

INTRODUCTION

There are three terminal punctuation marks. A period marks the end of a stated declarative statement. An exclamation point marks the end of a statement of strong emotion. A question mark is used at the end of an interrogative statement. In written Spanish, they place the inverted exclamation point and question mark at the beginning of a sentence, which I think is a good thing. In English you may be reading along and only at the end you know to raise the tone of your voice for a question?

If you have an iPhone you can ask Siri questions. She's pretty smart at math. You can ask her to find the square root of any number and she can give you the answer in seconds. But some of her answers can be funny. Try asking Siri, "Why did the chicken cross the road?" She will give you different answers. You can even ask her, "Where is Elvis?" But my favorite is when you ask Siri, "What is zero divided by zero." Her answer is, "Imagine that you have zero cookies and you divide them between zero friends. See it makes no sense. And Cookie Monster is sad that there are no cookies, and you are sad because you have no friends."

The Bible contains many questions. In fact the first recorded word of Satan in Genesis 3 was a question to Eve about God's character. He asked, "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the Garden?" That wasn't what God said at all, but the devil is still trying to get people to question God's character.

In the same chapter, God's first question in the Bible was when He asked Adam, "Where are you?" Of course, He knew where Adam was; He just wanted Adam to admit it. God said to man, "Where are you?" And the first question of the New Testament is man asking where God is. In Matthew 2, the Magi asked Herod, "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?"

There are many other important questions in the Bible. Job asked, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" Jesus asked, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" Paul asked, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" The writer of Hebrews asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation."

But of all the questions in the Bible, I believe the most important question is the one we are going to hear Pontius Pilate ask. I believe this is Life's Most Important Question. In Matthew's account, Pilate asks, "What then shall I do with Jesus?" (Matthew 27:22) I have to answer that question. You have to answer that question. In fact, that is a question that every person who has ever lived must answer.

Mark 15:1-20. Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "You have said so," Jesus replied. The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd

came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. "Crucify him!" they shouted. "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

I'm going to have you each answer Pilate's question: "What will I do with Jesus?" It's a personal question; it's not "What will WE do with Jesus?" It's a pressing question, because it's one you must answer before you die and stand before God.

Life is full of choices. There have never been more choices. When I grew up, we had NBC, CBS, and ABC, and we had to move the antennae to pick up those different stations. Today, with cable, satellite, and streaming services you have thousands of viewing choices. We used to have vanilla, strawberry, and chocolate ice cream, and today there are thousands of different flavors including horseradish ice cream, lobster ice cream, and bacon and beets ice cream. But those are relatively insignificant choices. Life is full of important choices. Will you get married? Who will you marry? Where will you go to college? What career will you choose? Those are big decisions. But the biggest choice you'll ever make is, "What will I do with Jesus?"

The good news is that God gives you a choice about what you will do with Jesus. God is too much of a gentleman to force anyone to accept His love. If it didn't have a bad connotation in today's debate about abortion, I would say God is pro-choice. He gave Adam and Eve a choice in the Garden of Eden and they made the wrong choice. In Deuteronomy 30 when Moses was poised with the second generation of Israelites ready to enter the Promised Land, he said, "God has placed before you life and death, blessings and curses, now CHOOSE LIFE!"

As Joshua faced the nation after they had taken much of the Promised Land he said, "Choose you this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" (Joshua 24:15). When Elijah faced a nation devoted to Baal worship, He declared a God contest on Mt. Carmel. He said, "No more sitting on the fence. If Baal is God, then choose to worship him. If Yahweh is God, choose to worship Him!"

In this message I want to present five different choices you can make about how you answer the question, "What Shall I do with Jesus?"

1. PILATE: You may choose to reject Him

After Pilate interviewed Jesus, the Bible says, "He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified." (Mark 15:15) Pilate was the ultimate Roman authority on this case. He had the power to release Jesus or to have Him crucified. Luke tells us Pilate went back to the Jewish leaders three times and said, "This man has done nothing wrong. He doesn't deserve the death penalty." It seems clear that Pilate wanted to pardon Jesus and set Him free. But He gave into the mob mentality. In John's account the Jewish leaders find Pilate's soft spot. They said, "If you let Him go, you are no friend of Caesar. We heard Him claim to be a king and anyone who claims to be a king is no friend of Caesar." Pilate only had one boss, Caesar, and he didn't want these pesky Jews to threaten his job. So he gave into the political pressure and he chose his career over Christ.

There are people in our culture who seem interested in Jesus. They are fascinated by His claims. But it is not politically correct to say Jesus is the only way to heaven. And some people think if they followed Jesus, it would cost them their momentum on their career track. So like, Pilate, many people reject Jesus and choose their careers over Christ.

2. HEROD: You may choose to admire Him

When Pilate learned Jesus was from Galilee, he wanted to shift some of the responsibility, so he had Jesus sent to Herod Antipas, who was the governor of Galilee. This was the same Herod Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist. The Bible says in Luke 23:8, "When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort." Herod asked Jesus many questions, but Jesus just stood there silently. This frustrated Herod, so he started mocking Jesus and put an elegant robe on Him and sent Him back to Pilate.

Herod represents those people who simply admire Jesus as a great moral teacher, like Socrates or Confucius. Richard Dawkins is a leading spokesman for atheism today. He is an Oxford University professor who wrote a book called *The God Delusion*. In a newspaper interview he said Jesus was a great moral teacher. He went on to say Jesus was such a radical thinker that if he lived today, he would be an atheist.

However, when you consider the radical claims of Jesus, it's impossible to simply admire Him as a moral teacher. Consider these three radical claims: Jesus claimed He existed before Abraham. He claimed to be one with God. He claimed the authority to forgive sins.

So to simply admire Jesus as a great teacher isn't a viable option. To quote another Oxford University professor who was once an agnostic, C.S. Lewis wrote: "You must make your choice: either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let you not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

3. THE MOB: You may choose to replace Him

Pilate was still trying to figure out a way to release Jesus. Since there was a custom to pardon a prisoner at Passover, Pilate suggested they allow him to release Jesus. But the crowd would have none of it. The Bible says, "But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed." (Matthew 27:20)

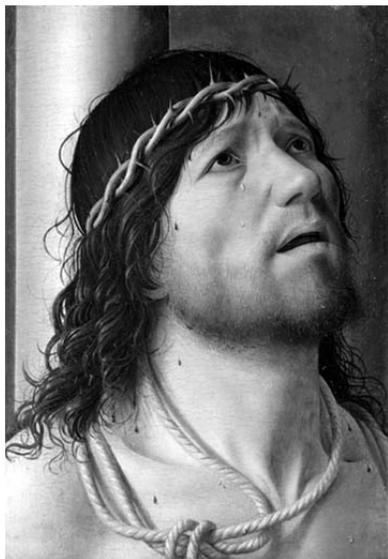
We're told in the text that Barabbas had committed murder. So the crowd was faced with setting free a miracle worker, or a murderer. And they chose Barabbas. By this time, Jesus' approval rating among the Jewish elite was so low, that they preferred a hardened criminal to a teacher who preached love and forgiveness.

Today, millions choose a replacement for Jesus. Our Muslim friends have replaced Jesus with Mohammed. They revere Jesus as a great prophet, but since Mohammed came after Jesus, he is the greater prophet. So given a choice between Jesus and Mohammed, Muslims choose Mohammed.

Millions of Buddhists and adherents to the Hindu religion have a respect for Jesus, but He is not their highest source of truth. They have replaced Him.

Even non-religious people have replaced Christ. Many atheists have replaced Christ with human reason and worship at the altar of science. Many greedy American consumers have replaced Christ with their ongoing passion to have more and more and the newest and the best. If Jesus isn't #1 on a list of 1 in your life, you have replaced Him with someone or something else.

4. THE SOLDIERS: You may choose to mock Him



Christ at the Column
Antonello da Messina
c. 1476-1478

This is one of my favorite depictions of Jesus painted by Antonello da Messina. If you want a closer look, it's one of the paintings in our Life of Christ art gallery in the hallway of the Crosswalk Conference Center. It shows Jesus as a real man looking up to His Father for help while the soldiers were torturing Him. The Bible says, "They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again." (Matthew 27:28-30)

Christ and Christianity are being mocked today like never before. On one hand we are seeing some wonderful, well-done Christian movies like *Woodlawn*, *War Room*, *Captive*, and *Risen*.

But at the same time, we live in culture that is becoming more and more hostile toward Jesus and Christians. There has been a rise in television shows that

make a mockery of our faith. Not long ago Saturday Night Live presented a vulgar spoof of the movie, "God's Not Dead."

One of the latest examples of mockery is a show on TV Land called *Impastor*. I haven't watched it, but I've read about it. It's a show about a crook running from a loan shark. He steals the identity of a gay pastor in a small Canadian community. He's a total fraud, and the show makes a mockery of Christians. I can't believe the same network that shows *Andy Griffith* and *Bonanza* would create a program like this. But it is symptomatic of those who publicly mock Christ and our faith.

The Million Moms organization has criticized the show, writing: "TV Land is not ridiculing any other religion currently and wouldn't dream of mocking Mohammed or Muslims."

There are many people who will join the Roman soldiers and continue to make a mockery of Jesus and His followers. That's their choice.

5. GOD: You may choose to crown Him as Lord

So the most important question you'll ever answer in your life is this: What will I do with Jesus? You have to answer that question. If you say, "I just won't answer it, I won't do anything with Jesus." That is doing something with Jesus. Basically all of the responses fall into two categories: Rejecting Christ or Receiving Christ; Crucifying Jesus or Crowning Jesus as Lord. Turning your back on Him, or Trusting Him. God gives us the only correct answer. The only choice that will lead to eternal life is to crown Him as Lord. Have you chosen to do that? Well, if you have, God actually chose you before you chose Him. The Bible says in Ephesians 1 that "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight." (Ephesians 1:4)

God made a choice about what to do with His Son. And it's the choice we should make. All around the world, there are people who are bowing down. Some are bowing beside their beds looking to heaven. Some are bowing down facing Mecca. Some are bowing down and praying to a statue of Buddha. But God makes it clear that one day every knee will bow to Jesus. The Bible says, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11). This isn't a popularity contest, or an election. But I wonder how many of you would raise your hands with me right now and indicate. I have answered the question, "What will I do with Jesus?" I have chosen to crown Him as Lord of my life.

CONCLUSION

Let's come back to our punctuation marks. There are some important questions that need answers, and God provides the answer. And when God speaks truth, that settles the issue. That's why sometimes we'll make a statement and then say the word, "period." Like, "And that's the end of that, period." That means that there's nothing else that can be added to what has been said. When I hold up the period, I'd like for you to say the word "period" aloud.

In Acts 16 the Philippian jailer asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" That's a good question. Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. PERIOD." Everybody wants to know, "How can I go to heaven?" Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, the life, no one comes to the Father except through me. PERIOD." The Bible says, "There is no other name except Jesus under heaven given among men whereby you must be saved." PERIOD "For God so love the world that he gave His one and only son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life." PERIOD. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." PERIOD. There's nothing to add. And today, Satan is still trying to put question marks where God puts a period. So don't you ever put a question mark where God puts a period.

I believe there are many statements in the Bible that deserve the strong emotion of an exclamation point. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, I don't think he said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." I believe he said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

John wrote, "Behold what manner of love the father has shown us that we should be called children of God!" On that first Easter morning after Jesus appeared to Mary in the Garden she ran back to the disciples. Do you think she said, "I have seen the Lord."? No, I believe she said, "I have seen the Lord!!!!!!!!!"

As Christians, we should be living in the exclamation points of the Bible. I want you to correct these statements I make. "Jesus is alive." "Jesus is alive!" "Jesus is Lord." "Jesus is Lord!" "My sins have been forgiven." "My sins have been forgiven!" "Hallelujah?" "Hallelujah!" "Amen?" "Amen!" "Thank you Jesus?" "Thank you Jesus!"

One day, the question, "What will I do with Jesus?" will have an eternal impact on your life. In 1905, a Canadian pastor named A.B. Simpson, who founded the Christian Missionary Alliance church, wrote a song about Jesus standing before Pilate. The words are powerful: Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall, Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all; Hearken! What meaneth the sudden call? What will you do with Jesus? What will you do with Jesus? Neutral you cannot be; Someday your heart will be asking, "What will He do with me?"

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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