

Ask Jeff 1.31.18  
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How are y'all doing this evening? Alright. It's really...those on the front row just went, "Whoa!" So, yes, this is a Baptist church and so we actually designed the sound for those sitting on the back row because that's what we're used to. No, I'm kidding.

I do want to encourage you to get your Circle of Concerns, otherwise known as our prayer sheet out. For those of you that are new with us tonight, this is the way we communicated among our church body about those that we know and love who are sick, ill, or struggling in some capacity. Not everybody here is a member of or directly associated with First Baptist but they have a connection to us, the people at First Baptist Church.

I don't normally do what I'm about to do but we just got word right before coming in here tonight two individuals, long term contributors, members here at First Baptist, Jim G. and Ben B. are both at East Alabama Medical Center and we just found that out and so I wanted you to be praying for them. They are not on your sheet but feel free, please, to write them in. I don't know all the details, I just know that they are there and I knew y'all would want to be interested and concerned and to be praying for them. So we apologize, we just found out just a few moments ago and so we wanted you to be aware of that.

Also, you'll notice on the bottom of the front side, the sympathy section. Many of our church family who have lost loved ones in recent days, and on the back, those who are serving both on the mission field and in the United States military. Always continue to pray for them as oftentimes they are away from home, they're away from the comforts of what we know of life, and oftentimes experiencing homesickness, for lack of better terms, and we want to be in prayer for them.

Let's pray and we'll be started tonight.

*Heavenly Father, tonight, you know, we always pray not only for those that are on the list but for those that aren't on the list but are in our heart. Today we do pray for the G. family and the B. family as well as the many others that are on this sheet, Lord, and those that are not on it. Lord, we know that you're not only a God of healing but a God of restoration and, Lord, even if we're without knowledge, you're a God of knowledge. So Lord, we're just praying that you would move in mighty ways in the lives of everyone that is both mentioned and not mentioned. Lord, we do pray for those who have lost loved*

*ones. We know that it's never easy and there's always a loss and there's always a vacuum, but we know that you made a promise in your word over and over again that you would never leave us, you would never forsake us, you would even be with us to the end of the age. So Lord, that's what we're praying for those who are struggling with the loss of loved ones, and for those who have family members serving overseas, Lord, we do pray for comfort and for peace and that your Holy Spirit would be as present with them there as it is with us here.*

*Lord, for our campus tonight, thank you for the hundreds of people who are in the Master Life Bible Study. Thank you for the hundreds of students and children and college students and those that are in our worship ministry that are all over this campus serving you and honoring you and glorifying you and, Lord, for the hundreds here, Lord, we pray that as we open your word, that we would be focused upon you and you alone, that it wouldn't be our opinion, it wouldn't be our desire that matters but it would be yours and only yours. Lord, bless everything that happens on our campus this evening as we center upon your word to point us to you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

Tonight, I do want to welcome you to Wednesdays at First Baptist and as you look around, if this is your first time, you have no reference point but if you are a seasoned veteran here, you may notice a few empty seats or those that are watching by way of media ministry, may not seem as full as it normally is because I am proud to announce that we have hundreds of our adults that are participating in our Master Life Bible Study this Wednesday night. They're going to be away from us for 12 more weeks and so in lieu of one of the things that I shared last week that I want to share this week is our Wednesday night Bible study, the first half is a Q and A question time, the second half is a systematic Bible study. For about the last year we have been walking through the book of Revelation, a book that oftentimes many are intrigued by, some people are even concerned by, but a lot of people are interested in and I heard from a lot of folks taking Master Life saying, "Wow, if I'm gone for 12 weeks, I'm going to miss so much." We are actually going to suspend our Revelation Bible study during the Master Life Study on Wednesday nights but we're still going to do a Bible study. You'll notice you do have an outline and we are going to study the Scriptures with a little bit of a Revelation flair, if that makes any sense. So we'll still kind of be thematically there, we just won't be walking verse by verse through the book of Revelation until the end of April.

But the beginning part of our Bible study is a question and answer time. We call it Ask Jeff because you ask the questions and my name just happens to be Jeff. If you want to submit a question, the absolute easiest best way to do so is to go to our website [fbcopelika.com/askjeff](http://fbcopelika.com/askjeff). You can submit a question. When you submit a question, if you put your email address, then when that question is answered, I push the little "answer" button, it will send you an email link to the video of the question being addressed and answered just in the event that you are not here when it is brought up. The reason that is important is because there is no system to the order that the questions, there is an algorithm in the computer. It is absolutely random and so some of you may have put in a question a year ago and say when is it going to come up. I have no answer. I don't know,

whenever it gets brought up. Or you could have submitted one this week and it comes up tonight. So there is no order chronologically there, there is just a simple database that I will go to, I will push the little button and it will come up.

It says in Matthew 13, guess where we're going to be tonight, Matthew 13:31 and 32, are the birds evil as are the tares in the parable in verses 24 through 30? Do they represent our distractions, temptations, troubles that can keep us from focusing on God? Do they represent growth and a place to dwell/live in the kingdom of God? Thank you.

All right, whoever asked that, I appreciate the thank you there. All right, Matthew 13, a very unique section in Scripture. Jesus communicates 32 parables in the gospels. The greatest concentration of parables in any chapter in the gospels is in the book of Matthew, and every single one of these represents the kingdom of heaven. You'll notice throughout Scripture there are parables about the kingdom of heaven, then there are parables about the kingdom of God. Of those 32 parables that Jesus shares with us, only three of them are the same parable for the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. There is the parable of the sower. There is the parable of the leaven. And there is the parable of I cannot remember. Y'all know that parable, right? Yeah, that's one of the three. But in Matthew 13, the parable that was alluded to here in verse 31 and 32 is the parable of the mustard seed. It says in verse 31, "Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

Now I want to take a very interesting approach to this parable because it was asked what do the birds represent and how do we identify with? I want you to notice the very next parable, verse 33, "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." What's interesting about the parable of the mustard seed in Matthew 13 alongside the parable of the leaven, by the way, which preceded with the parable of the wheat and the tares, what we see here is a theme that is developed here where Jesus is trying to teach us how to discern or discriminate between that which is false and that which is real, that which is unrighteous and that which is righteous. For example, the wheat and the tares, you remember the parable well. The wheat obviously represents that which is of God, it grows of God, it is of God, it looks of God. The tares look identical on the outside but are very different internally and it's a very clear picture to us that just because it walks and it talks and acts on the outside, it may not be genuine on the inside, in fact, the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus says that the enemy, the devil himself plants the tares among the wheat.

When you get to the parable of leaven, every time you find leaven in the Bible, it's not good. It's never good. Now, it's good in your yeast rolls at home, it is not good in Scripture. For example, back in the book of Exodus 12 during the Passover meal, they were supposed to eat bread without leaven. Jesus tells the disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." Then he explains representing their lifestyle and their sin and

the rebellion against God. Why is this important to the question at hand? Because the parable before is about distinguishing the difference between that of God, that not of God. The parable after of leaven is a warning about that which grows within us that is not of God. So right there in the middle we have to interpret this parable in the same context and it says that the mustard seed is planted, it grows this plant with all these leaves and the birds of the air nestle therein.

Now two passages I want you to go to to understand this. The first one is Mark 4. Mark 4 is the parable of what we know as the sower. Mark 4, Jesus gives us an interpretation of birds, so to speak. Mark 4, and then we're going to go back to the book of Daniel. So Mark 4. By the way, if you're new with us tonight, I'm not so fond of people's opinion or ideologies as much as I am what does the Bible say, and so I think the best way to interpret Scripture is with other Scripture. In Mark 4, Jesus tells the parable of the sower. It begins with he says in verse 3 of chapter 4, "Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up." Now I want you to think about that. The parable we just read about the mustard seed, it said the birds of the air, here it says the fowls of the air, that those which are flying, they are there, all right? Now look at the interpretation beginning in verse 13 of Mark 4, "he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts." Isn't that interesting that the parable Jesus tells is about the birds of the air coming to swoop up the seed. When Jesus gives the interpretation, he says it was Satan himself that did so. By the way, you know in Ephesians 2 Satan is called the prince of the power of the air.

All right, now go back to the book of Daniel, back in the Old Testament, the book of Daniel, we're going to begin in chapter 2. I think it's chapter 2 that I want. Nope, not chapter 2, move to chapter 7. I apologize. Chapter 4, I apologize. Third times the charm. In chapter 4 of the book of Daniel, there is a dream that Nebuchadnezzar has and that in his dream he becomes this large tree. Remember that? Now remember Nebuchadnezzar is a perfect picture in the Bible of the one day coming Antichrist. He is one who later on will, for lack of better terms, almost become if not completely possessed and he goes out for seven years in the wilderness and he lives like an animal, but in verse 19 of chapter 4, there is an interpretation given. It says, "Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies. The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Take the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth."

And we could go on and read the interpretation, here's what I want to hear by going to all those Scriptures, that in Matthew 13 there is this famous parable of the mustard seed, one of many parables, in fact, Matthew 13 is chock-full of parables about the kingdom of heaven. Its location is between the parable of the wheat and the tares and the parable of leaven both warning us about that which may appear to be of God but is not of God. Here in the parable of the mustard seed, it says that the birds of the air are upon the leaves or the branches of this great tree that grows. Take that with the parable of the sower and this imagery that Nebuchadnezzar has with his dream in Daniel 4 and one of the things that we discover is oftentimes in Scripture that the imagery of birds or the imagery of fowls are representative of the work or the plans of the enemy in our life.

Why is that important? It says the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, it starts so small but it gets so big. That's a wonderful concept that the things of God start small and get big but one of the things we have to realize is there's also times where the enemy sows his seeds among the things of God, just like the tares and just like the leaven, it is small but it gets big. Later in the book of Jude it says that the problem that the people of God are having is that there are those that do not believe who have crept into the body of Christ and are corrupting it from the inside, not from the outside. And I think the lesson from the parable is multilayered as all parables are, but in regards to the birds, anytime you're reading in Scripture and it talks about birds or it talks about fowls, take a step back because typically in context it is speaking about how the enemy creeps into our lives and can thwart our lives and distract our lives, and in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, be a part of taking down our lives.

Any bird, fowl questions, parables, kingdom of heaven? Okay, food settled heavy tonight, I apologize. Everybody is good there? Okay, well, hey, it's Matthew 13. By the way, Matthew 13 is not easy, just thought I'd let you know that. All right, that one is answered.

Next, okay, this is going to be fun. Y'all ready? All right, you didn't lift your hands to follow up on that one, you will on this one. The question, actually there are three question marks in this question. Where is hell located? Is it at the center of the earth? Where is heaven located in relationship to the earth? Thank you for giving us a four hour question tonight.

All right, so I want to begin on the positive and then we'll go on to the negative. Let's begin in the book of Isaiah, the book of Isaiah 66 in the Old Testament, then we're going to go to the book of Ephesians 4. Isaiah 66, by the way, as you're turning to Isaiah, if you've never heard this analogy, allow me to share it with you. Isaiah has 66 chapters, your Bible has 66 books. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah are doom and gloom, the last 27 chapters are all greatness. The 39 books in the Old Testament, 27 in the New, oftentimes people have called Isaiah the Bible in miniature. But the very last chapter of Isaiah that if we were going to use that analogy, of course, would be the book of Revelation.

Verse 1, "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." In fact, one of the things that you see all throughout the book of Job is that the Lord is referenced to being in the north. In Isaiah 14, the passage that we see the imagery of Satan falling, it says he not only desired to put his throne above that of God, we'll talk about that a little bit in our Bible study, but that he went above the sides of the north, and the imagery that we get and I'll draw this out a little bit for you in just a moment, is that the concept of heaven, the concept of the crystal sea, the concept of the throne room of God is somewhere above. That's the imagery. If heaven is his throne and earth is the footstool, then heaven is above and the footstool, earth, is below.

Now turn to Ephesians 4. Now this is where it's going to get interesting and I'm not only going to allude to Ephesians 4 but I'm going to give you an account of a fascinating conversation that I had some years ago. Ephesians 4 is giving us the account of the ministry that the church of Jesus Christ has as an extension of the ministry that Jesus Christ had, and I'm going to begin in verse 4 just for context here of Ephesians 4. It says, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Verse 7, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Now let's stop there for just a moment. When Jesus Christ ascended in Acts 1 not only did the Holy Spirit come but with the Holy Spirit when you get into 1 Corinthians 12 and following, you have the gifts of the Spirit that the body of Christ which is one expresses. Verse 9, "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." So what we see in a generalization is that the imagery of the location of heaven is up and the imagery of hell is below.

Now here's where it gets a little bit interesting because anytime we began to utilize the physical sciences whether it be geology below or physics above, one of the things that we must take note of is anytime we're strictly studying the sciences, we're also dealing here with that which is spiritual, okay? Now heaven is a physical place though it's based on a spiritual reality because it says it has streets of gold, that's physical, it says there is a throne of which the Lord sits on, that is physical, there's a crystal sea which is physical, and I'm going to be there, you're going to be there, we're physical, right? So it is a physical place but it's a spiritual reality and last time I checked, hell is the opposite but yet just as much real. Hell is a real place that was pictured in Luke 15 of having fire and having that thirst and having an experience where it says "even my tongue is parched." So even though they may be physical, we understand that it is a spiritual decision that determines one's destination, correct? Upon Jesus Christ. So either spiritually a place the Bible calls heaven or spiritually a place the Bible calls hell.

Now I understand that there is a history of thought, belief and concern that somehow, someway heaven was way out there and hell was right down below, in fact, imagery that even Jesus uses all throughout Scripture is for hell being below, and I know that we've got brilliant brilliant brilliant people all over this world who know more about what's

underneath our feet than I could ever imagine, but what's interesting to me is it says that Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth, right? Now I know some people say, well, we've got to look at that because what that meant is he went to the lower peoples of their earth, he went to the lower economic class of the earth, he went to the lower regions of the earth. Well, the problem with doing it that way is the verse before says he ascended on high, well, does that mean he just went to a tall mountain or did he go to heaven? In other words, we can't say he went to heaven in one verse and he really just went to a socioeconomic class in the next. We've got to apply the principle to both.

Then when you say, well, he went to the lower parts of the earth, you know, what do you do with that? Well, some years ago I found myself in a PhD seminar, and last time I checked, that usually is composed of some pretty intelligent people. Now you could argue because I jokingly because I have one, I can say it's a postal digger degree. I've got one of those. But I'm sitting around a table with a bunch of guys who are striving for their theological doctorate and this verse comes up, this passage comes up, and every single person around the table begins to pontificate of the metaphorical language of this passage. They began to talk about how it is metaphorical and how it is chock-full of imagery, and everything that's there is just something that, you know, now it's the 21st century, we don't think, we don't write, we don't talk, look at what we've discovered in 2,000 years compared to when the Lord gave the inspiration of this. So everybody is talking and the professor is just sitting there, he's just looking, he's listening, and he allows the pontification to go on for about 20 minutes and I'll never forget what he says. He looks at us and he says, "Boys," now when you're in your mid-70s you can say that to us, he said, "Boys, I appreciate you and I appreciate what you're saying but Scripture is what Scripture is and we may not understand it but you may get shocked one day to find out that hell was right below you." Now that sounds academically crude but the man who made that statement was also the man that was commissioned by a historical society to write the official autobiography of Billy Graham, so he was an intelligent, rationally, academically credentialed man who then followed up by saying this, "Rather than trying to talk ourselves out of what it might be, why don't we live in fear of what it says that it is?"

Wouldn't that be something if the hell that is descended upon rejection of Jesus is that which was walked upon one's entire life, and the heaven that everybody just assumes everyone goes to is actually a great distance far off? By the way, you know the imagery that Jesus uses of hell is the bottomless pit. We live on a spinning globe, correct? Last time I checked based on the laws of science, if something spinning that fast, that quick, if you drop it, it never hits bottom, the bottomless pit? And I know scientists can speculate all day long what's in the center of the earth and I know I'm not a geologist but there's only one thing they have beyond a conclusion of, it's hot. It's hot and it's spinning. The imagery that the Bible uses for hell incidentally lines up with both of those scientific known truths and the last time I checked, nobody has ever been there to tell us what's really there. We speculate and we question but I did take geology in college and I'm not a geologist but last time I remember, earthquake waves actually don't go through the center of the earth, they actually deflect. Huh? So waves don't go through, we know it's hot and

it's spinning. Every one of those "scientific known facts" line up with the imagery that the Bible gives us.

Now here's the thing I want you to leave with on this question. Hell no matter where it is located is actually not the final destination. Go to Revelation 20. Let me show you something then we'll surely open it up for some fun now. Revelation 20, this is the final judgment. I'm going to fast forward to verse 13. There's a great throne, the Lord is sitting on the throne, it says, "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell," hell, "delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Now I'm going to continue in chapter 21, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Here's what I want you to hear tonight: is there a place called heaven? Yes. Is there a place the Bible calls hell? Absolutely. But when we've been there 10,000 years, the heaven of 10,000 years from now is actually a revised version of what it is today. It says, "I saw a new heaven," correct? And the hell of 10,000 years from now is called the lake of fire. Simplistically speaking, the heaven description is pretty good, the lake of fire description not so good. Locationally, does it say anything in chapter 20 or 21 about where these are located? No, there is no location given at all for the lake of fire and for what we know as the new heaven. None at all. But today, the Bible speaks the imagery of heaven is a place that is up in distance and in the Bible the description of hell is one of below and hot.

Now there are many that have said, well, if it be not the "center of the earth," then maybe just like you've got this idea of the earth with heaven above, maybe it is descended further below. I don't have any problem with that imagery, one is up, one is down, one is great, one is not so great, and the deciding factor is Jesus. The imagery that the Bible gives is vivid but yet it is vague, but it is clear enough to know that one is a place of desire and one is not a place of desire.

Any hell, heaven, geographical, fun questions? Yes, ma'am.

[unintelligible]

If somebody is already in hell...

[unintelligible]

They are judged again. Then they are thrown into the lake of fire. Ah, that's a great question. The question is if you couldn't hear it, if you've got somebody that is a current resident of hell and according to Revelation 20:13, hell delivers up the dead and then they are "judged" again, and then they are placed into the lake of fire, why the double



judgment? All right, I'm glad you asked that question, here's why, because the Bible speaks that you and I are going to breathe our last breath barring the second coming of Christ, we're going to breathe our last breath, right? The best imagery we've got for the sake of time, just let me allude to Luke 16 where the famous story of Lazarus and the rich man. Remember it says and the rich man in hell lifted up his eyes and Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom? The picture you get is that upon your last breath, that you immediately are either A in the presence of the Lord in a place the Bible calls heaven, or immediately in a place the Bible calls hell. Immediately. It's there. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, right? What's interesting is the Bible says all men must die and face the judgment, correct, immediately in a place of the Bible calls hell, then you have not gone through a "judgment" per se because it is our sins that get us there without Christ, correct? The judgment happens later.

Now on the other side of the equation, did you know as believers we're going to be judged too? According to 1 Corinthians 3 beginning in verse 11, it says that we're judged but yet saved from hell. In other words, we're not judged, our works post-salvation aren't judged to determine our eternality but for lack of better terms, our rewards in heaven that the Bible speaks of. So we are judged not where we will end up, if that makes any sense. Their judgment, those that are residents of hell, their judgment is that final proclamation that their sin and rejection of Jesus, this is eternity. Our judgment is more of a reward for our eternity, if that makes any sense at all. We all must face judgment but that judgment does not happen upon our last breath, so that's why it appears to be double fold because one day if I breathe my last breath today, it's going to happen, I mean, it's going to happen one day, I'm not hoping it's today but y'all know what to do, right? My wife is teaching Master Life, make sure she buys the yellow Porsche, that's all I ask, all right? That's the rule we have. It has to be a convertible so that when she's driving down the road she can just wave and say, "Thank you, I appreciate you, honey." That's our rule. So if you see my wife in a yellow Porsche, you missed my funeral. I'm just telling you, it's over.

But if I breathe my last breath today, according to Scripture absent from my body I'm immediately in the presence of the Lord, correct? However I haven't been through that "judgment period" yet because I haven't gone through that time where that process in 1 Corinthians 3 is described. So I will go through it. By the way, just as an incidental, if you've ever had an elongated conversation or dialogue with somebody from a Muslim faith background, this is one of their biggest struggles with Christianity is they say, "Oh, you just believe in Jesus and you never have to go through judgment." We do but it's not a judgment for our eternity, it's a judgment based on our fellowship with the Lord. And one of the things that I have found, I know it has nothing to do with your question, very successful in talking with Muslim people is that passage in 1 Corinthians 3 where it says that even believers go through a judgment. It opens their eyes because they believe that we believe that we just call on Jesus and do anything we want to do without any accountability which is not what the Bible says. So yes, you are correct, the Bible does say that a resident of hell today is one day finally judged out of the book of works according to Revelation 20 and then the lake of fire.

Does that help at all? Somewhat? Anybody else on this very intriguing topic? Y'all not wanting to chase this rabbit?

All right, oh boy, anytime a question begins with, "So..."

[unintelligible]

Correct.

[unintelligible]

Okay, great question. A twofold question. Let me repeat. 1. You've got a current resident of hell, their presence in hell is not that a declaration of judgment, okay? 2. Since they're a current resident and there is a pending future judgment, does that open up any possibility for a reversal of fortune? Did I repeat that?

Okay, let's begin with the second question. Back in Revelation 20 that we just read, I did not read verse 12 and I apologize, it says, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead," that's those individuals, "were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." There's not a single solitary human being who can ever stand before Almighty God and said, "I was good enough." Nobody. So therefore per the second question you asked, at this final judgment I don't think you're going to ever see any reversal of fortune because those that were dead in their sins are judged according to their works which condemn us no matter what.

Does that make sense there? Maybe not? Not really? Kind of? This is not fun to talk about. You ought to be me. I don't enjoy talking about this.

The first question you asked, though, is, well, isn't their presence in hell "a judgment"? It's a consequence. Hell is a consequence of uncovered sin or un-atoned for sin, let me use a better word there. Heaven is a grace reward for atoned for sin. Does that make sense? So I think you could use in our vernacular today, I think you could use those words. I think the difference that we're trying to draw here is there is not in our imagery of the judge, the courtroom, the prosecution, the case being laid out, if that makes any sense. I've heard people who are just completely against the things of God and the person of God who are very defiant against God, they'll say, "Well, one day when I stand before God, I'm going to tell him what I think." Yeah, right. Good luck.

The interesting thing about Revelation 20 is you never have any idea that anybody argues with their sentence. Nobody. There is no imagery anywhere. It's kind of like we talk about heaven and hell, we may not have all whole lot of specifics but we've at least got some imagery to give us some guidance. There is no imagery of anybody saying, "But, but, but, God, whoa, whoa, timeout. Hear me out here." There is no imagery. I mean, in fact, you get silence because they will see and I've quoted this before so forgive me if you're getting tired of it, Luis Palau, famous evangelist of Portland, Oregon makes the

statement: if we could see with spiritual eyes for one second, it would scare the hell out of us. And what he is saying by that is if we could really see what the throne room of God looks like, if we could really see Revelation 20 laid out, not a person would make a decision to rebel against the things of God and the person of God. So I believe based on that, when these individuals see what it is and for who he is, there is no, "But let me plead my case." So you can use the word judgment, yes, but I think consequence may be a little better word. Same concept. Same concept.

Any other? Yes, sir.

[unintelligible]

Ha, ha, ha, yes. You know, there is an old southern gospel song that says, "I just want a shack right outside the doors of heaven." I don't know if you've heard that old song.

All right, so the question is what about Ephesians 2:8 through 9, "For by grace are you saved through faith not of works lest any man should boast, it is a gift of God." Okay, it makes it very clear that our salvation is by grace alone and has nothing to do with our works, right? We've got that. Those of you that are not familiar with this, allow me to introduce you to line theology. Line theology is you have somebody over here who is lost, that means they do not know Jesus, they are destined to the place we call hell. Over here is somebody who is saved. They have, as you said very clearly from Scripture, they have admitted they are a sinner, they believe that Jesus is their Savior. The question is how do they go from this side to that side, okay? Well, Ephesians 2:8 and 9 is a perfect verse for that, that it is grace alone that allows that to take place. There are no works at all.

The question is and if you go to 1 Corinthians 3 beginning in verse 11 through 15, it says that there is no foundation whereby must be laid but the foundation of Jesus Christ, okay? So in other words, that's the foundation here and it says then it talks about our works. It says wood, hay and stubble, gold, silver and precious jewels, that one day they shall be tried by fire. Then in verse 15 it says yet we shall be saved from fire. In other words, what it's saying here in this passage is there comes a time where, as Romans 14 says, that I have to give an account of my life in faith in Christ, in other words, how have I lived this life you so graciously given me, Lord, okay? That I have to give an account according to 2 Corinthians 10, of that which is good and bad, that's the new Jeff Revised Version there. But I have to do so, there is a judgment per se and the Bible does speak of these "rewards." There are five passages in the New Testament that are mentioned therein. Five of them. The question is what about the fact that there might be those who, you used a certain specific name of a very well-known person who we're just presuming will have five. Allow me to say I think it's the people that we don't expect to have five that will have five, and maybe the people we expect to have five that may only have one, but that's a whole other sermon for a whole other day. I want you to know and I'll go ahead and confess to you, I struggled with this for years. I struggled with the fact of okay, I'm saved by grace, there's this opportunity for reward, but if I'm in heaven for 10,000 years and I've got a mansion next to a guy with five and I've got one, I'm going to covet.

Covet is a sin, I'm in a lot of trouble, okay? Does anybody else think weirdly like that? But I do, I mean, that's how I'm thinking. I'm like, man, this is no good because, you know, knowing my luck, I'm going to be right between Billy Graham and Billy Sunday. I mean, come on. You know, I mean, this is awful, all right?

So the thing that completely changed everything was not an opinion, not a Bible study, not as sermon, it was Revelation 4. In Revelation 4 we have the picture of the throne room of God and notice what is happening, it says the four and the 24 elders are around and what are they doing? They are casting their crowns before the throne of the Lord. Here's the thing I want you to know about rewards and I think this, it helped me, hopefully it will help you, these rewards that are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3, this judgment of that which is of God, that which is not of God, it's not that one day so we can get, it's so that we can give. When you get to Revelation 21, we just read about a new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem, there is nobody wearing crowns. Those have all been cast at the feet of Jesus. So one day if I get to be "mansion neighbors" with Billy Sunday, who if you don't know who it is, famed evangelist from the 19-20<sup>th</sup> century, former pro baseball player etc., if that were to occur, his rewards per se are not going to be any more or less than mine because whatever reward he received he has cast at the feet of Jesus, whatever reward I've received, I've cast at the feet of Jesus, and the desire and the goal is not so that we can crown collect and walk around for eternity going, "Hey, look how good I was," but rather throwing them at his feet and saying, "Thank you, Lord, for how good you were to me."

Does that make sense? That is why if you may not be familiar with them, they're kind of a "contemporary Christian group" called Casting Crowns, that's where they got their name and the idea is not to collect but to be able to give.

So, yes, salvation, grace alone, no works at all. On the other side of salvation all that we do with our faith is so that one day we can celebrate the Lord by giving to him. Does that help at all? And by the way, just so you know, I can tell you exactly where I was when I first read that scripture and first heard it, and the reason is because it was so profound because and I'm not accusing you of this, I was living this life like, okay, I'm saved by grace but I live by works. I was like, that seems to contradict itself. You can never work enough. When I realized, no, I'm saved by grace, I live by grace but by living by grace I get the opportunity to celebrate his work in me one day and it changed my whole perspective on everything.

Now one day I'm going to stand before him, one day I'm going to have the opportunity to cast those crowns before him and casting those crowns is saying, "Thank you, God, that you moved in my life," not, "Thank you, God, look what I did with my life." There's a whole different perspective there. I believe what I call crown collectors, you know what a crown collector is? That's somebody who does so to collect. I think they're going to be the ones with none. I think they're the ones with none and I think the ones who only just because they love Jesus they do whatever it is for no other reason at all are going to show up and they go, "Really? I get to give all this back?"

Does that make sense? So it's the reverse of our flesh if that makes sense. Anybody else? I know it's an interesting subject matter. We're done with this one? Wow. Whoa, back row. Yes, sir.

[unintelligible]

All right, I was waiting for somebody to ask that. Thank you, sir. Now I do notice that the person who asked that question is behind the camera so we appreciate that. Maybe nobody in front of the camera was willing. Back to the question about Ephesians 4 when it says he that ascended, being Jesus, also descended into the lower parts. If you interpret that, that it doesn't just mean socioeconomic, that it literally means wherever it may physically be located, the place the Bible calls and refers to as hell, the question he's referring to is does that mean or did Jesus actually go to a place known as hell. Several things I want to approach and, by the way, this means during the death experience of three days. Several things I want to address. 1. For those of you who may have a background in or a knowledge of what we know as the Catholic Church, there was a thing years ago called the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed was developed over 1,500 years ago and it makes a statement that Jesus lived a sinless life, he died and then he descended into hell. That's in the Apostles' Creed. They took that out at Vatican II in 1964. For over 1,500 years the church in general made that statement theologically and then has removed that statement in the last 60 to 70 years. When it comes to where did "Jesus go during those three days," you've only got three options. There's only three. Option number 1 is that he went to what we would call heaven. Option number 2 is he stayed in the grave. Option number 3 is he descended into hell, all right?

Now the issues that we have here, number 1, that he went into heaven. Well, according to Luke 24 when Mary comes to him, what does he say to her? "Do not touch me for I have yet to ascend to my Father." Okay, so based on that, we can say, hmm, that probably didn't happen, correct? What's interesting is if you say, well, he was just in the grave, in other words his body was in that tomb, Joseph of Arimathea's tomb as traditionally that we know and are taught, the problem we've got with that is twofold. Number 1, the grave was above ground so how could you descend below if you're above? 2. There is this passage of Scripture in 1 Peter 3 that says that during this experience, that he went and he preached unto the spirits which are in prison. All right, now there's a whole lot behind that passage but the idea that you get is that at some point between his death and his resurrection, he actually interacted with those who years before had rejected the ways of God. That's not going to happen in a tomb in Jerusalem. Uh-oh, what are you left with? This really bothers us but let me tell you why it doesn't bother me. 1 John 2, it makes the statement, that Jesus gave himself as a propitiation for our sins. Now that's one of those big Scrabble words if y'all like to get a lot of points, let me spell it, propitiation. Now the word propitiation, big fancy theological word means someone who took the punishment for. That's what it means. That's all it means. The only time the word propitiation is used in your Bible is in reference to what Jesus did for us. The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We've talked a lot tonight about heaven, a lot about hell, what is the consequence of sin? The consequence of sin is not that you lose the breath in your lungs and you cease to exist, that's physical medical death. Biblical death is that reality of eternity in a place the Bible calls hell. I don't struggle with this, number 1, because you don't have any other options. Number 2, the whole means by which I am "saved" is the fact that my sins have been paid for. My sins can't be paid for just by loss of breath. The punishment has to be paid and the punishment, I mean, now, I know y'all know I have three boys in my home, none of them are in the room so I talk about them, neither is there mama so I can go for it. Here we go. In all of my years of raising my boys and, boy, I haven't finished it yet, I have had not one of them when their brothers get in trouble say, "Hey, dad, I'll take it." Do you know what they say? "Good luck, buddy. Ha ha," and they take off for the hills saying, "Boy, I'm glad it's not me." I've never had one of them come and say, "Dad, I tell you what, I know you're upset, I'm going to take it for them." Well, the propitiation in that image just in our world today, that would mean that one of my children would take the penalty for the other one. The penalty for sin is not loss of breath, the penalty for sin, the consequence of sin is an eternity in a place the Bible calls hell. It is a very difficult concept to grasp because we think of sinless Jesus but he took on my sins, in fact, in 2 Corinthians 5:21 it says he became sin for us. And so, again, I don't know of any other option.

Now let me help some of y'all because this is a struggle. The next question is, well, if he did, how long was he there? I don't know. He only had to be there a millisecond to pay the price. Now there's a lot of sermons out there that talk about, you know, the fact he was therefore 72 hours, but my point is I do believe for propitiation to take place, the punishment, the consequence, the judgment has to occur, and the fact that it says he was our propitiation, he did preach to those who were in prison, and he had not ascended to his Father.

Does that help at all? Yes, oh, I got a yes. Thank you. Anybody else on that fun one? Boy, y'all started off slow tonight. Boy, y'all sped up quick. Yes, sir.

[unintelligible]

Yes. Yes, it's called annihilationalism. That's even a bigger word than that one. All right, what he said is he's got a co-worker who is formerly a part of what we called Seventh-day Adventism. Seventh-day Adventism, if you don't know all whole lot about them, they typically worship on the Jewish Sabbath day, what we know as Saturday, very law abiding as far as Old Testament is concerned, correct? All right, but one of their belief systems and, by the way, it's not just Seventh-day Adventism, is that upon death if you do not believe in Jesus, they believe that you do not go to a place the Bible calls hell, that you cease to exist, okay? I'm going to give you the verse that they will go to, go to 1 Thessalonians 1 is their justification for their belief but I want you to see what it says because I don't think it says what they think it says. 1 Thessalonians 1, actually I'm sorry, 2 Thessalonians, I apologize. I'm going to begin in verse 5 just for the context here and, by the way, I think this goes without saying but it goes back to kind of like he ascended,

he descended, how can you believe and have eternity but not believe in not? Okay, I know that's a logical conclusion there.

Verse 5 it says, "Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Listen to verse 9, to use the words with, these are the consequences, this is the judgment, "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." A Seventh-day Adventist or somebody who believes in annihilationalism, by the way, I know Baptists that believe in annihilationalism, would say that that phrase "everlasting destruction" means they are annihilated, they cease to exist, it's as if they vaporize. Multiple issues with that. 1. Everlasting destruction. When something is destroyed, it doesn't cease to exist, it is just in shambles. Don't believe me, occasionally I could give you pictures of what happens at my house when my boys all get together, they destroy some things, I mean, it's part of it, right? Everlasting destruction would mean whatever has been destroyed is in a state of destruction perpetually, not ceasing to exist.

Secondly, it denies the reality of the soul. Your soul, my soul, a human being's soul is saying that the eternal aspect of our soul is based on our condition at death. Our soul is eternal, our destinations are different, if that makes sense. So they're using that one phrase and that one verse to say that... Because it says everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, well, let's just be simplistic here. That means that they are not in the presence of his glory, they are not in the presence of the throne room, they are not in the heaven and, they are not in the new earth, they are not a part of. In fact, when you get to Revelation 21:8, it says there are those that are outside of that presence. And so I think 2 Thessalonians 1:9 actually says the opposite of what they say.

So here's the deal. If they're right, okay, if they're right, then if I reject Jesus, I don't lose real bad. Okay, fine, I don't get to go to heaven but, phew, at least it's just kind of over, right? If the Bible says what I think it says, then when we reject Jesus, it's got much weightier consequences than that. In fact, I may have shared, have I ever shared Pascal's Wager with y'all? Blaise Pascal, the famous mathematician, scientist? Blaise Pascal had a Wager and here's what he said. He said talking about the person of Jesus and our belief in Jesus, he said if you were to have a bet whether to receive him or to reject him, okay, he said it was real simple, he said what if it is true, what if it is false, all right? Supposedly legend has it that this is what led Blaise Pascal, the famous mathematician, to come to faith in Christ. Let's say that what the person of Jesus, the message of the Bible, let's say that it's all false, it's all made up, it's fairytales, we're wasting our time here tonight, okay, all right? If I believe in it or if I reject it, am I any worse or better if it's false? No, it doesn't matter, does it? It doesn't matter because it wasn't true anyway so the acceptance didn't help me and the rejection didn't hurt me. But what if it's true? If the message and the person of Jesus is true, if I accept it, it changes everything. If I reject it, it changes everything. And here's what Blaise Pascal said in 21st century language: anybody with

any sense would go to Vegas and always bet on Jesus. That's why it's called Pascal's Wager, that even if you weren't looking at it theologically just from a rational betting perspective, you would never bet on it being false because you can't win. If you bet on it being true, you actually have the chance of winning.

Now let me apply that to the argument of annihilationalism, okay? We're going to use the same skill here for annihilationalism, okay? If annihilationalism is true, I can't lose. I can't lose. But if annihilationalism is false, I have the chance of losing big time. And what Blaise Pascal in his Wager would say is you'd better that that it's true because if it's not, you're in big trouble. Does that make sense? I mean, I know I can defend it scripturally but...

[unintelligible]

Great concept. Our God is a loving God, he never sends anybody to hell. You're right, people send themselves. I'm absolutely right. We talked about hell is the consequence of sin so when we openly rebel against God, we're sending ourselves. He's not sending us at all, and I think that's something and that's one of the great arguments of the atheist, why would a loving God send people he supposedly loves to a horrible place called hell? He didn't send them. The question I've got is the reverse, that how can a loving God love us enough to allow us to go to a place called heaven? Let's take the question and let's reverse it for a matter, that's where it gets significant there. But you're absolutely right, and it's not just that one denominational affiliation, there are others that just believe that we just cease to exist, we just cease to exist which could not be further from biblical truth. To my knowledge and I could be so wrong, that's the only verse they've got to believe what they believe and, by the way, any time you take a single verse out of context and make it what you want to make, you can build a whole doctrine around it, so to speak.

So anybody else on that one? Yes, ma'am.

[unintelligible]

A universalist, correct. A universalist does not believe in hell but they believe everybody is in heaven. A universalist basically there are multiple kinds of universalists. There's one universalist who will say, well, it doesn't matter if you're Christian, whether you're Muslim, whether you're this, whether you're that, you all kind of believe in the same thing, you're all going to end up in the same place. That's kind of a theological universalist. The compassionate universalist says that God is so loving it doesn't matter how much you reject him in life, he's still going to put you in heaven one day because he's so loving. So, but a universalist believes nobody is in hell. Annihilationalists believe that there are people in heaven but some people who don't get there that just cease to exist, and the Bible says that there are residents of heaven, residents of hell, and only Jesus makes the difference.

That's what the Bible says but notice tonight and we'll wrap up with this because we've got one minute and we didn't even get to the outline, did we? Ah, we've got week. The



thing that's interesting in all this conversation, notice how much of what we discussed tonight comes from the way we think or we hope or we suspect versus what the Bible just says. The Bible is not hard to read, it is hard to believe. I'm going to leave you with that one and let's pray.