

11-5-1967

Man's Persistent Questions

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Recommended Citation

Chalk, John Allen, "Man's Persistent Questions" (1967). *Herald of Truth Audio*. 166.
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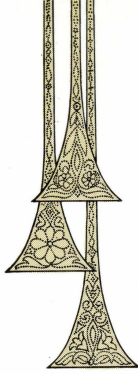
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Man's Persistent Questions



Number 823
TRANSCRIPT OF THE

Herald of Truth
..... *radio programs*



HIGHLAND CHURCH OF CHRIST
radio program

P. O. Box 2439 Abilene, Texas 79604

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Man's Persistent Questions

Have you ever thought about how accurately the questions you ask reveal your real self? Man is a questioning creature. He probes, observes, inquires, and reacts to everything around him.

Had you ever stopped to think that the Bible is essentially a book about man's vital questions? The basic questions of life and death seem to persist. If philosophy and history have anything to say to us it is that man's questions have never changed! And that's part of the reason why the Bible's unchanging truth continues to speak to the man who asks, seeks, and knocks (to use Jesus' words, Matthew 7:7, 8).

One does not read far into the opening chapters of the Bible's first book, *Genesis*, before hearing a question. Strangely, and significantly enough, the Bible's first question is asked by God. This is the setting: Adam and Eve have willfully and deliberately disobeyed God's instructions regarding the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — they have eaten the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6, 7). In turn, immediately following their disobedience, God comes to talk with them as was His custom in the intimate and open relationship He and man enjoyed in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). But Adam and Eve were now no longer comfortable in God's presence. Instead of welcoming

Him the Bible tells us, "And they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah God amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). God deals with this reaction in the following manner: "And Jehovah God called unto the man, and said unto him, Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9). That, my friend, is the question God continues to ask with greater and greater urgency until the ultimate expression of it at Calvary in the death of His only begotten Son! "Where art thou?" God's plaintive cry unheard and unanswered by rebellious, sin-slaved man.

With the beautiful and eternal relationship between God and man broken; with man's decision to hide from God; with the closing of the Garden to all human occupation; sin within the human family begins to stain, blotch, darken, and confuse man. Now the questions, not from God but from man, begin to come freely and desperately. Only one chapter later in *Genesis*, Cain murders his brother Abel! When questioned by God, Cain asks a question that strikes at the very heart of much contemporary violence, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). How often we are insensitive to our neighbor's plight. How terribly hard are our hearts to suffering humanity around the world. No, Cain does not ask an obscure question. Rather, his question wells up in all too many of our hearts, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

In one of the Bible's oldest books, the book of *Job*, another of man's many questions is asked: "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). The continuation of life was never a problem in the Garden of Eden. But sin produces death, wherever and whenever it occurs. Spiritual and physical death occur today because of sin (Romans 5:12). Therefore, Job speaks of that never quiet urge within man for immortality!

In the *Psalms* also many basic quests are expressed. As an example, listen to *Psalms* 8:4: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalm 8:4). Man's nature and destiny weigh heavily on the author of this *Psalms*. In one way or another his question is every man's. Who am I? Why am I here? What's my life all about? These are questions that the Psalmist sees when he asks, "What is man?"

Later in the *Psalms* another equally important question arises. Listen! "What man is he that shall live and not see death, that shall deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?" (Psalm 89:48). In addition to social responsibility, concern for immortality, and the nature of man, there

are the deeply significant concerns for life and death! When will I die? Why must I die? The fear of death is one of modern man's universal anxieties, even as it burdened ancient man.

Solomon, the author of the Old Testament book *Ecclesiastes*, lived with many questions in his heart. For all of us he spoke in the first chapter of *Ecclesiastes*, and asked, "What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun?" (*Ecclesiastes* 1:3). We labor and strive only to die! We scrimp and save only to have no real need and genuine purpose for our wealth! Solomon said, Let's stop and examine the way we are living.

It is Solomon again who asks this modern question: "For who knoweth what is good for man in his life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?" (*Ecclesiastes* 6:12). Moral relativity has not been the province solely of the new morality advocates and the radical theologians. Vacillation about principle is stock-in-trade for too many hypocritical pretenders of Christianity. And all too often the important question of what is right is overshadowed by the defective query, "For who knoweth what is good for man in his life . . . ?"

These are but a few of the questions asked in the Bible. Probably Pilate, at Christ's trial, best summarized the confusion and darkness of counsel created in our hearts by sin, when he asked at that fateful moment in history, "What is truth?" (*John* 18:38). Isn't that your concern today? I want you to know that it is mine! "What is truth?"

The Bible doesn't seem as "old fashioned" and "out of date" as it did a few minutes ago, does it? These are questions you have either heard others ask or you yourself have asked. No age has questioned more, in all areas of life and thought, than our own. But to our everlasting discredit, I'm afraid, we have repeatedly and foolishly asked the questions without ever seeking the answers! The result of such a state of affairs, which exists right now in too many of our hearts, is permanent, unremitting anxiety! That's why I want us to find some answers, but more especially why I want us to hear God's answers to these and all vital questions being asked today!

At this point I want us to pause and observe that with the coming of Christ all these, and other important questions asked by mankind, took on a new urgency, that is, were asked with a new fervency. Almost like some unique stimulant had been poured into men's hearts, the questions flowed even more insistently.

Everywhere Jesus went, during His earthly ministry, He was questioned — personal questions, religious ques-

tions, prejudicial questions, honest questions, troubled questions. They came from all sectors of life and from all kinds of people.

From His forerunner, John the Baptist, now in prison because of his fearless denouncement of evil in officialdom, came the question, "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" (*Matthew* 11:3). Those who had known Him and His family in Nazareth asked: "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?" (*Matthew* 13:54-56).

Out of the hearts of His own disciples, when He taught the rich man's difficulty in entering the Kingdom, came the question, "Who then can be saved?" (*Matthew* 19:25). And a few moments later, another even more personal query, "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee; what then shall we have?" (*Matthew* 19:27).

The Jewish leaders of the day were probably more puzzled than any who knew Him. This is what happened on one occasion during His ministry: "And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" (*Matthew* 21:23). They couldn't understand who He was, what His intentions were, and how He could say and do things they couldn't do!

Caiaphas, the high priest, during Jesus' last day on the earth, asked the question men wanted most to ask. During the preliminary trial among His own people, Mark's *Gospel* says, "Again the high priest asked him, and saith unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven" (*Mark* 14:61, 62).

But the point is this: they questioned Him, they sought His answers, they wanted to know all about Him and all about the God He represented! With the coming of Jesus men took up their vital and ancient quests with a new intensity.

This renewed search for answers to these vital questions may have been partially caused by the very purposes that brought Jesus into the world. He was the "Word become flesh" who reflected the "glory of the only begotten from the Father" (*John* 1:14). This meant not only that Jesus was "full of grace and truth" — the very things sinful and confused man needed most — but that to "as many

as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God" (*John* 1:14, 12).

Jesus Himself explained, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (*John* 10:10). What He means here is that He came to answer the questions that sin had created in men's lives and hearts. He came to fit all the pieces of the puzzle together!

What He offered then, and offers now, is the very thing that you and I have been unable to discover and possess — peace and quiet within our souls! He invites you and me: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (*Matthew* 11:28-30). Notice those significant words, "ye shall find rest unto your souls." Money can't buy that kind of contentment, that kind of relaxation, that kind of satisfaction — "soul rest" — that reaches to the primeval depths of the human condition with God's grace, love, forgiveness, and life.

He clearly stated that "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many" (*Matthew* 20:28). He actually summarized His purpose in coming into the world to live and die among men in these words: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (*John* 14:6). God has now spoken His will to us clearly, simply, fully, and finally (*Hebrews* 1:1, 2).

It was because of mankind's unanswered questions, and more specifically the condition that created these questions, that Christ came as God's answer.

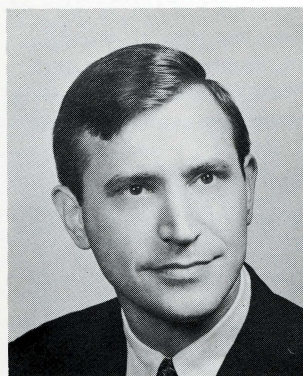
"Where art thou?" was not a question casually asked by God of man in the distant past. With painful repetition God continued seeking man's response. His love for lost men continually sought means to arouse them to repentance, a love that wouldn't at the same time destroy their power of choice. Finally, yes finally, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (*John* 3:16). Paul views this same truth from another perspective when he says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses" (*II Corinthians* 5:19). Salvation, not condemnation! Hope instead of despair! Clarity of purpose rather than confusion of plan! Reality took the place of fantasy! God answered, and even today answers, our questions in Jesus Christ.

But we have to be sensitive to Him, obedient to Him, willing to surrender the control of our lives to Him. That's right, obey Him! "Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation" (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

But isn't that the real reason we are still asking the questions without arriving at any answers? We have tried our own methods, gone to our own inner resources for power and purpose. But the answers haven't appeared. Why? One Biblical sage said, "A man's goings are of Jehovah; how then can man understand his way?" (Proverbs 20:24). And one of God's inspired prophets admitted "O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

Christ commands, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). He urges all who would receive His counsel, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish" (Luke 13:3). He also assures us, "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

It is my absolute conviction that Jesus Christ is man's only hope for worthwhile life. Only in Him are the questions, the ancient, ever-recurring questions of our hearts, fully and thrillingly answered. No wonder the Apostle Paul could say, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (II Timothy 2:10). Are you "in Christ"? Have you obeyed Him in willing faith and baptism? I hope so, for in Him all our questions are answered.



John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.