

Question Time

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[0:00] Corey can come down the front as well. We're going to sit down. So you might not see us, but that's an advantage. There's some benefits to sitting down.

Ones at the front we'll see. We'll see me anyway. Sorry, sorry. Just had to put another six inches on the pulpit this evening.

OK, so we've got five questions. I've got four of them. I think you've added them right down the fifth one, but you've got it. So you know it. That's fine. So I'll read out a question, and then we'll both do a wee bit of an answer.

And we'll see how time goes. And if time goes quietly, then that's good. You'll get home sooner. Or might even give you an opportunity to ask a question, but probably not.

OK, right. We'll start with the first question, which is do we need to justify not worshipping God with every spare moment to ask in another way, how should we weigh recreation versus worship in daily life?

[1:07] Corey? So this may have been prompted by our look at the Sabbath commandment, I'm not sure. So I think what's being asked here is if God is God, and he is the Triune God, supreme worthy of all worship, and we are made to glorify him, that's our purpose, to know God and to glorify him and enjoy him forever, how can we justify, why don't we worship more often?

Like this, why don't we spend more time in worship? And why should our days not be full of worship in that particular way, some type of other corporate or personal, private?

OK, so God in the beginning made human beings out of the human Eve and us in his image, and he told us to take dominion over the land, he told us to be fruitful and multiply, he told us to be gardeners like he was and cultivating the land, organizing, designing.

So we looked at this recently if you've been around St. C's for any time in our creation series, but God gave us a particular command at the very beginning of time to be culture makers.

And that command is a command to work, that is a command to enjoy not only God himself, but mainly, but also all the things he's made, relatively. And so we can't exist, we can't survive without doing so much other stuff.

[2:34] Corporate worship is to strengthen us, to send us back out into the cultural commandments that we've been given, the cultural mandate. So we can think about a capital W worship, which is when God gathers his people together on Sunday to mimic, to image the heavenly Jerusalem.

Right here, right now, the heavenly temple is being imaged when we gather together. We come to the holy mountain, Hebrew says, it's like the Sinai event all over again, but through the lens of Christ coming.

But then when we go out, there's a lower case W worship that happens all the time. So we don't have to justify not worshipping God in the sense of doing leisurely things, working, all sorts of stuff.

The New Testament's really clear that it is possible to be in worship at all times, and that's different than being actively singing songs or reading scripture or something like that.

So Paul captures this by saying, pray without ceasing. So he's saying that the life of prayer can become so immersive, you can become so immersed in it, that you are simply conscious that God is with you at all times.

[3:43] And so James four says, never forget the Lord. So there's a problem, we lack worship in our daily lives when we forget about God. But when we remember God at all times, and when we know we're standing, quorum deo as the reformers told us, before the face of God at all times, we are able to worship.

So you can worship and you can pray when you brush your teeth, and when you're washing dishes, and when you're going to the gym, living in righteousness and pursuing God's justice for the world, and having a consciousness that God is with you, that's worship.

So there's a capital W worship when we gather, there's a lower case w when we depart, and so we do worship, we can worship all the time, right? So.

Yeah. Yeah, I think there's always a, I think we have a danger sometimes of being dualistic. So we see, we compartmentalize our lives, and this is the God bit, and this is my bit, this is what I do.

Whereas in Christ, we're, he's Lord of everything, he's our sovereign King. And so, you know, we're tough for our bodies, living sacrifices, holy and acceptable, everything we do, Romans one, or whoever you do, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, you know, it doesn't say whatever you do, whether you sing, Psalms, and listen to sermons, it says whatever you do, whether you eat and drink, very ordinary things, do it to the glory of God, one Corinthians 10.

[5:03] And so I think everything we do is to be done with that consciousness that we've got gifts from God, we've got our lives from God, we're to thank Him for our leisure, for our pleasure and our recreation.

And so I think that that's, yeah, absolutely right. And always, I think, look at our heart and our motives. Are we looking for recreation to give us a break from God?

Ah, great, okay. I don't need to think about God now, I don't need to worry about that. So that it's a heart issue, rather than saying, well, this is great. I love that God's given me such an amazing ability to play football, and I can praise Him for that gift, and not be jealous of anyone else who's better or worse than me.

And that kind of thing. So it's not, you know, it's not a pie, it's not a false piety, it's not a false holiness, but we're just genuinely thankful for His amazing creativity that allows us to have even recreation as something that we can give Him the glory for.

Can I, I just thought of that, I mean, you can also think about recreation in the sense that in the Old Testament, we have these huge seasons of festival. This concept of the feast and the festival of true leisure is given to us as part of the heartbeat of the Old Testament rhythm of life.

[6:22] Another would be, well, I've just lost it, I had to. Maybe you have it, I don't know, I don't have it anymore. Jubilee, no.

Jubilee, yeah, there's another one. Yeah, maybe it'll come in a minute, we'll see. Okay, in the meantime, I'll go into the second question. Was a very short question, well, a short answer.

It will be, can women lead in a city group meeting? Why or why not? This would come in a battery from our church position, which is that the spiritual leadership is males and men, and therefore, should women lead in a city group?

And as an eldership, as the spiritual leaders of the church, we've discussed this and we said, yes, absolutely they can, because we recognize that in a city group role, as a facilitating role in leadership, everyone can speak, everyone can share their own thoughts.

It's not preaching, it's not speaking authoritatively, the spiritual leaders in the church, that role is given for men in their position, but yeah, we've said that's absolutely fine, and some of our city groups are doing that, so yeah.

[7:30] Do you want to add to that? I don't think so. Okay, nice and easy. Yeah. The next one, it's a good question, interesting question.

Is it possible to delve in too deep, sorry, is it possible to delve so deeply into a Bible passage that we end up taking meanings out of it that is not meant?

Let me start, okay. The answer is yes, but with lots of qualifications and other things to say, so, I think there are two potential dangers here.

One is to do what this question's asking, to delve so deeply into a Bible passage that we do take meanings out of it that aren't there, but it's probably not an issue of delving deeply if we're doing that, probably something else is happening.

On the other side, we don't see that you actually can dive deeply into a passage and never really reach the bottom of it, I think that's probably more of the risk.

[8:37] So, we've got time, yeah, okay. One of the ways, reading the Bible, reading the Bible well and reading the Bible deeply actually protects us from reading into it the wrong things.

And so, delving deeply is not as much the issue as reading in the wrong things. And so, to read well, there's a few things to think about. One is that the first order of Bible reading, when you're doing Bible study, apart from private worship, apart from daily worship, just reading scripture in order to draw near to God, when you're doing Bible study, the first order of business is you wanna ask the question, what does the author mean in the original context according to the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter, the story, or the book I'm reading as a whole?

So, we talk about authorial intention, so that's the first step, what does the author mean here? And we call that the grammatical, historical reading of a passage. We say, what does the original author mean in the original place and time?

So, you take something like the whole book of Deuteronomy. The whole book of Deuteronomy is written as Israel is about to enter the Promised Land for the second time. The first time they were about to enter, they all said, we're not going in because of the giants.

Now, here they are again, and what is Moses doing? He's recounting all the things God has done in Deuteronomy and saying, don't reject the call this time to go into the Promised Land.

[10:13] You messed up last time, you were put in the wilderness for 40 years, this time, don't do it. And so, you've got to read the whole book of Deuteronomy in the light of the fact that the Israelites are standing there on the brink of the river, about to enter, and then ask in every passage, therefore, what does this passage mean in the light of that particular context?

So, that's the first order of business. But then, because we, as Christians, we say that Bible reading then requires more than that. So, if you just read a passage in the original context, according to what the words say, according to where Israel is or something like that, what's going on in the history, then you haven't finished reading it deeply quite yet.

And that's because the Bible doesn't just have one author. The Bible has the author of the book and then the divine author, God. And that means that God has something to say here that goes way beyond the grammatical historical context.

And to see that, you've got to read then every single passage, and this is where the really hard work begins, every single passage in the light of the whole Bible. So, what does Deuteronomy mean in the light of the book of Revelation?

Right, that's a real question. And we believe that we can ask that question because God has written every single book and gifted that to us. And then most importantly, we read every single passage then through the light in the light of Jesus Christ himself.

[11:39] And the reason for that is because in after Jesus' resurrection in Luke 24, Jesus is on the road to Emmaus and he turns to the disciples, the apostles that are there with them, and it says that he opened up the scriptures to them and explained to them how he was present, how he mattered, how he fulfilled every section of the Old Testament.

And so then we realize, oh, the whole Old Testament's about Jesus ultimately. And now we need to go back and read the whole Old Testament and not only in the grammatical historical, but in the light of Christ and in the light of the whole biblical canon because God authored the whole thing.

Right now, I'll say one more and I'll be, I'm sorry, I'll be done. Yeah, okay. The last thing we do and the last thing to think about is then and only then till we begin, if we're doing a deep Bible study, then and only then when we get there, what does this passage mean in the grammatical historical, in the light of Christ, in the light of the whole Bible, then and only then do we ask, okay, now what is God saying to me?

What is God saying to me? So if we've worked through that pattern and then finally gotten to what is God saying to me, in light of all that, we're probably not going to read our own context into it to the point of adding meaning that's not there, right?

We're in the posture at that point to really receive what God is saying and why it matters still for us today. Yeah. Yeah, I think that's right. It's not so much about the delving deeply because you have to take meaning out of it, it's not meant is probably not delving too deeply.

[13:20] It's being too shallow in a sense. Yeah. I think the original context is really important. You can't deny the historicity. Interesting, I was at a conference earlier in the week and the speaker was speaking about the book of Ruth and he was saying that, you know, book of Ruth's history, it's not fable, it's not just a pretty story, it's a historical account.

And he says, but the first, other than Ruth's faith and the way that she followed the God of her mother-in-law, there's also a reality about Boaz and his ability to be a good employer.

The way he treated is the people who worked under him and the way he greeted them and the way that he allowed the poor to glean from the land. And so there's historically practical things that we can take out of that about how to manage people and how to lead.

But then of course, if you miss in the story of Ruth and Boaz, that Boaz is the Kingsman Redeemer, one who redeems her and buys her back, if you miss that link to Jesus Christ, who's our great Kingsman Redeemer, then you're losing sight of what's, it's not that you're delving too deep, but it's absolutely, it's, ah, it's right there, right?

You know, it's a massive, big foghorn that Jesus Christ is the great Kingsman Redeemer. So that would be a good third point, wouldn't it? Ah, just that alone, just the foghorn.

[14:55] Foghorns are good. So it's important, you know, to spiritualize the Bible out of its context, to deny, don't deny its historicity. Don't make it contradict other parts of scripture, just to suit your own argument.

And recognize it as always, as Corey said, in its context and as part of the Bible. But it's a living, remember, the most important, it's a living word, it's a living word of God and it's uniquely bound together by that.

And so we can recognize it in that way. Okay, good. Okay, fourth question is, and this is, I guess, triggered by your sermon last week on the Sixth Commandment.

It's clear that murder is wrong and sinful, but is killing of an enemy combatant during wartime sinful, and what about self-defense or capital punishment? Well, you can start out, and since you did the sermon.

Okay. So one thing to say is that if you were here for the Sixth Commandment sermon, or you listened to it later, I said something wrong at the very beginning that I was pointed out to me, and that's that.

[16:07] Wasn't me, I didn't point it out. Yeah, you didn't point it out. No, it's that at the very beginning, the word murder that's used, the word in Hebrew that's used for murder in the Sixth Commandment is talking about several contexts.

We had said it's talking about premeditated murder, murder in the midst of passion, anger, something like that, and also the Hebrew word is sometimes used for extreme negligence that causes death in some way.

And then I said, but it's never used for self-harm, and I meant to say self-defense. That was what was in my notes, self-defense, but I said self-harm.

And so we would have said in that sermon that the word, the command thou shalt not murder, is the command thou shalt not murder does not include self-defense.

So you can actually answer the self-defense and the just war, the concept of is it wrong to kill an enemy combatant really with the same answer?

[17:12] And that's that the church, Christians for 2,000 years now, have a immense amount of work and literature and time put into the question, what makes killing just?

And what conditions is killing just? And most commonly, those are through the language of just war and self-defense. And to dive into that subject is very deep, right?

And there are various opinions in the Christian tradition about what makes a word just. The simple answer here is that there is, Christians have always believed that it is just to kill an enemy combatant in certain conditions during war time.

What are those conditions? Maybe I'll just list a few of them that have been pretty common that most people have agreed on in amongst the Christians throughout the last couple thousand years. One of those would be that the provocation that caused somebody to enter into a war really did merit a necessity for war by the nature of the thing that was done.

That's one of the first things that they say. The second thing they say is, and this is very common amongst all sorts of sub-traditions of Christianity, that other routes have been explored for peace and resolution prior to war.

[18:43] That's one of the key things you see across most traditions for just war in the Christian tradition. A third condition for just war is that every measure is taken to protect civilians and innocent people.

And so that there's no movement towards the taking of innocent lives. So those are three or four of the main conditions that we've seen throughout Christian history for just war that is distinct from the Sixth Commandment and permissible and a terrible consequence of the fall to be sure.

And then self-defense really follows on the same logic. Proportionality, we would also be part of it. And not without a colonization.

You're doing self-defense primarily and nationally as well with the aim for the restoration of peace. So you can take that into the current situation and you can answer it yourselves what you think about the current situation in Gaza and West Bank and Israel and Palestine.

I think on both sides, a lot of these particular markers are not being met in reality. So that's just war, a bit of capital punishment.

[20:05] Well, that needs to start with that one. Yeah, thanks. Okay, well, capital punishment, there's quite a strong history of it, I guess, in the agreement with it in the Christian church, maybe going back to Genesis 9, 6 about if a man takes, sheds the blood of another man, then his blood ought to be shed, the taking of life as retributive judgment justice.

So I think interestingly, although that comes before the giving of the law in Sinai, it's very early, it's interesting, isn't it, that God doesn't choose to kill Cain.

So that's the first example you would have thought. If it's a life or a life, that God would have laid that down by taking Cain's life who killed Abel.

So that's an interesting thought for you to mull over. I think there is, I don't think the Bible forbids it, but I think in Christ, we have a desire to see rehabilitation and restoration and the example of Christ Himself on the cross, which we read, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they're doing.

It doesn't deny justice, and it's not a blanket forgiveness for those who are involved, but it's a recognition that there is that hope and even in punishment that there's a hope of restoration.

[22:05] I think it's an issue that I would, in theory, think is potentially not unbiblical, but in practice I wouldn't have confidence in the impartiality and the wisdom of the governing authorities to make the right decision, because we know of so many decisions that have been wrong for whatever reason, and it can't be corrected.

It's too late for correction by that stage, but I recognize that in all of this area of punishment and justice, that great wisdom is needed, but I wouldn't vote for it that way.

Yeah, I think can capital punishment, an instance of capital punishment meet the conditions of what we would call biblical justice? Yes, is it wise?

Is a second question an important question, and I largely agree, I think, with what you're saying. I think on these issues, just war, capital punishment, it's nearly impossible to talk in this venue and in this short time about the depth of the issue and the myriad of questions that come up, and so I think if you want to think more about this and talk more about this, there's lots of great resources and helpful things from the Christian tradition on these things that we can definitely help point people to, so.

You got the last question? Yeah, the last question. I don't think it's going to come up because I didn't give it to Siobhan, but the last question was given to me earlier today, and I think it's a helpful one to end on, and it's the question that comes from, yeah, who knows, it's a mystery.

[24:02] We're about to find out. It's posed from the passage that Derek read for us from the book of Luke, Gospel of Luke just earlier, which is when Jesus Christ says on the cross, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Who is it that he's asking forgiveness for? Who is it that he's crying out for forgiveness for? What is he saying in that moment? So that was a question posed earlier, and we thought it would be a helpful one to end on.

A gospel question, that was a little easier for us to answer, I think. Do you want me to start? Yeah, okay. So when Jesus cries out, forgive them, he's crying out to his father in that moment as he's on the cross.

He has been beaten, he's been spit on, he's been flogged, he has marched up the way towards Golgotha, he carried his cross part of the way, Simon of Cyrene carries it the rest of the way.

There are some, as we read earlier, people mourning and crying, but most are mocking. Most hate him, most are jeering at him. If you were here with us this morning, they shouted Hosanna on Sunday, and they mocked and spit at him on Friday.

[25 : 26] And if you look at the passage, Matthew 26, Luke 23, you'll see that there, I think Matthew in particular, is really deliberate to show all the different groups of people that are all represented.

The rulers, the Sanhedrin is there, regular folk, the crowd, the mob is there, the Roman soldiers are there, the Roman procouncil members are there.

Every single type of person represented in the society across the classes, they're all there to some degree, including the criminals. And so we saw earlier, you read that, one of the criminals mocked him and jeered at him as well.

So I think, again, grammatical historical, in the immediate moment, who is Jesus lifting up his heart towards the Father, his voice towards the Father and praying for? I think he's praying for every single group around him that has participated in the mocking, that has jeered at him, that has spit at him, that has said, crucify him, every single one, the Romans, the Gentiles, the Jews, the leaders, the Sanhedrin, the ones that were gambling over his clothing, the criminal next to him being crucified himself.

I think that Jesus Christ in that moment is showing that his cross is about his priesthood and that as the priest who stands on behalf of us, representing us before the Father, he lifts up his heart in prayer to his Father and says, forgive them, forgive all these people.

[26 : 56] Now, when you come to Acts chapter two, Peter preaches the first sermon and Peter says in the first sermon, all of you crucified him.

And we know at that first sermon that there were people there that had gathered on Pentecost from all over that were not present at the crucifixion physically.

And he looks out and says, every single one of you crucified him, all of you did. And so in the grammatical historical context, we say, Jesus, you are the first one, in the broader context, we say, Jesus is saying, forgive these people who have spit at me.

And in the broader context of what God meant, of what Jesus meant as the divine Son, he's talking about everybody that shouted crucify. And Peter says, that's everybody.

And you see, Jesus is acting as a priest and he's praying to his Father on our behalf in this moment. And it doesn't mean that it's the proclamation or declaration that every single human being is forgiven.

[28 : 01] It means that he is the priest that has the efficacy by the cross to do such a work that can forgive the sins of the whole world. And so he's praying that all these people, groups around him would know that, particularly the ones that had spit at him and mocked him, and jeered him.

It's a prayer that is truly good news, actually, for all of us. Yeah, and I think we were talking about earlier, it's a prayer that fulfills his own teaching and the sermon on the Mount where he says, you've heard, you know, pray for, love your friends and hate your enemies, basically, and he says, no, pray for your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Love your enemies rather than pray for those who persecute you. And here's a feeling that on the cross, very, very powerfully and very visibly and very practically in this moment of greatest need.

And that's what we're to do. That's what you're to do. That's what I'm gonna do, to love those who don't love us back and we're to pray for those who persecute us.

And we don't know much about persecution, but we're still to pray for people who persecute the Christian faith, maybe, maybe not persecute us personally. Maybe they do, maybe, but we pray for them and love them and do what Christ did.

[29 : 26] So good, do you wanna pray, Corey? Yeah, let's pray. Lord, we give thanks tonight for the fact that Jesus lifted up his voice on the cross and said, forgive them.

And we know that the power of forgiveness was found in the power of the fact that he made and met justice. He satisfied in his death the justice that was demanded of every single one of us.

And yet as our great priest and as our sacrifice, the Lamb who was slain, he could truly say, forgive them and it means something. Forgive them and it be powerful. So we thank you tonight for that, Lord.

And Derek and I ask Lord that you would help us as we look back and think, did we say anything tonight that was unhelpful, Lord? In your great wisdom, would you help all of us to see that and to say, to see truth, Lord?

So that we would all be Bereans and just ask, well, what's the truth? And so we recognize that we are fallible before you and we might not know very well.

[30 : 35] And so we pray, Lord, that you would speak the truth to all of us in our hearts, that we would all be driven from things like question times to go and search the Bible for ourselves and think carefully about it.

And ultimately that we could rest tonight in the pronouncement of Jesus, that forgiveness is truly available because of the sacrifice of Christ. So we pray for that for all of our hearts.

In Jesus' name, amen....