

### Thought for the Week - 26<sup>th</sup> April 2020

I hope you are all surviving the social distancing and are looking forward to the time when we can get back to some normality and gathering together again for worship.

Some of you may have been watching the new ITV drama "Quiz" which was aired during Easter week. It recounts how, in September 2001, former army Major Charles Ingram, his wife Diana Ingram and an accomplice, Tecwen Whittock, were accused of cheating their way to winning a million pounds on the ITV game show, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire."

The couple stood trial for conspiring by coughing during the recording to signify the correct answers to the multiple-choice questions posed by host Chris Tarrant.

Although they have always protested their innocence, the Ingrams were found guilty of the charge of "procuring the execution of a valuable security by deception" and sentenced to 18 months in prison, suspended for two years.

Just in case you haven't seen "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," it's a quiz show based on answering 15 multiple choice questions with ascending difficulty to win various sums of money from £100 up to £1,000,000. After the contestant had chosen their answer from the four possibilities, the host asked them the question, "Final answer?" Along the way the contestant has three lifelines to help them choose the correct answer - "ask the audience," "fifty-fifty" and "phone a friend."

While the end result could be a significant win, the questions posed had little life-significance. Today I would like to pose a question which requires a correct final answer and it is one which has life-changing significance. The question is there in a passage from Mark's gospel 8:27-35

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" <sup>28</sup> And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup> And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." <sup>30</sup> And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. <sup>31</sup> And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

<sup>34</sup> And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever

would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Interestingly, in this passage we have three life-lines to help with the answer to Jesus' question.

**Ask the Audience.** In the quiz show each member of the audience is asked to use a keypad to vote on which is the correct answer. The percentages are then given to the contestant. Of course there may be no clear majority or the majority may even be wrong! Jesus asks the disciples, "*who do people say that I am?*" For almost three years crowds of people had been following Jesus - he was the talk of the country and everyone had formed their own opinion on him. Judging by the disciples' response, if you had asked the audience there would have been no clear answer. It's still the same today, and maybe that suits a lot of people. They like a vague Jesus about whom we can all have our own opinion. But before you take this option, maybe you would be wise to try a second lifeline.

**Phone a Friend.** The contestant can opt to phone a friend who has 30 seconds to hear and then answer the question. Jesus was not particularly interested in what the audience thought about his identity, his concern was with his friends and followers, so he asked, "*but who do you say that I am?*" Peter spoke up and said, "*You are the Christ.*" Christ was the Greek name for the Messiah in Hebrew. Both names mean the anointed one. The people of Israel looked forward to the day which God had promised, when he would send the Anointed One who would save his people. Peter gave the correct answer: Jesus is no ordinary man - not a great prophet or a great teacher but the one God had appointed to save all those who put their faith in him. Have you heard someone tell you about Jesus and the difference being a Christian has made in their life? Or are you still unsure? There's just one life-line left.

**Fifty-fifty.** On the game show there are four possible answers to each question - one correct and three wrong. The fifty-fifty lifeline allows the contestant to have two wrong answers taken away leaving just two possible answer the right one and a wrong one. And folks, this is where we are today. You can't cheat on this answer - it's your decision alone. When Jesus asks us "*who am I?*" there are just two possible answers - the right one and the wrong one. If he is just a work of fiction or a legendary figure and a great teacher, then it means little or nothing to follow him. But if he is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God who died to save us from our sins, then it means everything to follow him. It's a big decision - a much bigger decision than giving the right answer to a question that might make you a millionaire. Gaining riches in this world may seem very attractive, but giving up our own preferences and ambitions and living for Jesus gains us forgiveness for our sins and eternal life in heaven, which is surely far, far better.

So, what's your final answer?

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