His own life.

God is greatly concerned about the salvation of sinners, in proof of which He gave His only Son to be a substitutionary sacrifice on their behalf, for we are told: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) God has gone on record as saying: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked . . . but that the wicked should turn from his evil ways and live. Turn you, turn you, for why will ye die?" (Ezek. 33:11) Notice, God does not ask: "*When* will ye die?" or "*Where* will ye die?" or "Of *what* will ye die?" but "*Why* will ye die?" It is as if He says: "Why die in your sins and be eternally lost when I have made every provision for your eternal salvation, if you will turn to Me?"

Let us look a little further into our Lord's answer to this frivolous and inquisitive questioner. Notice carefully the four words He used: "Strive to enter in." The word "strive" is the word from which we get the English word "agonize." The question of the soul's eternal destiny is so important that Christ advises people to agonize to enter in at the door of salvation. It should be the supreme object of the reader to make absolutely certain that he is truly saved, that his sins are all forgiven, that he has been born again by the Spirit of God, and that he is consequently ready for eternity.

Why did Christ advise this person to agonize to enter in the door? The answer is simple. Our Lord knew, as none other, the tremendous forces which would combine to hinder the sinner from entering the door to God's great salvation. Let us name some of these opposing forces which would seek to rob the soul of the salvation God desires him to have, remembering that to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

First, there is *Pride*, which lifts its haughty head and refuses to admit that man is, by nature, the lost and guilty sinner that God declares him to be; that refuses to bow in contrition and confess: "God be merciful to me the sinner." We are told: "Though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly, but the proud He knoweth afar off." (Psa. 138:6) So long as a person adopts a superior air, and imagines himself to be quite good enough to merit God's favor by his own efforts, so long will he remain in his sins and, if he dies in that condition, will be lost forever.

Second, there is *Prejudice*, which consists of a wrong opinion formed before proper investigation. This has blinded many a person to the truth of the gospel and resulted in untold misery. The sinner forms a wrong impression of God, and of Christ, and of God's "easy, artless and unencumbered way of salvation." This prejudice may take many forms. It may be religious prejudice that hinders him from accepting God's way of being saved. It may be social prejudice that prevents him from taking his place as a sinner, no different from anyone else. It may be racial prejudice that causes him to refuse a salvation that is for "whosoever will."

Third, there is *Popularity*. Many have been deterred from walking the upward and heavenly pathway because they fear that such a path will cause them to become unpopular with their worldly friends. They dread the ridicule that living a consistent Christian life will bring them, and thus they allow themselves to be laughed into a lost eternity. The Bible speaks sadly of those who "loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." (John 12:43) Christ declared that "the truth shall make you free." Note: not popular, rich, powerful and successful, but Free. It may and will entail the world's unpopularity, but it is the path of true and eternal satisfaction.

Fourth, there are material *Possessions*. "The love of money, which is the root of all evil," has kept many from taking advantage of God's offer of salvation, and from trusting the One who, "though rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich." The lure of the almighty dollar has turned many a person into an "I-dollar-ter," who has discovered, too late, that his love of temporary wealth has plunged him into eternal bankruptcy!

Fifth, there are worldly *Pleasures*, which often prove to be an obstacle to the enjoyment of the true and lasting pleasures that only Christ can give. The Bible speaks of "the pleasures of sin," but goes on to say they are only for "a season." Robert Burns, the great Scotch poet, wrote of worldly pleasures:

"Pleasures are like poppies spread,
You grasp the flower, the bloom is shed;
Or, like the snowflake on the river,
A moment there, then gone forever!"

In spite of this fact, thousands of men and women are bartering their souls for the fleeting pleasures of a world that crucified its Creator, and still lives in rebellion against the Son of God.

Sixth, there is *Procrastination*, or delay. There are many who have been brought to realize their lost and guilty state in the sight of a holy God. They have heard of the way of salvation through an acceptance of Christ as their personal Savior, and yet they still linger in their sins and are thus exposed to the wrath of God. What is the reason for this folly? It is procrastination. This has sealed the eternal doom of thousands. They always intended to be saved "some other time," but death came upon them unawares, and they were just as assuredly lost as though they had flatly refused to accept Christ as their Savior. There is an old proverb which says: "The road of By and By leads to the town of Never."

Seventh, there is the *Prince of this world*, the Devil. He is the great hinderer. The Bible speaks, clearly and definitely, of his personality, wisdom and power. We are told: "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Cor. 4:4) It is only when a sinner seeks to escape from Satan's clutches that he is made to realize how great is this power that the enemy wields.

In view of this formidable array of opposition, our Lord's words need to be laid to heart: "Strive to enter in." May the reader give himself no rest or peace until he is certain that he has entered through the door of salvation, and knows the blessedness of his sins forgiven, of his peace with God and the possession of eternal life!

The second question is found in Mark 10:26, where the disciples of Christ asked: "Who then can be saved!" We shall call this:

II. AN INCREDULOUS QUESTION

This question can best be appreciated by a consideration of the circumstances which prompted the query. A rich young man, of high morality and intense religiousness, came running to Christ. Kneeling before Him, he earnestly inquired: "Good Master, what shall I do that I might inherit eternal life?" The Savior, who read him like an open book, proceeded to show this young man the utter impossibility for anyone to inherit eternal life on the basis of his own morality or self effort. Christ said: "Thou knowest the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery; do not kill; do not steal; do not bear false witness; defraud not; honor thy father and thy mother.'" At this, the young man replied: "All these have I observed from my youth." Then Christ proceeded to put His finger on the hidden cancer of the love of wealth which lay deep within his breast. He therefore said to him: "One thing thou lackest. Go thy way, sell what thou hast and give to the poor . . . and come, take up the cross and follow Me."

We are told that when the young man heard this, he was "sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions." Thus this man turned his back on the Son of God, and made his fatal choice for earthly riches and worldly prosperity, and we never hear of him again. As the young man went away, the Savior said to His disciples: "How hardly shall they that trust in riches enter into the kingdom of God!" It was these words that provoked the incredulous question: "Who then can be saved?" Notice the answer that Christ gave: "With men, it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible."

There are many today who resemble that rich, moral and religious young man. While possessed of many admirable qualities, they lack the one great essential requirement which is necessary to be a truly born again Christian, and this lack is fatal. This man trusted in his riches and turned away from Christ and departed, joyless, nameless, hopeless, lifeless and Christless! He valued his wealth above the far more exceeding value of his soul. Whatever it may be that keeps a person from trusting Christ is the value he places on his soul, and "what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

There are those today who are trusting to their morality to merit God's salvation, and falsely imagine that living a fairly decent and respectable life will win them a home in heaven. They have not yet learned that salvation is by grace alone, and is "not of works, lest any man should boast." See Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 4:4

Still others think that because they have passed through some religious rite or ceremony they have been thereby fitted for heaven. Many are trusting in their baptism and the fact that they take communion regularly, and thus make an ordinance a substitute for Christ! Baptism and communion are ordinances for those who are already saved and on their way to heaven, but they have no saving virtue whatever.

To all such the words of the Savior: "One thing thou lackest," should come home with force to their souls. The great need of all men is to have Christ as a living reality in their lives. This can only be brought about by believing the gospel which proclaims that Christ died for their sins. Only through accepting Him as their own personal Savior and confessing Him as the Lord of their lives can salvation be theirs.

The third question we shall entitle:

III. AN IMPERATIVE QUESTION

This is found in Acts 16:30. It was asked by the jailer of a prison in which Paul and Silas were imprisoned for preaching the gospel. God sent an earthquake so that all the doors of the prison were opened. The jailer, thinking his prisoners had escaped, was about to commit suicide when Paul called to him and said: "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here. At this, the man cried: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Back came the answer from the lips of Paul: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!"

Is this your question, my friend? Has God shown you that you are a lost and guilty sinner, helpless to save yourself by any efforts of your own? If so, thank God, for you are just the kind of person for whom the Son of God suffered, bled and died on the cross of Calvary. He knew your dire need and deadly danger and, in wonderful love, allowed Himself to be crucified in order that He might bear all your sins in His own body on the tree. As He hung there, despised and rejected of men, all God's righteous wrath against sin fell on Him, in unparalleled force, until every claim of God against sin had been satisfied by

His substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of sinners. Mark the loud and triumphant cry of the Savior ere He bowed His head in death and dismissed His spirit: "It is finished!" What was finished? All the work necessary for the salvation of every sinner who will trust in His finished work of redemption and receive Him as Savior and Lord.

God has signified His absolute and complete satisfaction in the finished work of His beloved Son on your behalf, and is now prepared to receive, pardon and save every sinner who trusts in Christ and rests, simply and entirely, in the virtue and value of the precious blood of the Son of God as the alone foundation of his hope of eternal blessedness.

May God, in His mercy, grant that this imperative question may be yours, and that from the heart you may sincerely say:

"Just as I am, poor, guilty, lost,
I come to Thee, Lord Jesus Christ;
In simple faith I trust in Thee,
Who bore my sins and died for me.

God's word will then assure you that you are saved, and saved eternally; that your sins are all forgiven; that you are the possessor of eternal life; that God is your Father; that the Lord Jesus Christ is your Savior; that the Holy Spirit is your indwelling Comforter; that the word of God is your infallible guide; that Christians are your heaven-born, heaven-bound and heaven-bent companions, and that heaven will be your eternal home. May it be yours to say of the Lord Jesus, right here and now: "He is mine, and I am His, for ever and for ever!

"Come, come, sin laden one,
Just as you are in your sins;
Trust, trust, Christ's precious blood
That satisfied all God's claims;
Look, look, to Him who bore
All of your sins on the tree;
Rest, rest, on His own word.
Then saved by His grace you shall be!"

Alfred P. Gibbs