

Ask Jeff January 18

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We are back. I want to welcome you to Wednesday nights here at First Baptist, Opelika. The first thing that I want to call your attention to is the green sheet that hopefully you picked up on your way in. This is our circle of concerns otherwise known as our prayer list. One thing I want to remind you of, if you know somebody, anybody connected to our church in any way possible that we need to be praying for on a regular basis, please let us know in the office so that we can get their name, their situation, and their location on this sheet and on this form. So I also want to remind you: do not throw this away when you're done. Put it in your Bible, take it at home, put it on your nightstand, whatever, so that you can make praying for those connected to our church body a part of your week and not just a part of this evening. As always, I want to call your attention to the back page, two sections that I believe we can't pray enough for are those who are serving in our military and those who are on the mission field, and so please make it a point to pray for those who put themselves or allow themselves to be in harm's way so that we can have not only physical protection but so that we could have a spiritual influence all over the world.

That being said, let's pray and we'll get started.

Lord, as we gather tonight, we know that there are a lot of names on this piece of paper, behind every name is a story and every story has a lot of details but, God, there's more than just these names that are on our heart. Many of us tonight are burdened for loved ones, for co-workers, for friends, for our families, maybe even for ourselves, struggles that sometimes are physical with health and doctor's reports, many times spiritually with addictions and problems and trials and strongholds. So Lord, tonight we come on behalf of everybody not only mentioned on this piece of paper but that it's on our heart, and we just ask you to be the Almighty supernatural God that we know that you are in this situation and in these lives. So Lord, where there is healing that is needed, we pray that you would be a healer. Where there is restoration that is needed, we pray for restoration. Lord, where there is repentance that is needed, Lord, we pray that you would convict those individuals with your Holy Spirit so that they would repent and as your word says, come to their senses. God, tonight we yield ourselves to you not just in these situations but in our Bible study. Lord, we don't want to talk about or discuss anything tonight that is beyond what you want us to talk about so, God, would you direct the conversation, would you orchestrate the questions and, God, would you just supernaturally show us and point us to the Scriptures that we need to study tonight. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Alright, I do want to welcome you formally to Wednesday nights here at First Baptist. Our night tonight is going to be divided into two sections: the first section is entitled "Ask Jeff." What that simply means is if you're here as a guest or a visitor, that everything that happens the first half tonight is because you desire for it to occur. It is a question that you have asked, you have submitted it on our website, fbcopelika.com/askjeff. Sometimes some of you have utilized Facebook of which I have a page there on, or you do the old fashioned way, you take a piece of paper, you write it down and you put it one of the receptacles on campus, you give it to somebody who's on our staff, and it makes its way to the database. Speaking of the database, there is no chronological order to your questions. You could have submitted one two days ago and it would be the first one that's pulled tonight. You could have submitted it six months ago and we haven't heard it yet. You say, "Why hasn't my question been answered?" I don't know. There is an algorithm that I don't understand and that's where the questions come from.

So that being said, we have no idea the order that they will be presented. Once that question is presented, I will begin and then you have the opportunity to raise your hand. Now when you raise your hand, you lose all anonymity. We know who you are. When you submit it online, we don't necessarily know who you are but when you submit your question online if you give us your email address, when that question is answered you will receive an email link to the audio and the video answering the question just in case you were not here presently to hear it spoken. The second half tonight will be a continuation of our book of Revelation Bible study which hopefully you got your notes on the way in.

So without further ado, we're going to go to the database. First question. Notice I'm being positive, the first question, which presumes there will be a second. Those of you who have been sometimes there's only one. It says if Jesus spent most of his earthly preaching ministry preaching in parables, what does that mean for us as believers in Christ who are called to preach and teach, should we be doing it the way that Jesus did?

It's really maybe a more interesting question than it may perceive on the surface because one of the questions we have to ask ourselves is why did Jesus preach in parables? Why did he use a mechanism of communication? By the way, Jesus was a master communicator. A master communicator. He always, in fact, one of the things I love that Jesus did that I try to model in my life is he answered questions with a question. When someone would ask him a difficult question, he would ask for clarification just so as to know exactly how he needed to answer it. But parables are telling an eternal truth in a very everyday practical life lesson. So why did he do so and now that we discover or when we discover why he did so, I think then we can answer the question more specifically. Those who teach and preach and do Bible study, should we do the same thing?

Now we actually need to begin all the way back in the book of Isaiah 6. You say, "What does Isaiah 6 have to do with the parables?" Trust me, I'll get there in just a moment.

Isaiah 6, a very famous passage in the Bible regarding the call of Isaiah. You probably know it. You've heard it at every mission's conference you've ever attended or mission commissioning service you've ever been a part of. This is when Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up, he sees the robe, the glory of his robe filling the temple. He discovers or not only discovers but he declares that he is a man of unclean lips. The coals come, they touch his lips. Then the Lord says, "Who will we send? Who will go on our behalf?" And he says, "Here am I, Lord, send me." Before he is given the details, before he knows exactly where and how and what and when, he says, "I'm just a willing vessel."

Well, at the latter part of chapter 6 beginning in verse 9, the Lord communicates to Isaiah what he is going to do. Work with me here. This has absolutely everything to do with the question about parables. It says, "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate." Now that passage of Scripture says the Lord says to Isaiah, "You're going to go and speak to them and they're going to be hard-hearted, they're not going to listen to you, they're not going to pay attention to you. Their hearts have been turned." What we discover not just in the book of Isaiah but all throughout the Old Testament is there is this word called a remnant, those that are faithful, those that truly desire the things of God. But there are those who are pretenders, there are those, we usually use this word in the New Testament, the Pharisees who have this outward appearance but inwardly not so much.

Now I want you to turn to the book of John 2. John 2, Jesus is beginning his ministry. This isn't a parable, I promise. We're going to get to the parables, I promise. John 2, Jesus performs what we know as the first miracle, the turning of the water to wine. Soon thereafter he makes an upheaval of the temple. By the way, I've shared this with you before on Wednesday night. It's one of the favorite statements I've heard when somebody asks you what would Jesus do, just remember that breaking out the whips and overturning tables is a viable option. That's what happens there in John 2. But beginning in verse 23 it says, "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."

Now let me put these two passages together and then we'll go to the parables. Isaiah says a man who God has called to preach and to teach and to prophesy. A lot of people aren't going to pay attention to you, in fact, you're going to be preaching to deaf ears. Jesus then comes on the scene the very beginning of his ministry and says there's a lot of you who say you believe in me but you don't really mean it. You just want the good stuff. You just want to see the supernatural. And so he says he did not give himself over to them. You say, "Why is that so critical?" Alright, let me show you. Jesus communicates 32 parables in the gospels. Now those of you who are already Googling that fact, many people will say 33 parables. The reason that I say 32 is that there's a passage that we talked about last

week in Luke 16 about the rich man and Lazarus that many people claim is a parable because it begins with the phrase, "A certain rich man." I don't believe it's a parable, I believe it's a true story because if it is a parable, it's the only parable that we have where characters in the parable talk to each other, and it's the only parable that we have in Scripture where the characters are actually named. I don't think it was a parable, I think it was a true story that Jesus was speaking about the fates of the rich man and Lazarus.

So you've got 32 parables. Now here's what's significant about that, that only three parables are communicated prior to Jesus and the expression of or the story of what we call the unpardonable sin. You say, "Why is that interesting?" So there's three here, a line, then there becomes 29 obviously over here. What we know as the unpardonable sin, think about the most commonly known parable in Scripture, the parable of the sower. The parable of the sower, by the way, is one of these three. The parable of the sower, that when the word goes forth some it doesn't get received because according to the interpretation by Jesus, literally the devil and his minions come and swoop the message away. There is one that grows up excited and it looks good but then it discovers that it withers in the heat because there are no roots. Then there's one that's doing well but it becomes unfruitful because of the lust of the world and the cares of the world. Then there's one that produces 30, 60 and 100 fold.

I want you to turn to the gospel of Mark 3. By the way, I gave you a little bit of misinformation there. The parable of the sower is the first parable on this side of the line, not the last one on this. So it's the first one. But in Mark 3, we have the teaching of the unpardonable sin. Now we can discuss what that unpardonable sin is tonight, that's not the point of me answering the question the way in which I am, but it's significant in dealing with it because when we hear about the unpardonable sin beginning in verse 22 of Mark 3, it says, "And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils." Is this a word of affirmation? I think not. Jesus has been teaching, Jesus has been preaching, he's been using a few parables but nothing real significant, in fact, just kind of the basic ones, and then all of a sudden the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, they turn on him. They call him Beelzebub. They claim that he's a prince of devils and the only way that he can do what he's doing is because he has a devil. So Jesus then begins and tells the parable of the sower.

Beginning in chapter 4 of Mark, the parable of the sower is given. Beginning in verse 9, Jesus says, "And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable." In other words, what's happening here is, in my opinion, is that Jesus is communicating, he's teaching in parables and all of a sudden what we saw in Isaiah 6 is coming to fruition, there will be those that are hard-hearted, there will be those who have no desire for what you're really doing here, so much so they call him the prince of devils. So then he communicates a parable that is mysterious, the sower and the good ground, the bad ground, the questionable ground. Those that are listening come to him and say, "What is this?" Then Jesus gives the explanation beginning verse 13, "And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know," listen, "all parables?" And so

what happens in this very significant parable is Jesus transitions from very open communication to parabolic communication, meaning eternal truth in everyday language that as you will see every time he tells a parable there is an explanation that follows thereof.

So why did he do so? Well, this is going to be a really bad analogy but allow me to give it. Have you ever watched a football game? The offensive coordinator calling the plays? What does he do with his play card? He covers his mouth, doesn't he? He doesn't want the opponent to know what he's calling. Guess what? Jesus was the first offensive coordinator in the Bible. The other 29 parables he's calling plays and they can't read his lips. They have called him Beelzebub, they had shown their true colors and with the exception of Luke 15 where there are three parables communicated in a row, he doesn't go any further than two parables before explaining them all to those who have ears to hear. By the way, all the seven churches in the book of Revelation 2 and 3 he ends with this statement, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Now the question was Jesus taught in parables, should we teach in parables? Well, yes and no. Jesus used illustrations, we should use illustrations but I want to go a little bit deeper and look at the issue of parables in Scripture. It's interesting how they're divided. It's interesting when Jesus changes his tone and, I believe, why he does so because as soon as they call him Beelzebub, everything kind of turns a little bit and more explanation is needed.

Parable questions, thoughts, concerns, rude remarks? Casserole sitting heavy? It's okay. Nobody? We're good? Alright. Woo, it's gonna be one of those crowds tonight. I'm good with that. Here we go. Some of you are thinking, "Yeah, I didn't want to know that much about parables." Alright. Seriously, alright, here we go.

It's a question about the book of Revelation. I promise we're going to teach it here in just a few moments but we won't spend a whole lot of time. It says can you discuss Revelation 12 and when the signs appear? Does the Bible point to "the male son as the church and the snatching up of God, the rapture of the church is at the beginning, the sign happens at the beginning..." That's like six questions all in one.

Let's go ahead and go to Revelation 12 real quick. Now for those of you who will stay for the entire hour tonight as we continue to walk through the book of Revelation, we will get done some time before my kids are out of college. We'll get there eventually, but in Revelation 12 we have a passage of Scripture, hence the first question that was asked is parabolic, it is a parable. It is the story of not only the rise of, the coming of, and the return of the Messiah but the enemy known as the devil who despises him. Now let me answer this question in a very simple way because I don't want to spend the whole time on Revelation 12 because I promise one day we're going to get to this chapter of Scripture but it begins by saying, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon,

having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days."

Simplistic response to this question. There are three individuals in this chapter that need to be identified. There is the child that is born. There is the woman that gives birth. And there is the dragon who opposes the child. Let's go from easiest to hardest. The dragon is Satan. That's pretty easy. He's called the old serpent. He's called that red dragon. His whole purpose in this chapter is to kill, steal and destroy, just like Jesus said in John 10. So he's the easy one.

The man child and the woman, this is where it gets a little harder because if you go and do a little research, you will discover that there are actually three different opinions on who this woman is and who this woman is determines on who this child is. There are those who would claim that this is Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus. Several problems with that idea or that interpretation, one of which is the fact that Mary gave birth to Jesus chronologically in what we know as the time period roughly about 2-4 BC. Don't panic, Jesus was not born in the year 0, there is no year 0, just so you know. But he was born under King Herod who died in 2 BC. So that being said, Jesus was born 2-4 BC, somewhere in that area, and the Lord gives John this vision as we studied last week in 96 AD. So an entire 100 years has gone by and I know what some of you are thinking, "Well, but it's a picture. It doesn't have to necessarily be chronological." That's fine but what you need to understand is Mary did not give birth to the church and the people of God, she gave birth to the Messiah. On the other hand, there are some who say, "Well, Mary is a picture of the church." The church didn't give birth to Jesus, Jesus gave birth to the church. You say, "Well, who is this woman?" It's Israel. That's who it is. You say, "Well, how do you know it's Israel?" Well, beginning in verse 1 it says that the stars and the moon, the sun, they bow down to her. Do y'all remember the story, the dream of Joseph in the book of Genesis where he had this dream of the stars and the wheat sheaves? This is Israel and it is Israel and the tribe of Judah specifically by which the man child, the Messiah, would come, and when he was birthed, yes, the enemy, the devil was there to oppose him and to try to devour him.

So when we get to Revelation 12, there is all kinds of discussion of who these characters are but I think biblically speaking you have to say that the woman is who we know as Israel. You have to say the man child is who we know as the Messiah. And you have to say that the dragon is whom we know as Satan. When you get those three lined up, then the rest of the story all works and you discover that it's really a picture of this cosmic struggle of God's purpose of redemption and Satan's desire for destruction, and not only how that worked out when it was prophesied before it was realized, but at the consummation at the very end because when you get to the end of chapter 12, you have

all this havoc wreaking forth for the people of God from the hand of the enemy known as Satan.

Any other Revelation 12 questions? Yes, sir.

[unintelligible]

Ah, great question. What is significant about the picture of 1,260 days? Let me go ahead and share with you one of the struggles of the book of Revelation is that there are various time periods that are given to us: 1,260 is a time period, 1,290 days is a time period, and 1,200 days is a time period. We will get through that through our study. I believe that the significance therein is that you are dealing with a time period of 3 ½ years in the Jewish calendar. What we know this time period that's being described in Revelation, particularly this end part of the chapter, Jesus himself called it the Great Tribulation. The book of Daniel and Jeremiah declare that it would be seven years in length. So for 1,260 days is that for half of that time period the events being described took place, and so you see that in varying places. Now what's interesting is 1,260 doesn't necessarily begin on day 1 and end on 1,260, it could begin theoretically on day 100 and end on 1,360 but it's 3 ½ years in the seven year period. Does that make sense?

Anybody else? Questions, comments? Woo, casserole sitting heavy. Y'all just nervous? Scared? That's fine with me. Alright. Some of you are saying, "We gonna get to a bunch of questions tonight. We're gonna do it." Alright, that one is gone.

Next question. Come on. Oh, boy. Okay, let's do this in a few minutes. I may take a little more time because it's that important. The question is what does the Bible say about homosexuality? I hear some moans. Some of you are going, "Nay, we're not getting to Revelation tonight." You know, in the book of Revelation it says that the Antichrist does not have a desire for women. It kind of relates to this question maybe. Specifically in the context of a committed relationship.

Okay, I want to say a couple introductory statements and then I'll deal with this issue. 1. It doesn't matter how you slice it, you dice it, you cut it, or you want to massage it or tweak it, the Bible makes it very clear that what we know as homosexuality is a sin. End of story. But so is adultery and so is fornication and so is pornography and so is bestiality. You say, "Oh, you said that." That's in Leviticus. It's there. In other words, I want you to hear something very clearly: there are lots of sexual sins in the Bible, lots of them, of which homosexuality is one of them, okay? So you cannot get around that point. I know we live in a world today where everybody particularly on this issue, and I don't know if there's another issue today that is getting more funding, more attention, and more verbiage than this issue in our culture. However, the question is what does the Bible say about it? I'm going to address this tonight from a completely different perspective than you may have ever seen it in your life, okay? So those of you that take notes, get ready. Here we go. We're going to have some fun.

Go to Matthew 19:12. Matthew 19 is about marriage. It's about a man and a woman, which biblically speaking is the way that marriage was intended by God. Matthew 19. Are there passages in the book of Leviticus about homosexuality? Absolutely. Is there a passage in Romans 1? Absolutely. Some people say, "Yeah, but Jesus never condemned it." That's absolutely true specifically but Jesus did say in Matthew 5 that no piece of the law would ever be removed from heaven. So that being said, he was advocating that everything that was said previous is still true, you cannot discount it. So rather than sitting down for 12 hours and reciting the entire Torah and saying it's true, he just said, "Trust me, it's still good." Okay?

So in Matthew 19, Jesus is dealing with the concept of marriage and he talks about the man, the woman, etc., that what God has put together let no man put asunder. Verse 12, I believe personally speaking and we could go for another 30 minutes but I'm going to make it short tonight, if we want to expand later we can, I think verse 12 is the key to understanding this issue in light of biblical Christianity today. Not that biblical Christianity has changed, but today I think this is the key. Here we go, verse 12, "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." Now I know what some of you are thinking, "Ah, what does being a eunuch have anything to do with this question at hand?" Allow me to define what a eunuch is. A eunuch is either somebody who cannot procreate or somebody who has no desire to do so.

Now we'll look at the illustration that Jesus gave. Some men have been made eunuchs by other men. You go back in the Old Testament and the stories of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, you get the idea that that was happening in the Babylonian culture with the Israelite young men who were the best of the Israelite culture. You get the idea they were made eunuchs, there was something done to them physically so they could not procreate. Jesus talks about that. It says that some men make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. There are instances and there are cases in your Bible where men choose or desire not to be in a marital relationship or to procreate for God's call on their life. Case in point: Jeremiah. Jeremiah was told by God, "Do not marry." He followed God's instructions. He made himself a eunuch, not necessarily physically but made himself one. Why? For the kingdom of heaven's sake. There is a very good argument and we could discuss this for hours about the Apostle Paul because he speaks about the fact that, "You know, it's better to marry than to burn but I wish you were like me." And there are some people who would say, "Well, Paul was a single man and for the kingdom of heaven's sake he did not enter into a marriage relationship nor did he procreate."

I think we would all agree with those two, correct? No issue there. Some men have been made eunuchs by other men forcibly, some individuals have chosen not to do so for their love of the Lord and his call on their life. But Jesus gives a third category. Jesus says some were born that way from God. Hm, interesting. Is it possible that what Jesus is saying is that there are some individuals who I guess physically or medically we could

say would not be able to bear children, that's possible, but are there those individuals who they are from God, from the womb here without a desire, without a want to not only be in a marriage relationship but to procreate, have children and what the Apostle Paul said would be the burdens of life? If that is the case and if I'm right based on this verse, that means that there are some people born in this world who do not and will never have a natural inclination to marry the opposite sex and/or to have children but it doesn't mean they were made the opposite. Did I make myself clear? Thank you.

When Jesus said some men are born eunuchs from the womb for the glory of God, is it possible that there are some individuals that are born on planet earth directed by God that will never have a natural desire or an inclination toward the opposite sex or to have a family and procreate, thus being a eunuch? If that is the case, that does not say that they are apt to or should be attracted to the same sex just because God made them not attracted to the opposite sex. Nowhere in Scripture does God ordain homosexuality but in this verse he says there are some people that are not attracted to the opposite sex, there are some people who do not desire to have a family. They are set apart for God. So what does the enemy do? The enemy gets in there when they're young and says, "You're not attracted to the opposite, so you must be attracted to this." And what does our world teach us today? Our world says if you're not attracted to the opposite, then you must be attracted to the same. Is that what Jesus taught? He just said there are some who will never have this inclination, they'll never have this natural desire.

Here's why this is so important. When we typically talk about the subject matter of homosexuality, we talk about it being a sin, which it is, in fact, there's words stronger than sin even used in the Bible in regards to it. Oftentimes when we communicate it, it appears that we're saying that that person is less than or lesser than we are, but based on what I just read in Matthew 19:12, that individual who God allowed to come out of the womb with a different inclination than I did, actually has a higher purpose for God on planet earth than I do, has a higher calling from God than I do, but has believed the lie of the world and settled for a second rate opportunity. Is it possible that all that we see happening in this issue are individuals who from the womb God said, "I want you for me," and the world and the enemy said, "No, I've got this one."

Now I'm going to get a little crass for just a moment so put up with me and we might have to erase this from the video. Here we go. Have any of you ever noticed per this thought that the overwhelming majority of those who advocate this lifestyle are intelligent, creative, musical, artistic. Aren't those the gifts that God uses all throughout Scripture to call attention to himself? No offense, guys, but I don't see a lot of rednecks in overalls. Think about it. Not picking on rednecks in overalls, that's half my family. It's all good. Don't worry about it. But I want you to think about that for a moment. This affects every one of our families. This affects every one of our neighborhoods. And this affects our culture today. And yet when we see this issue rise to the forefront, can you imagine the people who are advocating the homosexual agenda, can you imagine using those talents for God? Can you imagine the artistic ability, the creative ability, the musical ability that is so prominent in that lifestyle, can you imagine if it was used for God, how

incredible that would be? And what did Jesus say? He said there are some people who came from the womb without the desire for, for God's glory.

So when we talk about this issue of homosexuality, is it a sin? Absolutely. But I think you and I need to communicate a lot better that those who have bought the lie of the enemy are not less than us, they may, in fact, be more than us but they've been deceived and they've bought a second rate Plan B for their life.

Alright, I know y'all are gonna have questions now. Go for it. Here we go. Come on. Come on. Here we go. Go. Nobody? Somebody? Yes, ma'am.

[unintelligible]

The question is if they do not turn from their lifestyle, now this opens up a whole other Pandora theological box here, okay? Salvation is based on a relationship with Jesus Christ. Period. Okay? And so the question oftentimes is asked can a homosexual be a Christian? I want to ask the question can an adulterer be a Christian? What if they don't turn? You see, you've got to apply the same rules to everybody. The question that I'm more concerned with, and hear me clearly, is how does a person, how do they respond to their struggle or to their sin? And one of the big problems and I've talked with hundreds personally, privately, not just in groups, of those who advocate homosexuality as being ordained and okay by God, one of the problems is they say, "God made me this way. There's nothing wrong with me." In other words, "What you're calling sin isn't sin, I'm okay." I've got a big problem with that, and by the way, it's not just homosexuals that do that, there's others that do that as well, and so if we take what the Bible says is sin and say, "Well, God actually likes this about me," then I don't think we understand who Jesus really is. Does that make sense? Does that communicate? We don't understand.

Now there's a big difference between someone who says, "You have to endorse me. This is the way God made me." Than somebody who says, "I've got a struggle here and I'm asking God for repentance." Notice I didn't say homosexuality, that could be any sin in anybody's life, and so I'm more concerned with how people respond to their sin. The one issue we have with this one is oftentimes we don't want to call it a sin. And what do people say, "Well, that's just how I was born." I get it. You were born different but you weren't born for the same sex, you were born for no relationship of a marital "connotation," and you were set aside for God. By the way, this has got precedence all over the Scripture. Look at the tribe of Levi in the Old Testament. The firstborn was always set aside never to marry, to go into the priesthood. Every single family. That's not without precedence. God does this all over the Bible but all of a sudden nowadays we don't want to talk about this, we don't want to recognize this. Could this still be happening today? Why couldn't it be? Could God still be setting people aside for his glory, his honor, and his purpose? And the world has snuck in and said, "Nope, that one's mine."

So to your point, it's how do we respond to the sin and salvation is through Jesus Christ alone, and I'm convinced that if someone is saved and knows Jesus, they are heartbroken over their sin, not justifying their sin, whatever that sin may be. Does that help a little bit?

Yes, sir.

[unintelligible]

Okay. The question and we're going through Revelation eventually. I just knew this was going to derail us. The question is why do some denominations, I can't speak on behalf of those denominations, there have been large groups of "collections of churches" who come out and make public statements in defense of homosexuality. I think it all begins, you look at all the groups, all the peoples who claim it's okay, you're going to be hard-pressed to find a group that believes in what we call the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. In other words, a lot of these organizations find themselves in what we call the tripod effect. Let me tell you what the tripod is: there is Scripture, there is personal experience, and there's education, and if any of those three say what I want it to say over the other two, I can side with one of those three. And so therefore based on what I've been educated in or based on what I think, I can trump what the Bible says very clearly because it's one of those three.

Now here's why historically I love being a Baptist. By the way, I'd rather be a biblicist than a Baptist, but I like being a Baptist. Baptists historically have said the Bible alone is what we interpret an issue on irrespectively of our education, background or personal preference. If you just look at the Bible you cannot avoid the sinfulness of homosexuality. When you begin to bring in education, personal opinions, philosophies, then you can enter into this debate. So that's where it begins, where it ultimately ends is the fear of retribution, the fear of loss of individuals, the fear of the loss of money. I mean, I would rather have no friends and go broke than throw out the Bible. There's a lot of people who want a big crowd and have money and could care less, they just want to have the crowd. Does that make sense?

So I think that's a multifaceted response but we live in a world today where more and more even the umbrella of Christianity are embracing and those who are not based on the Bible are becoming more of the minority opinion. I think that pendulum is going to continue that way in the years ahead. All I know is one day I'm going to stand before God and you are too, we all are, and I don't know exactly what all that's going to look like. 1 Corinthians 3 talks about, you know, wood, hay and stubble and gold and silver and precious jewels. I don't know if he's going to ask about this one issue but I want to be able to say that to the best of my ability every position I held and every opinion that I advocated was based on Scripture alone and not on what made me friends, influence people, or increase my bank account. And that's not popular today. So be it. So be it.

Yes, ma'am.

[unintelligible]

She said why did I not use Romans 1? I began answering the question saying Leviticus and Romans 1 address this as a sin, the reason I wanted to go to Matthew 19 is I don't think homosexuality to be discussed is it a sin or is it not a sin, that's not worthy of our time. It is a sin. What's worthy of our time is how to approach this sin from the perspective that Jesus did in light of our culture versus debating is it or is it not a sin. I don't think that's worthy of a debate. It is a sin but how do we approach the sin? But Romans 1 is very clear, very clear, as is Leviticus and some other passages. It's clear that it is a sin. You know, in fact, 1 Corinthians 6 deals with it. Revelation 21 deals with it. There's lots of passages, you know, and I've got folks and I've had lots of conversations that say, "Well, you know, that's just all back in the Old Testament. It's not in the New Testament." Per your point, it's all over the New Testament as well. But I think the reason I went to Matthew 19 is I think Jesus addressed the subject matter of marriage and the subject matter of our natural desires for family in a way that maybe we haven't spent a whole lot of time looking at, and maybe that's our answer to this problem in our culture, that because I don't think anybody hopefully, if you can take a biblical stance, you cannot say that anybody is born to sin. You can't say that. Now we may be born with a sin nature but not born to sin. There's a difference and so therefore I think it's the approach. That's why... I mean, we can go to Romans 1 but where we're supposed to start Revelation 13 minutes ago, can we do that real quick? Thank you, because I'm sweating. I don't know about y'all.

Okay, here we go. Phew. Alright, Revelation 1. Now let remind y'all every question that we address is your fault. You put it in there, not me, because let me speak on behalf of all pastors in the world: if I were picking the questions to put in the database, I wouldn't have put that one.

Okay, Revelation 1. I'm going to read verses 1 through 4. It says,

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: 2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. 4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

Now last week we made incredible progress, we made it through two verses. Revelation has 400 verses in it so if you do the math, that's a long time. But nonetheless, tonight obviously our time is a tad bit short due to the questions that were at hand but they were important to address. I want to move into the last part of verse 2 and the beginning of verse 3 because there's something very important that we need to read not just about the book of Revelation but about all Scripture and all subject matters that we go to Scripture to deal with.

Notice it says, "Who bare record of the word of God, the testimony of Jesus, and all that he saw." What was the primary means of God's communication to mankind about the end of the world? The word of God. Not what we think, what we perceive, or what we see, or what we hear. Notice that what he saw was last and in between was the testimony of Jesus. Now I am firmly, absolutely, completely convinced this is why we struggle with the book of Revelation. This is why, as the old joke says, you get two Baptists, you get three opinions, when it comes to the book of Revelation you can multiply that tenfold. It's because of this issue right here, "Who bare record of the word of God, the testimony of Jesus." By the way, I put it on your outline. Revelation 19:10 says that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophesy.

Now let me work with some numbers for you. For every verse in the Bible dealing with the first coming of Jesus, what we know as Christmas, there are eight verses dealing with the second coming. There is an 8/1 ratio. There are eight times more passages about the contents of the book of Revelation than there are the contents of the first couple of chapters of Matthew and Luke. The Old Testament is saturated with commentary and prophecies about the second coming, in fact, we typically say that there are 48 specific prophecies about the birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 48 of them. Depending on who you talk to, who you study and how they categorize them, there are at least 300 prophecies about the second coming and a lot of people will say upwards of 800-900. That's an incredible amount, so much so that I believe this is why we struggle in Revelation, 400 verses and 285 direct references or quotations from your Old Testament.

Now can you just be honest with me tonight? As a born again, Bible believing, in a Baptist church Christian, do we spend more of our time in the New or the Old Testament? The New, and yet the book of Revelation almost every verse has a reference to the Old Testament. Why do so many people struggle with Revelation? It's because they don't know their Old Testament. I've got news for you, as we study the book of Revelation going forward, you're going to learn Revelation, you're going to learn your Old Testament because you cannot understand the book of Revelation apart from the Old Testament, 285 direct quotes and over 500 references. That means that on average every verse, on average every verse in the book of Revelation has more than one reference to the Old Testament.

Why do I believe so many people struggle with the book of Revelation is because they read it and they interpret it in light of their personal experience, in light of their contemporary culture. You cannot separate the book of Revelation from the Old Testament. You have to go back into the Old Testament or you will not grasp what the book of Revelation is actually communicating because it is showing us an event that the Lord is showing John on the island of Patmos, whatever that event may be, the opening of a seal, the opening of a vial, the Antichrist, but it's not showing it out of the context of the Old Testament.

So he says basically the testimony is the word of God, the testimony of Jesus, and the things that he saw. We talked a little bit last week that this is the only book of the Bible that says you will be blessed by reading, hearing and doing the words thereof. I don't know how many of you took the challenge last week, it takes about 30-45 minutes to read through the book of Revelation start to finish but there are seven blessings in the book of Revelation. The first one, to those who read, hear and keep. Interesting about these blessings. I want you to notice I've put them on an outline for you. We won't turn to all of them tonight. You are blessed if you die as a saint. Well, absolutely, of course. You are blessed, those who keep their garments, those that are faithful in their faith. You are blessed, those who are at the marriage supper of the Lamb. You're blessed. You're blessed, those who experience the first resurrection, who keep God's sayings, who keep God's commandments.

Why is this important? A book of the Bible that is so often shrouded with mystery and intrigue, seven times says we'll be blessed. Why would we want to stay away from a blessing? Why would we want to avoid a blessing? If you want to live a blessed life, then you need to understand the book of Revelation. Now I'm not here to pick on, chastise, or incriminate, but a very popular book was written years ago called "Your Best Life Now," how about your blessed life now? The book of Revelation and the study of end times according to what we just read produces a blessing in our life. If we want to be blessed, this is a book of the Bible we need to spend a lot of time in.

Now warnings concerning this. He who reads, he who hears, he who does. I just put some Scriptures on there for you because I want to get to the bottom part of this outline because, believe it or not, I can stretch 45 minutes of lesson into 4 ½. I can make it happen. I talk fast enough. I can make it happen. Is one of the concerns is those who just read or those who just hear or those who just keep. The Bible is very very clear that we are to read, hear and keep, not just do the one that we find convenient for ourselves. For example, James 1:22, be a doer of the word and not just a hearer only. Matthew 5:13-16, it says no man takes a light and hides it under a bushel but he sets it on a hill. And so the book of Revelation isn't just for us to read, it's not just for us to hear, it's not just for us to "do," it's for all of those things. It's the total package in our life.

And with that being said, I want to get to verse 4 because it says, "John to the seven churches." Who is the person that the Lord is going to use? The Apostle John without question. This is the individual who was in Jesus' what I like to call the big three, Peter, James and John. This was the one, the sons of Zebedee, the men of thunder. This is the same individual who the Lord allowed the privilege of writing the gospel of John and then also 1, 2 and 3 John. One of the original 12 apostles. One of what we like to call the big three.

He finds himself, as we'll discover in just a moment, on the island of Patmos. Now what do we know about John biblically and then what do we know about him from history? Biblically speaking, he was the faithful one. You know, it was John the apostle who according to the end of the gospel of John said he was the one that laid on Jesus' breast, in other words, when they would lounge around a table in biblical days, he had the seat

right next to Jesus, the closest seat to him. He was the one that was called the beloved apostle, in other words, the other 11 said, "Jesus likes him more or Jesus favors him more." Jesus referred to him at the end of the gospel of John saying, "If one of you does not see death until he sees the kingdom of heaven come in power, so be it," in reference to whom we know as the Apostle John. But more than being beloved, and more than being in the seat next to Jesus, the Apostle John was the faithful one. Here's what I mean. The night of Jesus' crucifixion, everybody took off but John. Everybody. I mean, they fled like cockroaches in the daylight. Man, they were gone. Peter goes and denies three times. We don't hear about a lot of the other guys but what we do discover is that when Jesus was going through the trial, when Peter was on the sidewalk denying him, it says that John went inside. He was actually there, a part of the proceedings. He never left Jesus' side. And I put the verse here for you, in John 19:25 when things get really bad, when Jesus is on the cross, the crown of thorns is on his head, the blood is flowing, the nails are in his hands and his feet, John is the only male present. There are four ladies and one man. By the way, all the ladies have the name Mary, kind of interesting. But in John 19:25 there are five people at the feet of the cross and John is the only one of the apostles there. Of course, you know most famously when Jesus made this statement, "Woman," speaking to Mary, "Woman, behold your son. John, behold your mother." That what we know is that relationship, that kinsman redeemer relationship as described in the book of Ruth, the Apostle John was the one whom Jesus handed over those reins to him, a significant faithful character.

Historically speaking, it is believed based on the writings of Polycarp and other early church fathers, that John pastored First Baptist Church of Ephesus. The book of Ephesians, the church at Ephesus, that significant stalwart of a body, it is believed that he pastored that church not just because we have people that said he did, but and this is a side issue for another day, the city of Ephesus is where the teaching or the idea of the worship of Mary came from. Well, that would make sense if he was entrusted Mary's care and she was in Ephesus while he was pastoring that that erroneous teaching would be built around the solid teaching. So most likely when you read the book of Ephesians, when you hear about the church at Ephesus, this might have been the church that he pastored.

Now in a few moments you're going to discover that one of the letters goes to the church of Ephesus. He's not there because he's on the island of Patmos, so he is not the current pastor at the time. Now that's the person God used. The people that God speaks to, the churches, plural, something's interesting in the book of Revelation, particularly chapters 2 and 3, than all the other portions of your New Testament. When the Lord speaks through the Apostle Paul, the letter of what we know as Philippians, the church at Philippi, that letter was to that church. The letters to Corinth, 1 and 2 Corinthians, were to Corinth. Ephesians to Ephesus. What we see here is to the seven churches whether it was Ephesus, whether it was Laodicea, Smyrna, Sardis, Philadelphia, Thyatira, whichever of these seven, the picture or the idea that we get is that they were all to read it. In other words, the church at Ephesus read what he said about the church at Sardis. And the church at Philadelphia read what he said about the church at Laodicea. You say, "Well, why is that so significant?" Because as we go forward in the next couple of weeks, we're going to

discover that the message that he gave to Ephesus is vitally important to the church at Sardis, and the message to Philadelphia is important to Laodicea and vice versa all over. It wasn't just a message to seven individual particular churches, it's a message to all the churches teaching them something they all collectively need to know.

Next, the perspective that God uses. Now this is one of those pet studies of mine. I think this is fascinating. You may find it's boring. The good news is we're down to four minutes so we're all going to make it through it. Here we go. I find this fascinating. John is on the island of Patmos. Notice what it says here in verse 4, "from him which is, and which was, and which is to come." So it mentions the present tense, then the past tense, then the future tense, okay?

Fast forward to the book of Revelation 11. I apologize, go to chapter 4. Forgive me, chapter 4, verse 8. These are the four beasts and we'll discover this in a few weeks, the angelic creatures around the throne of God. It says, "And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and which is, and which is to come." Now that may not seem significant to you but these angelic beings begin with the past tense, then speak of the present tense, then of the future tense. John on the island of Patmos begins with the present, goes back to the past, then to the future. You say, "Why are you making such a big deal about this?" In Job 38:7 it says that when God spoke creation, the sons of God, or the angelic beings, they rejoiced and they celebrated, and so the perspective of the angelic host is so different than the perspective of humanity, number 1 from a time perspective, but how about from this perspective, how about from a salvation perspective? The Apostle John at one point in his life was lost, he was in sin and he was in a damnable state, but because of the blood of Jesus he was saved so why not say he who is? It's a real present tense reality of my life. You know, the angels don't comprehend that. The angelic beings who rejoice and sing, they don't have the perspective of being lost and found, they don't have the perspective of being saved, redeemed, reconciled or forgiven. So though it may seem like a minor semantic study, I think it's important that the human being by the name of John describes Jesus from a different perspective as the angelic beings. He who is, he who was, and he who is to come. After all, it was to a human being by the name of Moses in Exodus 3:14 where God said, "I am that I am, that my name means present tense."

So John has a very interesting perspective and then last but not least, the perfection that is shown. It says here, "from the seven spirits that are before his throne." Now later in chapter 3, verse 1, it's going to talk about the seven spirits, but remember there's 285 direct quotations from the Old Testament and people have questioned and debated who are these seven spirits, what are these seven spirits, what do they actually mean? I've got great news for you, they're found in Isaiah 11:1-2 and you go and you can read those verses and it will describe the spirit of God, the spirit of this, the spirit of that, and those seven spirits are laid out there in those verses in Isaiah 11, the first of 285 direct quotes from your Old Testament that necessitate how we interpret the book of Revelation.

So it goes without saying we conquered 30 minutes in 14 tonight. You got the fast forward version, no time for questions. I hope it made sense. Phew! Y'all tired? I am. God bless you. I'll see you Sunday if not before. Who knows, we might see each other before. It'll happen.