



Personal & Group Study Guide: January 23, 2022

Message Series: The Questions Jesus Asked (Part 1)

Message Title: *Why Are You So Afraid?*

This week's question: *What role does fear play in our lives today, and what is the connection between our faith in God and the fears we face?*

Christians often think of Jesus as the guy with all the answers, but when you read the biographies of his life in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) you will find that Jesus preferred to ask people questions. In fact, the four gospels quote Jesus asking questions over three hundred times during his three-year ministry!

Why did Jesus ask so many questions? Because his questions inspired deeper conversations among his disciples as they pursued the truth of God together. That's what The Story is all about, so with this series, we're taking a closer look at some of the questions Jesus asked.

Read Genesis 1:1-3.

How does what a person believes about what happened *in the beginning* shape how they understand the things that happen *here and now*?

If it's true that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and that He spoke order and light into the chaotic primordial darkness, why should that make us less afraid today?

Read Genesis 3:8-10.

What was the immediate aftereffect of Adam and Eve's first sin?

How does fear lie *to us* - and make liars *of us*?

"Fear not" is God's favorite command in the Bible. Variations of "Do not be afraid" can be found over 350 times in the Old and New Testaments. ***Why do you think God is so concerned with getting this simple message through to His people?***



Read Matthew 8:23-27.

What did Jesus say to the disciples when they woke him up? (And what did he *not* say?)

How have you seen fear change our world/country/community since the beginning of the pandemic?

On a personal level, how has fear changed your outlook, your relationships with people, and your faith in God?

If fear has been a struggle for you, it's understandable. No judgment here. But how much of that fear can you trace back to a deficit of faith?

If we believe that "In the beginning, God created..." on purpose and according to plan, and that Jesus commanded the winds and waves, *what do we have to fear?*

If you're not sure what you believe about God, what specific doubts are holding you back from putting your faith in Him? And who can you reach out to for deeper conversation about your beliefs and doubts?



Personal & Group Study Guide: January 30, 2022
Message Series: The Questions Jesus Asked (Part 2)
Message Title: *How Will You Escape Hell?*

Series Introduction: Christians often think of Jesus as the guy with all the answers, but when you read the biographies of his life in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) you will find that Jesus preferred to ask people questions. In fact, the four gospels quote Jesus asking questions over three hundred times during his three-year ministry!

Why did Jesus ask so many questions? Because his questions inspired deeper conversations among his disciples as they pursued the truth of God together. That's what The Story is all about, so with this series, we're taking a closer look at some of the questions Jesus asked.

This week's focus question: *What did Jesus say about Hell, and how can a loving God condemn people He loves to eternal, conscious torment?*

Out of all the figures in the Bible, who had the most to say about Hell? Why might this come as a surprise to some people?

How did Jesus describe Hell? (See: Matthew 5:29-30; 10:28; 11:23; 13:40-41; 13:49-50; 22:13; 25:31-43; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:5; and 16:19-31)

Read Matthew 23:33.

Who was Jesus talking to specifically? Why does God hold people in positions of power and authority to a higher standard?

Why do you think more Americans believe in Heaven (over 75%) than Hell (less than 50%)?

What is Sam Harris' point about his understanding of the Christian afterlife? What is wrong with his argument?

Here's the quote from Dr. Miroslav Volf in his book Exclusion and Embrace

:

...[I]n a world of violence it would not be worthy of God not to wield the sword; if God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make the final end to violence God would not be worthy of our worship...in a world of violence we are faced with an inescapable alternative: either God's violence or human violence.

The STORY CHURCH

Most people...deem the talk of God's judgment irreverent, but think nothing of entrusting judgment into human hands, persuaded presumably that this is less dangerous and more humane than to believe in a God who judges! ...and so violence thrives, secretly nourished by belief in a God who refuses to wield the sword.

If you are inclined to dismiss [Hell], I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture in a war zone. Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die. And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind.

What is the relationship between comfort, privilege, and the denial of Hell?

Read Genesis 3:7-13.

How did sin change the behavior of Adam and Eve, and how did it affect their relationship with God?

How does sin "behave" like a typical addiction?

How do the first two steps of the 12-step addiction recovery process mirror the promise of the Gospel?

Read Ephesians 2:4-5.

How will we escape being condemned to Hell?



Personal & Group Study Guide: February 6, 2022

Message Series: The Questions Jesus Asked (Part 3)

Message Title: *If You Only Love People Who Love You, What Reward Will You Get?*

Series Introduction: Christians often think of Jesus as the guy with all the answers, but when you read the biographies of his life in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) you will find that Jesus preferred to ask people questions. In fact, the four gospels quote Jesus asking questions over three hundred times during his three-year ministry!

Why did Jesus ask so many questions? Because his questions inspired deeper conversations among his disciples as they pursued the truth of God together. That's what The Story is all about, so with this series, we're taking a closer look at some of the questions Jesus asked.

Today's question: *If You Only Love People Who Love You, What Reward Will You Get?*

Time to name names! Who are some of the people (or types of people) you find most difficult to love? Why?

What did God do for Adam and Eve in the aftermath of their sin, and what does that tell us about the love of God? (Check out Genesis 3:8-9, 3:21)

Read Matthew 5:43-48.

"You have heard that it was said..." Jesus repeated this phrase often when speaking to his Jewish audience. What did he mean by this? Where had they "heard that it was said"?

If the Old Testament said "Love your neighbor," but Jesus said, "Love your neighbor...and your enemy," did Jesus contradict the Bible? (See Matthew 5:17)

When Jesus said "Love your enemies..." and "If you love those who love you..." he used the word *agape* for love. What is *agape* love, and how does it compare to other, lesser forms of love?

Followers of Jesus love everyone because:

1. God _____.

Read Romans 5:6-10. What is the difference between the way God loves and the way most people love?

The STORY CHURCH



2. We're _____.

When you become a follower of Jesus and you receive the Spirit of God, a new “you” is born. Although you may continue to struggle with the same sins as before, the victory is yours by faith in Christ. The primary vital sign in your new life with Jesus is LOVE, because the more you choose to love Christ, the more love you will have for everyone else.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. How has your new life in Christ increased your capacity for love?

3. Everyone _____.

If you're following Jesus, you are on a mission to make sure as many people as possible know about his gospel and his love for all people. Although Christians have tried many evangelism “tactics” over the years - including argumentation, fear-mongering, and coercion - *agape* love is the only way to win people over.

Let's be honest. How have you failed to love others (even your “enemies”) with *agape* love? (Note: *This question isn't meant to shame you, but to produce the “godly sorrow” which “brings repentance that leads to salvation” [2 Corinthians 7:10]*)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor who was executed in a Nazi concentration camp at age 39 for his anti-Nazi activism. If anyone had the right to be filled with hate, it was him. But this is what he said about how Christians overcome the world:

“Love bears all things. That means it is no longer frightened by evil. It is totally able to accept the terribleness of human sin. It does not look away because it cannot take the sight of blood.

Love believes all things and becomes a fool because of its faith, yet it is right in the end. It is victimized and duped and lied to as a result, but nevertheless it stands its ground. *Isn't it nonsense to believe all things? Doesn't it actually provoke others to consider me stupid?* Yes, it is nonsense if I have something in mind I want to get for my love. But if I really want nothing less than to love without conditions, without limit, without prejudice, then it is no nonsense at all; on the contrary, it is then *the* way to overcome people, the very people begin to wonder and then change their ways. Love believes all things because it cannot help but believe that ultimately, when all is said and done, all people are created to be overcome by love.”
(from *The Unbelieving Way of Love*, a sermon delivered on October 21, 1934 in London)

Name two or three specific ways you will *choose* to love hard-to-love people with the *agape* love of God this week.