PRESSING QUESTIONS OF AN AWAKENED MIND

NO. 1520

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"Who art thou, Lord?...What wilt thou have me to do?"
Acts 9:5-6

PAUL fell to the ground overcome by the brightness of the light which outshone the midday sun, and as he lay there he cried, "Who art thou, Lord?" After receiving an answer to his first question, he humbly asked another, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

This morning I spent all my strength, and I scarcely have any remaining for this evening, but the subject was well worthy of the greatest exhaustion ["Receiving the Kingdom of God as a Little Child." #1,439]. I tried to show that we must receive the kingdom of heaven as little children, or else we could not in any wise enter into it.

I wanted, if I could, to add a sort of practical tailpiece to that subject, something that would enable me, yet more fully, to explain the childlike spirit which comes at conversion, and which is absolutely needful as one of the first marks and consequences of the work of the Spirit of God upon the heart. I cannot find a better illustration of the childlike spirit than this which is now before us.

Paul was a great man and on the way to Damascus I have no doubt he rode a very high horse. He verily thought that he was doing God service. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and had a very high estimate of his own character. And now that he had letters from the high priest upon his person, he felt himself to be armed with great power, and to be no mean man. He would let those poor Christians in Damascus know! He would worry them out of their fanaticism. He would take care to let them see that Saul of Tarsus was greater than Jesus of Nazareth.

But a few seconds sufficed for the Lord to alter the man. How soon He brought him down! The manifestation of Jesus Christ Himself from heaven soon subdued the great man into a little child, for the two questions which are now before us are exceedingly childlike. He inquires with sacred curiosity, "Who art thou, Lord?" and then he surrenders at discretion, crying, "What wilt thou have me to do?"

He seems to cry, "I give up my weapons. I submit to be Thy servant. I only ask to be taught what I am to do, and I am ready to do it. You have conquered me. Behold, at Your feet I lie, only raise me up and give me something to do in Your service, for I will gladly undertake it."

To this spirit we must all come if we are to be saved. We must come to think of Jesus so as to desire to know Him. And then we must reverence Jesus so as to be willing to obey His will in all things. Upon these two points I am going to speak with a measure of brevity tonight.

Our first object of thought will be—*the earnest inquirer seeking to know his Lord.* And the second will be *the obedient disciple requesting directions.*

I. First, then, if any one of us would be saved he must be brought by divine grace to be AN EARNEST INQUIRER AFTER THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST. He must ask the question, "Who art thou, Lord?"

Notice that *he is willing to be taught*. He lies there with the Christ above him, and he asks Him a question. He is not only willing to learn, but he is eager to be taught. "Who art thou, Lord?" is the utterance of his inmost soul. He wants to know. And do not you want to know, my hearer?

There is but one name given under heaven whereby ye must be saved. Do you not wish to know something about Him whose name it is? Are you indifferent to your soul's affairs, careless about what shall become of your immortal soul? Did Jesus die, and is it nothing to you? Do you pass by His cross as though it were the market cross of a village? Do you hear of His death as though it were some

commonplace event in history to be once read and then forgotten? I pray it may not be so with you. But since you must either be lost or saved eternally, come you and ask with deep anxiety, "Who art thou, Lord? Who are You by whom I am to be saved? What right, what power have You to save? What claim have You upon my faith? Oh, tell me, for I long to know."

Want of thought ruins half of mankind. If men were but anxious to understand the truth they would soon learn it and receive it. If like the Bereans they would search the Scriptures to find the truth, or if like Lydia their hearts were opened to receive it, they would soon know the Lord. Like Paul, we must be willing to learn.

And next, observe *the subject that he wished to be instructed upon*. "Who art thou, Lord?" You have heard that Christ is the Savior, let your ambition be to know all about *Him*. I will tell you one thing, saints on earth, and even saints in heaven, are always wanting to have this question more fully answered to them—"Who art thou, Lord?"

Those who know Him best will tell you that there is a something about Him which still surpasses all their knowledge. And I suppose that even when we see Him face to face there will remain a mystery in His matchless love, and a depth unsearchable in His divine person, into which even then we shall not be able to dive. "Who art thou, Lord?" may well be the question of a soul that is seeking salvation, since it is still the question of those who have found it.

"Who art thou, Lord?" What is Your person? What is Your nature? How is it that You are able to save? Learn well that He is divine, yet human. The Son of Mary and yet the Son of God. He is man, your brother, touched with the feeling of your infirmities, yet is He God eternal, infinite, full of all power and majesty, assuredly divine. Learn you this if you would be saved, and regard the Lord Jesus as God over all, blessed forever, yet clothed in the form of a servant, and made in the likeness of sinful flesh. Learn that.

"Who art thou, Lord?" What are Your offices? If my eye could see You I would ask You, what titles do You bear? What offices do You sustain? He is a prophet, you must be instructed by Him, and believe His teaching. He is a Priest, you must be washed by His blood, and He must offer sacrifice for you. Nay, rather, He has offered it, and you must accept it as being for you and on your behalf. He is a King too, and if you will be saved by Him you must let Him govern you. You must yield yourself to Him and be His subject, and take up His cross and bear His easy yoke, which is no burden to the neck.

Prophet, Priest, King, and a thousand other offices does He sustain. Ask, you craving sinner, ask, "Who art thou, Lord?" till you shall discover something about Him that exactly suits you, and then your faith shall light upon it and your heart shall cry, "He is all my salvation, and all my desire."

"Who art thou, Lord?" It is a question you may ask about *His relationships*. Who is He? The Son of the Highest, and yet the brother of the lowest. Who is He? King of angels and King of kings, and yet the friend of sinners and the helper of the humblest that will come to Him. He stands as the head over all things to the church, His church's husband and the world's ruler, master of providence, sovereign of heaven, conqueror of hell itself.

All power is in His hands. The Father has committed it unto Him, and now He stands in such relationship to us that if we believe in Him He gives us eternal life, and guards us from all ill, for He has said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hands."

O beloved hearer, if you would be saved, study deeply that question, "Who art thou, Lord?" and be not satisfied till you know Christ and are known of Him—till there is a mutual knowledge between you and Himself, for it is only so that you can be saved. An unknown Christ is no Christ to you. A Savior whom you do not know is a Savior who will not know you in the day of His appearing.

"Who art thou, Lord?" Now, that question, as I have said, concerning Christ should be asked by all of us, but it is not at all a speculative question. It is a question of the utmost practical importance to every man, and in proportion as a man knows the answer to that question he will receive its practical

result. Hearken and perceive this. "Who art thou, Lord?" What will be the first result of having this question answered?

Why, when Paul knew that He whose face had shone upon Him brighter than the sun was Jesus of Nazareth, He was seized with the deepest possible *contrition*. "What!" he seemed to say, "Have I persecuted the Lord? When I was hunting down those poor people was I hunting down the Messiah? Was I fighting against the Christ of God?" He had not known that before, but when he knew who the Lord was then his heart was broken within him with a deep sense of sin.

Now, come you hither, some of you. You have been living for years refusing true religion, and despising it, but have you ever thought that you were refusing Jesus Christ the Son of God, and despising the Beloved of God who condescended to come into the world to suffer for love's sake? When they put Jesus to death He was, as our sweet poet puts it—

"Found guilty of excess of love."

It was all that could be laid to His dear charge, but for excess of love He died. And you have refused Him. You have now these twenty years and more refused that thorn-crowned head, that brow so marred, those wounded hands, that gashed and wounded side! You have refused the matchless Savior, without whom you are undone forever! Have you known this? Have you done it willfully? I hope you can reply, "But I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Therefore He winks at your ill manners, and He bids you now come to Him and He will gladly receive you. He will in no wise cast you out.

To know Christ, then, is a practical knowledge, because it leads to repentance. When Christ is unknown we can go on refusing and even persecuting Him. But when we clearly perceive that it is the Son of God and the bleeding Lamb whom we have refused and persecuted, then our hearts melt. We beg His forgiveness, and cast ourselves at His feet.

A second practical result is that then our *hope* is encouraged, for though Paul at the sight of the Lord Jesus must have been full of bitter anguish, it was by that same sight that he was afterwards cheered and comforted. What! Are You in heaven brighter than the sun? Are You the man of Nazareth whom I have persecuted? Are You He who was rejected and despised? O You bright and shining one, are You that same Christ to whom the publicans and harlots drew near? Are You He who came to seek and to save that which was lost? Are You exalted on high to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins? Then there is hope for me.

It is the sinner's Christ that is in heaven, the same that took the little children and said, "Suffer them to come to me." Oh, then, I will trust Him. I feel I may, I can, I must. I yield myself to Him because I know Him now. I did not before. How practical is this knowledge!

And it had another effect upon Paul. It led him to *complete submission*. He said, "Is this Christ whom I have rejected Lord of all? Then it is indeed hard for me to kick against the pricks. I will not do so any longer. Resist Him? That I dare not do! If all power be in His hands, then to oppose Him is as hopeless as it is wicked. Behold, I surrender at discretion. O Lord Jesus, be my king. Accept me as Your subject. I oppose You no longer."

How I wish that Jesus would make some here know Him who have never known Him before—that they may at this very hour yield to Him, because if once they knew Him it would fire them with *ardor in His service*. There was never a man yet that did really know Christ whom Christ did not fill with an inward flame, so that he felt he could live or die for Him.

Some human military leaders have had such extraordinary influence over their soldiery that they have commanded and have been cheerfully obeyed, even at the cost of life. The Christ of God has a superlative power over all hearts that know Him. See how Paul felt His influence, and scoured the world to win Christ's lost ones. Perils of robbers, perils of rivers, the deep sea itself, scourging, stoning, all these were nothing to the apostle from the day when he knew Christ.

He had been exceedingly hot against Him, but now he burns and blazes with zeal for Him. And so will it be with all who know Jesus. Right practical, then, is the question, "Who art thou, Lord?" Oh that the Spirit of God would lead every one to ask that question for himself.

Only once more and I leave the question. It is this. While Paul was willing to learn, and his subject was important, for he wished to learn of Christ, and exceedingly practical, for it moved him to every good thing, it is worthy of remark that *he sought instruction from the best possible Master,* for, my brethren, who can tell us who Christ is but Christ Himself?

Here is His book. Read it. It is the looking glass. Jesus is yonder, and He looks into this book, and if you look into it with well-washed eyes, you may see His reflected image in this glass, darkly, however, at the best. So, too, when you hear His faithful servants preach, you may see somewhat of Christ. But let me tell you there is no sight of Christ like that which comes personally to your own soul by the Holy Spirit.

I do not mean that any men among us will ever see Christ while we are here with these eyes. And if we did, it might not do us good, for thousands saw Him who, nevertheless, cried, "Crucify Him." But I do mean that there are eyes inside these eyes, eyes of the mind and of the soul, to which Christ Himself must reveal Himself. And I charge you who have never seen Him so to fall on your knees and cry, "Show Thyself to me."

You must have personal dealings with Him, each one for himself, and you may have these dealings. He is accessible tonight. He will receive you at once if you seek Him. He has declared that He will not cast any out that come to Him.

Oh, will you not ask Him to show Himself to you? If you knew He would refuse you, you might be excused the prayer, but since He will manifest Himself to every contrite, lowly, seeking soul, will you not seek Him? Will you not even now humbly put to Him this question, "Who art thou, Lord? Reveal Yourself to me, as You do not to the world, but as You do reveal Yourself to seeking souls."

So then I leave that question to come to the second one. May the Holy Spirit help us while we handle it.

II. "What wilt thou have me to do?" THE OBEDIENT DISCIPLE REQUESTING DIRECTION.

We are always telling you that whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ has everlasting life. That is the basic doctrine of the Gospel, but recollect that we never told you that you might believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and then live as you liked. That is far from us. He who truly believes in Christ does as Christ bids him, and becomes henceforth Christ's servant and disciple as well as His saved one. Hence the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

You will notice that the apostle here puts himself into the position of a soldier waiting for orders. He will not stir till he has received his officer's command. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He stands quite ready to do it, but he wants to know what the order may be, and therefore he looks up and prays, "Lord, direct me. What would You have me to do?" it is his Lord's will alone that he now means to do. "Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?"

Before, it used to be, "What will Moses have me to do?" And with some now present it has been "What should I like to do?" for whatsoever their soul lusts after that have they done, and whatsoever new pleasure, no matter how sinful it might be, if it were within their reach, they followed greedily after it, but he that would be saved must yield up his own will to his Lord.

Now, beloved, take heed unto yourselves that Christ be your Master, and nobody else. It would never do to say, "What would the church have me to do?" As far as the church teaches what Christ taught, obey her, but no farther. It would not even be right to say, "What would an apostle have me to do?" Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." But if Paul does not follow Christ, we must not follow Paul. He says, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel, let him be accursed." And so let it stand.

I count it to be a sad lowering of a Christian's standard when he takes any mortal man living, or even any man now in heaven, to be his guide and master. "One is your Master, even Christ," and your

question should be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? I see what I am bidden to do in the Prayer Book. I see what I am bidden to do by learned and godly men, but these things have no authority over my conscience. Lord, what would *You* have me to do? If it be not Your will and Your Word I know there can be no light in it, but what I know not, teach You me."

And then, see that this childlike obedience of the apostle is *personal*. It is, "Lord, what wilt thou have *me* to do? I have little enough to do with my neighbors. They have their duty and their calling, but Lord, what would You have *me* to do? Other persons must follow the light they have, but Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do? My father, my brother, my friend, I have no right to judge these, to their own Master they must stand or fall. But Lord, what would You have *me* to do?"

You that look at your own inability when you come to Christ, must come to Him with a personal faith, pleading for strength to do His will. You must yield to Jesus a personal obedience, even should it separate you from all your family. Let it separate the nearest ties, let it cause your past friends to give you the cold shoulder, let it subject you to persecution even unto death, you have nothing to do with these consequences, your business is to say, "Show me what You would have me to do, and I will do it."

I mention a little incident in my own personal history, for which I have always had reason enough to thank God. When I was converted to God after some long time of bitter anguish of spirit I found rest. And the very first thing I did when I found rest in Christ was to read for myself the New Testament, and see what the Lord would have me to do. I found in the Word of God the duty of believers' baptism. I had never met with any Baptist friends in my life until I had for myself discovered the truth.

I had not even heard of their existence, so negligent had they been in the spreading of their views on that matter. But taking up the New Testament with my lexicon to see what the word meant, I found that the word baptize signified to immerse. When I read the Scriptures I found everywhere that believers were immersed. I did not at first know of the existence of another person who held that opinion, but it did not signify to me the turn of a hair. I was only afraid that I might not find anybody to baptize me, but I meant to attend to the duty in some way or other.

I discovered afterwards that there were many who had searched the Scriptures and had come to the same conclusion as myself, but to me, then, it did seem like coming away from all the Christian people that I knew. Have I ever regretted the step? No. Unimportant as some might think it, it gave to my whole spirit and life a tone for which I have reason to thank God. I stood upon my own feet, having read the Bible for myself. I took my own way in obedience to my Lord and Master, and from that day I know that I have not willfully turned aside from His statutes, either in doctrines or in precept, but I have taught the faith as I have learned it.

When I go to my chamber at night with a thousand imperfections to confess, yet I can feel that I have honestly and faithfully followed my Master. If I have erred it has been from want of light, and not from want of will to serve Him. But if I had burked that first conviction, and if I had made little nicks in my conscience at first, could I stand before you all this night and declare that I have not shunned both to do and to declare the whole counsel of God?

I charge every young man as soon as he believes in Christ to read and search the Bible for himself and say, "Show me what thou wouldst have me to do." I would rather be right alone than be wrong with all the world, and every honest Christian man ought to feel that he would rather follow Jesus Christ with two or three than run with a multitude after the traditions of men. God help you, beloved, as soon as you are converted to become thoroughly obedient disciples, searching the Word.

I do not set so much importance upon the result of your investigation as I do upon the investigation itself. I care less about the result you arrive at than I do for the Spirit which would lead you, as a disciple, earnestly to desire to follow your Master, and would lead you to do everything that you believe to be His will—the little as well as the great. The Lord help us to be anxious to know and do His will in all things, fearless of consequences.

Note again, that the apostle not only puts it personally, but he pleads for grace *at once*. "Lord, show me what thou wouldst have me to do?" as much as to say, "I will do it directly." He does not ask to be allowed a little delay, but "What wouldst thou have me to do? Here I, Thy willing servant stand."

Young man, if you would have salvation you must be ready to follow Christ tonight. Tonight, it may be, is the time when the Spirit of God is struggling with you, and if resisted He never may return. Just now the scales hang in an even balance. Which way shall they turn? It may be tonight for death or life the scale shall turn for the last time. O blessed Jesus in heaven, why should we hesitate if You will indeed save us? We may well make a complete surrender and say, "Now, even now, I enlist beneath Thy banner, for I Thy willing servant am."

And observe, once more, that *he does not make any kind of conditions*. What wouldst thou have me to do? I will do it. If unpleasant to the flesh, it shall be pleasant to my heart, and if it appear stern, yet if You will help me I will do it, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Saul little knew when he asked the question what the doing of His Master's will would involve, but he meant at the time that whatever it would involve he was prepared for it.

O you that would be Christians, do not suppose that it is just believing something—an article of a creed, or undergoing a ceremony—that will save you. You must, if you are Christ's, yield yourselves up to Him. He did not come into this world to lead men to heaven by back roads and crooked paths, but He leads them into the way of righteousness, the end whereof is everlasting peace. Will you be child enough to follow Him? Will you have the childlike spirit which only wants first to know who He is and then exclaims—

"Through floods or flames, If Jesus leads
I'll follow where He goes"?

The Lord grant it may be so with us!

I close with just this remark, that it is by knowing Christ that you will learn to obey Him, and the more you obey Him the more easy it will be. And in obeying Him you will find your honor. Paul at this day stands in a most honorable place in the church of God, simply because being called of God to do His will he did it faithfully even to the end.

Is it not beautiful to see how Paul in one moment seems to have forgotten all his old Phariseeism? All the harsh words and bitter blasphemies that he had spoken against Christ, they have all gone in a moment. What strange changes will come over some beings in an instant.

One of my students who has been a sailor has preached the Gospel for some long time, but his English was far from grammatical. Having been in college some little time, he began to speak correctly, but suddenly the old habit returned upon him. He was in the *Princess Alice* at the time of the lamentable catastrophe [October 20, 1878], and he escaped in an almost miraculous manner.

I saw him some time after, and congratulated him on his escape, and he replied that he had saved his life but had lost all his grammar. He found himself for a while using the language of two or three years ago. And even now, though he is recovering his spirits, he declares that he cannot get back what he had learned. He seems to have drowned his grammar on that terrible occasion.

Now, just as we may lose some good thing by a dreadful accident, or occurrence, which seems to sweep over the mind like a huge wave and wash away our treasures, so by a blessed catastrophe, if Christ should meet with any man tonight, much which he has valued will be swept away! You may write on wax, and may make the record fair. Take a hot iron and roll it across the wax, and it is all gone.

That seems to me to be just what Jesus did with Paul's heart. It was all written over with blasphemy and rebellion, and He rolled the hot iron of burning love over his soul and the evil inscription was all gone. He ceased to blaspheme, and he began to praise. May the like be done to many here present to the praise and glory of my Master's love and power. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ACTS 26

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—
505, 589, ("FLOWERS AND FRUITS" 109)

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.