

Prepare to Answer
POW Lesson 23
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Before time began, you were on God's mind. God existed before anything was made. Before He created a sun or moon or stars that placed order in our solar system by which we tell time and seasons, He considered all He would do, just for you. Ephesians 1:4 teaches, "For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight."

God placed the earth exactly where it should be to keep the perfect environment in which people could live and flourish. He gave the earth dry land and seas, plants and animal life, air and food; everything we would need for our physical well-being. Then, God created people.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make mankind in Our image, in Our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So, God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." [Genesis 1:26,27]

First of all, notice the plural pronouns used in Genesis 1:26: "Let Us make mankind in Our image, in Our likeness..." We studied many of the Scriptures that talk about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Bible speaks of God as being these three persons. The Father is separate from the Son and the Holy Spirit is separate from both, in function and personhood. However, in John's gospel, Jesus spoke of how they dwell in unity. "I have given them [believers] the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one -" [John 17:22]

In Deuteronomy 6:4 the Lord God clearly states: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." How far above us is our Lord God! He is three in one! I can't understand this. I can only accept it because the Bible says it! Yet we have studied how the Father sent His one and only Son to redeem the world.

We read that the Lord Jesus Christ would send the Holy Spirit to guide the disciples to recall all that Jesus said and did. John recorded Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit in John 14:26. All three persons of the Godhead were involved in this gift of His presence. "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." [John 14:26]

The Lord Almighty is so great, our minds can only begin to really know Him. I can't understand One who is eternal – existing before time, in time and past time. I can't understand One who is everywhere at the same time!

I am locked in time. I can only think of things that have a beginning and an end. But, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'" [Revelation 1:8] This timeless, eternal attribute of God is incomprehensible to me.

That is why God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth. So that by knowing Him in a form we could understand, our faith prompts us to believe those concepts that are too great for us to understand. He told Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." [John 20:29]

The Lord Jesus came to earth as part of God's foundational plan. God had created the perfect place for mankind to live and learn and to know their God. But even in such a true utopia, woman and man weren't satisfied.

God made a beautiful garden called Eden, with every kind of fruit and vegetable that grew lushly beside a river that flowed through the garden. There God placed Adam and Eve to tend the garden and interact with every kind of animal. And God would walk with them through the garden in the cool of the day. (Gen 3:8)

How marvelous, that God would walk and talk with the first couple daily. We begin to see the purpose for which God created people. He desired to have beings who would choose to love Him and walk with Him. However, we know that this beautifully idealistic situation did not last.

Adam and Eve chose to question God's purpose for their lives. They followed the prompting of Satan and disobeyed the one command God had given them. They chose to eat from the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, rather than to believe God's warning not to eat of it. So, Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world, and faced the consequence of death and spiritual separation from God. And worse, all of Adam and Eve's descendants have followed in their footsteps, to sin against God.

Did sin mess up God's plan for mankind? Did our rebellion destroy any chance we may have had to experience that precious love relationship God intended? No. Part of God's nature is that He is all knowing.

Before the foundation of the earth, as we read in Ephesians, God knew our weakness and that we would use the free-will He gave us to disobey and reject His ways. He knew the lives of each and every person from beginning to end. He saw each sin we would do, and each choice of our hearts. And He knew each and every person would one day need to have a chance to make a decision to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior: to love Him, or not.

God inspired faithful men and women to record the history of how God would reveal Himself to sinful men. We know that history as the Bible. In fact, we have just spent the last twenty-two weeks in this Bible Study, reading and studying about the life of Jesus, the Son of God, as He lived and died and rose again, presented in the Gospel of John.

Remember John 20:31 explained that of all the unrecorded, miraculous signs Jesus performed, "... these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." [John 20:31]

This was not a “plan B” on God’s part. He knew that by giving free-will to humanity in the beginning, we would use it to sin. He knew before he even created the universe, that He would need to redeem us. But even as He suffered on the cross for the sins of the world, the Lord God loved us so much that He would rather die than live eternally without us. So, even the pain and degradation He experienced in our place, was worth it, to save our souls.

What amazing love! How overwhelming is His grace and mercy toward us! This is “Good News” indeed! Romans 6:23 explains this mercy: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Romans 6:23]

In our sin, we deserved death. But God has given us eternal life in Christ as a gift of grace to those who will receive it. We can never repay God for such an amazing gift! But we can share this gift with those we love. We know what a difference the Lord has made in our own lives, and we know others would have so much more hope and peace if they could know Him too.

As Paul put it in Romans 10, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” [Romans 10:13-15]

Take a moment to glance at your beautiful feet. Although you may not consider yourself to be a preacher, you have been given the good news when you accepted Jesus as your Savior. Can you be a faithful witness to testify about what you have experienced in Him?

Throughout this series of lessons, we have considered the questions others may ask us when we attempt to share our faith. These are the various questions we have discussed in our lessons this year.

- “How do you know there is a God?”
- “What does ‘born again’ really mean?”
- “Why are there so many different kinds of churches if there is only one God and one Bible?”
- “Isn’t sickness a sign that there is sin in your life?”
- “I can’t believe unless I see a miracle for myself.”
- “How can I know God’s will for my life?”
- “I know Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery, but I’ve never committed any big sin like that.”
- “Satan isn’t real.”
- “Does God hear the prayers of unbelievers?”
- “If Jesus came to give such an abundant life, why aren’t you better off financially?”
- “Will my physical body be resurrected, or just my soul?”
- “Jesus had the support of the people when He rode into Jerusalem. Why didn’t He set up His kingdom then?”
- “If Jesus knew Judas would betray Him, why did He pick Judas in the first place?”

- “How does the indwelling of the Holy Spirit change you?”
- “I’m afraid of what my friends will say.”
- “Jesus talked about having trouble in this world as a Christian. I’m afraid I can’t stand up under persecution.”
- “I feel so far away from God. What should I do?”
- In witnessing you have asked your listener to make a choice for Jesus now. He responds, “I’ll think about it and maybe do it later.”
- How do you explain the importance of the cross and Jesus’ blood atonement?
- “I thought only God could forgive sin. What does verse 20:23 mean?”
- “I know I have a lot of faults, but a lot more people are worse than I am!”

You have thought about these questions. We have discussed them in our groups. Please know how proud we are that you have contemplated and answered these challenging questions. Perhaps as we have continued discussing subsequent lessons, you would now answer some of these questions differently, or with more confidence. As we learn more from the Scriptures, we understand more about our Great God and the new life He has given us.

The growth we feel as we learn new things from the Bible, gives us a firmer faith in Christ. Now is the time to apply that faith to our lives and let it show in our conversations.

As Jesus prepared to leave His disciples and ascend to heaven, He gave them instructions. He said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” [Acts 1:8]

There is that word “witnesses” again. John and the other disciples walked with Jesus for three years. They listened as He taught them. They asked questions and heard His answers. They watched how He reacted in situations. They saw how He always was truthful, honest, loving and untiringly working to spread the good news to every village or city He entered.

Then He asked His disciples to follow His example. They were to be a witness first to the people right around them, where they were living in Jerusalem. God’s plan for His witnesses is recorded in the Book of Acts. They didn’t need to divide up the known world and systematically go to every nation right away. Rather, God had brought every nation to Jerusalem at that time for the feast of Pentecost!

When Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to fill each believer, they began to praise God in various languages that they had never learned. The cacophony of all of these different languages drew a crowd toward the room where the disciples were staying. They each heard these praises in their own language. God used their curiosity to draw over 3,000 people to hear the good news from Peter, right there in Jerusalem. Peter testified about all He had learned and “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” [Acts 2:41]

Does this situation of people from many nations gathering together sound a bit familiar? People from all nations have recently come to our very own cities and towns too! It doesn’t matter what we believe politically about the influx of people that have come to our state. Please

take a moment to consider what if the Lord has allowed this moment in our history so that people from every nation may hear the gospel from us, without our even having to travel to foreign mission fields.

Jesus asked us to be His witnesses. Perhaps through our patience and compassion when we work with strangers in the grocery store, waiting in lines, helping them figure out what a sign or document means. Perhaps we can share about the love and Salvation Jesus offers, by witnessing about how His Word has changed our lives.

We do not know how long a stranger will remain in our sphere of influence. But we can, "...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." [Matthew 5:16]

Notice that this is life-style evangelism. It is not a prepared sermon, preached to any crowd you find. This is living each day in obedience to Christ's commands. Knowing my weakness for falling back into disobedience, this sounds very difficult. But Jesus simplified it for us. He lives inside us as the Holy Spirit to help us.

One day in Jerusalem, Jesus gave an answer to a religious ruler for the question, "which is the greatest commandment in the Law." (v.36) "Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'" [Matthew 22:36-40] It makes it easier to remember to obey Christ, if we concentrate on following these two commands.

The book of Galatians talks about living in the Spirit. "Serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" [Galatians 5:13,14]

It is certain that we think a lot about ourselves. We consider what we like and don't like. We think about how we feel. We take care of ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually. God made us in His image, so we rightly keep check on all of the different aspects of our being.

Jesus is actually saying that this concern for us is a blueprint for how we should consider family, friends and strangers too. When your teenager asks, "How can I know God's will for my life" ... when your neighbor says, "Does God hear the prayers of unbelievers?" ... when your aging friend asks, "Will my physical body be resurrected, or just my soul?" ... when your friend from work admits, "I feel so far away from God. What should I do?" Are you ready to give them your answer?

Remember our verse: 1 Peter 3:15. "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

Living a life that points to Christ includes being ready to talk to people around you. As we have thought through these same questions, and learned God's answers from Scripture for ourselves, we will be ready to offer these same answers to others.

There is an element of preparation involved. It might be good to keep a list of these and other questions with their answers, where you can find them easily. But you don't need to memorize them unless you just want to do so.

How easily you could answer, "You know I go to a Bible Study, and we talked about that question with my group just a few weeks ago! Let me show you what I learned."

Or there is no problem for you to say, "I don't really know the answer to that. Let's look it up together." Believe it or not, you can type the question into Google and begin your discussion with that answer. Or you can look up the topic in a concordance which is a book that will tell you verses where key words are contained in the Bible.

Before we conclude this lecture, I would like to share one story of how I was able to share the gospel with a friend. When I was in my first years of college, I was able to attend a course called, "Personal Evangelism," that was taught by an organization called Campus Crusade for Christ. Our church opened their doors so that they could offer such a course, back in the late sixties.

A booklet called, "The Four Spiritual Laws" had been published by Campus Crusade. It simply stated these four laws:

1. "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."
2. "Man is sinful and separated from God."
3. "Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin."
4. "We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord."

This simple booklet spelled it all out. I studied it and memorized the verses that stated each point. This course emphasized that the gospel is best shared in the course of friendship, letting your daily life bring up the opportunities.

One day, a neighborhood friend named Bill found me at home and asked, how do I become a Christian? Now, I had never had anyone ask me this so directly! Bill was a friend of my brothers, so we had known each other for years. But I have to tell you, my brothers loved to tease me. So, I thought to myself, "I bet Bill is just doing this to tease me. But I have learned how to share this, so I will go ahead, even if he is not serious."

So, I got out my booklet and shared those Four Spiritual Laws with Bill. When we got to the end of the booklet, it had one question: "Is there any reason why you can't accept Jesus into your heart right now?"

I fully expected to hear something like, “No, I was just teasing.” But to my surprise, Bill simply said, “No.” So, I led him in a prayer to ask Jesus into his heart. Then I told Bill, “Now you are my brother in Christ!”

I tell you this story because you need to know that God is stronger than our unbelief. I presented the gospel actually not believing Bill was serious! But the Holy Spirit took what I shared and changed his heart.

We soon faced the time of the Vietnam War. Three of my brothers and Bill went into the service. I hadn’t seen him for years until one day he stopped by to visit my family, with his new wife! He introduced me to his wife and said, “Dellena is the one who led me to Christ, like I told you.” Bill had truly accepted the Lord as his Savior and was establishing his family according to his belief.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have saved us. He has given us His Holy Word so we might believe and then learn to share that belief with others. He actually gives us the answers to questions others may ask, even before they ask us!

So be the witness God has asked you to be, always prepared to answer. “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” 1 Peter 3:15

Please stand as I pray, and then we will sing our song together.