

Is This the Last Generation?

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Ezra 1, Matthew 1:17

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First Baptist family, as we gather this evening from the worship center at First Baptist Church of Opelika, I want to welcome you again and thank you once again for allowing us to be a part of your lives, for opening up your homes, your back porches, wherever you find yourself this evening. I know that tonight there are many of you that are a part of this service who do not even live within what we would call driving distance to be a part of our physical service if we were able to have one, and so thank you so much for being a part of tonight.

Tonight we're going to address a subject matter, we're going to speak a message tonight that is not new. In fact, many of you are aware that the majority of tonight's message is actually that which I have been preaching for two decades, and so when we come to tonight's subject matter, one of the questions that needs to be asked is why tonight? Well, as you and I have been walking through a global pandemic, there have been many that have asked and I've even asked myself when would I address this subject matter again? Over the last 20+ years both in small groups and in large gatherings I have made it a point and a priority to address tonight's subject matter anytime that I'm given the opportunity and tonight the reason I want to address it at this specific time is because of our Bible reading plan. I do not believe that that was put together by happenstance or by coincidence, in fact, I feel that even though a lot of the times we're putting our Bible readings together according to the calendar or the season or whatever it may be, that God was orchestrating behind the scenes. He knew that we would be entering our second month of a global pandemic, he knew that we would be in the book of Ezra this week, and tonight there are two passages of Scripture that I want to call your attention to: the book of Ezra 1 and the Gospel of Matthew 1. Primarily the majority of the time tonight we're gonna find ourselves in Matthew 1:17, but I want to begin in Ezra 1 because it is describing a significant event that is critical to the message that takes place in Matthew 1.

Again, just a reminder that tonight is not new information for the most part, however I want to put a contemporary twist. For 20 years I have been preaching, I have been pleading, I have been begging with people that what we're about to study tonight that we were on the forefront of, we were on the fringe of, that we were just around the corner from walking through and tonight we're gonna address the question: is it possible that no longer we're on the outside about to walk into, are we possibly in the midst of what the

Bible's been trying to teach us for thousands of years? And so tonight I want to entitle the message "Is This the Last Generation?"

Now I know that seems somewhat ominous just to hear it quoted but we're going to address that subject matter particularly from Matthew 1:17 in a moment, but I want to begin tonight in the book of Ezra. Now just a little reminder because this has everything to do with Matthew 1, the Israelites have been held captive in what we know as Babylon, the totality of their captivity will be for 70 years. They're about to make their way back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, rebuild the wall, and most importantly reestablish the worship of the one true God in the temple on the Temple Mount. I'm gonna read the beginning part of Ezra 1, then we're gonna go into Matthew 1 and see how this story that's a part of our regular Bible reading plan that we're walking through has everything to do not just with the totality of history but what you and I are walking through today.

Ezra 1, beginning in verse 1.

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, 2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Now as we make our way to Matthew 1, one of the most ominous and I believe one of the most strategic verses in all of the Bible tucked there in the genealogy of Jesus Christ among all of the begats and so-and-so begat so-and-so, we find this verse that is most unusual but I think most telling about the days that we're walking through today. It says in verse 17 of chapter 1 of Matthew,

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Now what does Ezra 1 have to do with that? It's that last statement or that last sentence, "from the carrying away of Babylon unto Christ." When the Israelites were allowed to go back to the homeland, when Cyrus made that declaration, it was the initiation of that last clause and in just a few moments we're gonna focus on those three clauses in Matthew 1:17 and see how they strategically apply to you and I's lives today.

Before we deal with those specific historical picture there and its present day possibility and reality, I want to begin with some necessary definitions. In fact, if we're gonna talk about generations or we're gonna talk about time and history and prophecy, we've got to kind of unpack some things from the very beginning. Let's talk about the difference between time and history. Time as we know it is linear. In other words, we have the past, we have the present, we have the future. One of the things that we say about time is that you cannot get it back. That's why we call today the present, it is a gift by God to us. You cannot go back in time. You cannot fast forward in time. It is absolutely linear. In fact, one of the ways that humanity gets itself in trouble is either trying to relive the "old days" or trying to get ahead of itself too far in the future. So time as you and I know it, how we measure it, not with just seconds, minutes, hours and days, is linear. It doesn't matter at what time period you've lived, it doesn't matter where you have lived, time as we know it is always a linear function.

Now history is much different. History is actually cyclical. In fact, as you look through the stories of humanity, as you look back at the decisions that humanity has made, the actions that we have taken, one of the things that you will discover is that history always repeats itself. In fact, there are some famous statements that have been attributed to so many people such as that one thing that people do not learn from history is to learn from history; that history is doomed to repeat itself to those who do not learn from it. As you and I look back tonight on the history of the Israelites from Scripture, even the history of our own culture, our own community and our own context, one of the things that we're going to discover is that you and I whether we like it or not, whether we desire it to happen or not, are necessarily and naturally going to repeat the steps of history. We cannot help ourselves but to be cyclical in nature, and as you're about to see, what the Israelites did and what you and I do, is we fail to learn from history, we fail to look back and see how they responded and in what manner they responded, and so naturally unfortunately we end up walking in the same steps as they did and the one thing we don't learn from history is to learn from it.

So time is linear, history is cyclical, but here in Matthew 1 it talked about the generations, these 14 generations, and one specifically about the carrying away to Babylon is that passage that we read in Ezra 1. When the Bible speaks of a generation, it actually does so in two different ways. Now in our culture today when we speak about a specific generation and we'll address this more in just a moment, we typically are thinking in terms of a chronological generation.

Well, Jesus addressed this, in fact, in Matthew 24, the famous Olivet Discourse days before his crucifixion, Jesus is on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple Mount, the disciples come to him with some very strategic questions such as when will it be torn down, what Jesus was saying was gonna happen; when would the end of the world take place. He begins to share that there would be false christs, there would be wars and rumors of wars, this is the beginning of sorrows. He even talks about the famous abomination of desolation from the prophet Daniel. But he teaches there in Matthew 24 very strategically the first section I believe answers the first question the disciples asked,

and the second section the second question. In the midst thereof in the middle, Jesus shares a parable, a parable of the fig tree. Now as you walk through the Old Testament, one of the things that you'll discover is the fig tree more often than not is representative of the people, the entity that we know as Israel. What does Jesus say? He says, "When the fig tree begins to bud," in other words when the leaves establish, that which had been dormant for years when it begins to become alive again, I want you to hear what Jesus says in Matthew 24. He says, "This is the last generation."

Now tonight's not a message about 1948 and Israel coming back to their homeland, but what I want you to hear is Jesus Christ utilized this word "generation" in a chronological sense. He was essentially saying when you begin to see these things happen, you can set your watch, the countdown has begun and eventually it will hit what we know as zero. But Jesus also used the word "generation" in what I would call a philosophical sense, in other words, he wasn't meaning an exact timeframe from this point to another point but how people think, how people operate, how they process the things of life.

Allow me to illustrate. In the Gospel of Matthew 12, Jesus as he so often was, was surrounded by those who, shall we say, were overly critical. You know, he had healed miraculously those that were lame and physically sick, he had multiplied food, he had walked on water, think about all of the miracles that Jesus Christ even did before the very eyes of his critics. There in Matthew 12, if you'll remember they gathered around him in a large crowd. In a large crowd. It wouldn't have just been those elite scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, it would have been the masses, it would have involved young people, what we might call senior adults, medium adults, everybody in between, and they came to Jesus and they said, "Jesus, we seek a sign." Now that's critical particularly in the context of the Old Testament, the Scriptures that these individuals would have been familiar with. The rainbow in the sky after Noah's flood was a sign. The fleece of Gideon being dry when the ground is wet is a sign. Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin would give birth to the Messiah, that is a sign. It is supernatural, from God and cannot be duplicated by man. In other words, they said, "Alright, Jesus, we want you to do something that unquestionably shows us that you are the promised one that the prophecies foretold of."

Remember what Jesus said? He said, "Fine, you want a sign, I'll give you one." He says, "As Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so the Son of Man," he was speaking of himself, "will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." Here's what Jesus was saying, "You want a sign? Walking on water is not gonna do it, healing the lame is not gonna do it, multiplying the food. There is gonna come a day where you put me in a grave, you're gonna cover it with a stone and three days later I'm gonna raise from the dead." Now if that's not a sign, I don't know what is. What's important is what Jesus communicated about their desire for a sign. Remember what he said? He said, "An adulterous generation seeks after a sign." Jesus wasn't addressing their chronological age, he wasn't addressing just those that were a little bit older or a little bit younger, he was addressing the masses who came with a philosophy not matter what their age was, that surely there had to be something else. Why is this so critical to our study tonight? Because as we address the issue is this the last generation we have to understand

that biblically from the mouth of Jesus that can be addressed both chronologically as well as philosophically.

Now back to Matthew 1 of which Ezra 1 is a strategic part thereof. It says there that were 14 generations from Abraham to David, from David to the carrying away 14 generations, and from the carrying away unto Christ 14 generations. If you go back in your Old Testament and you've got time now that you're walking through a global pandemic and many of you are still sheltered at home, you could go back and you could trace the lineage of all of the individuals between said Person A and B and here's what you will discover, that none of those three strata of timeframes match up. They're all a different chronological time period and it's very difficult to reconcile it. This is what's critical to our understanding tonight, that in the Bible, yes, there are strict chronological generations but particularly in your Old Testament, particularly here in Matthew 1:17, we see that the philosophical generations more often than not overlay or overlap the chronological.

Allow me to illustrate. Let's just say use hypothetically one of the kings of Israel, one of the leaders of Israel, and let's say that this said leader walks in the way of the Lord. His son walks in the way of the Lord. His grandson walks in the way of the Lord. But his great grandson decides to leave the things of the one true God, build the high places and bring in the idols. Chronologically it was four generations, philosophically that great grandson is actually the second generation because his way of thinking was contrary to the previous three chronological generations.

Now I know that's a whole lot of information but essentially what it is saying there for you and I today, as we look back into Matthew 1, the thing that we discover is that as God was moving throughout the history of the Israelite people, from Abraham being called out from the Ur of Chaldees unto the time that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and that famous veil was torn in half, all of their history is segmented or divided into these three sections of history that are designated as having 14 generations each, and that's going to be one of those things as we study tonight that is not happenstance, it is not coincidental, in fact, I believe it's one of those strategic messages that God gave us in Scripture thousands of years ago that we need to heed tonight.

Now as we take that passage and begin to apply it to the life we're living today, when we ask the question is this in our culture the last generation, I want to address something, an issue, a subject matter, shall we say, a perspective that you will not necessarily find in the reading of your Bible. It's what we call the turnings of a culture or a society. To be honest with you, there have been many authors, most famously two guys by the name of Strauss and Howe a little over 20 years ago that went back into the history books of cultures and societies, it didn't matter if they were Western culture, Eastern culture, didn't matter if it was antiquitous or contemporary, they discovered that every culture, every group of humanity tends to work in cycles of turnings.

Now let's think about that for just a moment. A turning is that which they as a culture become a different entity or remain the same entity on the backside of a crisis. Allow me to work with what we know as the Israelite people then we'll apply it to our lives today.

Before Abraham was called by God to lead who we know as the Jewish people, the patriarchs of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he, like many of us, was a Gentile. The Jewish people did not exist. And so what did the Lord do? He called him. He signified it by the covenant or the sign of circumcision and the Jewish people began. What was it that was undergirding this or what was it that foundation of who they were as a people? It set them apart, it designated them as Jewish people because of the sign of circumcision.

Now notice it says from Abraham to David. That time period from the Ur of the Chaldees until King David desiring to build the temple and not being allowed to do so, the plans being passed on to his son, Solomon, that entire time period, the undergirding, the foundation was that mark of circumcision, but notice it says and from David, that would be Solomon, unto the carrying away. What was it that designated the people of God, what was the foundation for who the Jewish people were in that context? They still circumcised, of course, but it was the temple worship. That was the place where atonement took place. That was the place where sacrifice took place. That is why they would gather at what we know as Passover. It was so critical to who they were.

So from Abraham to David, it was circumcision. From David unto the carrying away unto Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar comes in in 586 BC, it was that first temple. But what happened? The Israelites go into captivity. That's the event that took place right before we read there in Ezra 1. The temple was removed from physical presence. The people were held captive and 70 years later, you guessed it, from the carrying away unto Christ, that second temple was built that most famously is referred to as Herod's temple because as he became a Roman leader, he funded the remodeling of such. So what do we discover is that Israeli history or Jewish history from Abraham to Jesus Christ can be segmented in three stratas of history but each one of them, and here's what is critical, each one of them had a turning, had an event, had something so significant that initiated it that their culture, how they lived life, was completely different on the days after than the days before.

Allow me to illustrate. Before Abraham was the leader of the Jewish people, he was just herding the animals on his father-in-law's property, a Gentile like you and I. Next thing you know, he's the patriarch to the mechanism for the Messiah. Unto David, think about this, longing for a temple, all they have is circumcision, a tabernacle that is mobile at best, and after David when Solomon comes there's now a permanent dwelling place. Do you see the difference? In other words, every time that we have a major turning in a culture's life they go from being one thing to another. What's critical for us to understand tonight is the turning in Abraham's life and the turning in David unto Solomon's life was actually a series of four turnings. In other words, the historians have discovered, the sociologists have discovered that every culture that's had the privilege of existing on planet earth walks through a series of these turnings. There's a time before they were, before they existed, and what we see is over a period of time there are these crises, there are these events that arise where they have to make a very critical decision, do we continue as we began or do we do it different.

Allow me to illustrate with a Jewish story that we know so well from Scripture. Abraham is initiated by God as the patriarch, the leader of the Jewish people. Circumcision will be the means by which they identify themselves until the time of David. You can go back and look not just chronologically but philosophically, about every four generations there was a crisis that came and the Jewish people had a decision to make: do we do it God's way as he called our father Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, or do we do it a different way? And by the time you get to David, no longer is circumcision gonna be the foundation for their existence but the temple. By the time you come back from the Babylonian captivity, it's going to be a different temple on a different spot and what we discover is that every culture, every community of people, this is based even on the secular's observation and, by the way, you say why would you cite a secular source in an environment such as this? I am convinced that humanity's aspiration not only for academic knowledge but for the knowledge of the world around us, we are simply doing our best to somehow, some way catch up with the Bible. I believe that God has given us the seeds of truth in his word long before we ever discovered it, and here in Matthew 1 it says there were 14 generations from Abraham to David, from David to the carrying away 14 generations, from the carrying away to Christ there were 14 generations, but like I said, every time you see one of the stratas of history go from one to the next, it happens on a "fourth turning."

So you and I even in our culture today, and I want to speak to you, I'm primarily addressing those who are in the Western civilization, primarily the North American continent in what we know as the United States of America, you and I are subject to the same historical lesson, the lessons that many societies and many cultures having to walk through over the course of time and, yes, history that repeats itself. Here's the thing that's interesting when it comes to the turning: in between these turnings we see a cycle of four generational thoughts. Now notice I said thoughts. Why? Because some times it's strictly chronological and other times, like I gave you the illustration of the leader and his child, grandchild and great grandchild, it is philosophical. And one of the things that we discover is that after there is this crisis, after Abraham initiates a new people, after Solomon builds a temple, after the Israelites come back after the edict of Cyrus that we just read, there is always a period of a high. There is this time period where everything is wonderful, the people are celebrating, the entity as a whole is celebrating and individuals make themselves subject to the "greater good." Over a period of time a new generation, sometimes chronological, always philosophical, arises out of that disposition and we call that time period an awakening where they decide that everything seems to be going well around them but there's got to be something more, there's got to be something more than just the blessings of everyday life and enjoying life as they know it. So what do they do? They push the envelop. Do we really in the context of the Old Testament, do we really serve the one true God or are these other idols worth entertaining? Is it okay just to be here in the land that God gave us or shall we branch out and see what else is out there on the horizon? An awakening seeks truth somewhere else than that which has been gained on the backside of this "turning." Then that generation produces a generation of unraveling. They see their grandparents sold out to the greater good. They see their parents seeking something new and they begin to cry out that the sky is falling. Somehow, some way we are destined for doom. There is no way we can continue this

way. The sky is falling. Everything is bad. Put your head in the sand and get ready for everything to fall apart. That third generation then produces a fourth generation, we call it the crisis generation. What does that mean? It means that the turning is coming. It means there's an event that is gonna take place that's gonna cause them as a society, as a culture, as a people, to make a very critical important decision: are they going to continue as God had led them or as their society has been doing it from a secular sense, or is it going to look and be different?

Now let me unpack that for the majority of those who are watching and listening tonight from the context that we are most familiar with. I'm gonna go back to the last time that we as a community had what we would call a turning. What was one of those events that was so dramatic and so significant in our culture's history that it caused everything that we know as far as life on a daily basis to change? Well, it's not difficult to look back and say that obviously it would have been that time period that we know as World War II, probably actually beginning with what we know as the Great Depression. When we talk about this crisis or this turning, it doesn't have to be a single event or a single day but it can be a time period that encapsulates an entire "generation."

I want you to think about the days since World War II, at least as far as a generational perspective here in the United States of America. In the days following it was a high, was it not? It was the days of the '50s and the early '60s. In fact, there was a tv show, "Sunday, Monday, happy days. Every day is a happy day." It's the "Leave It To Beaver" days. It's the "Father Knows Best" days. It was a time period that was marked, generally speaking, as that which was wonderful and fruitful and safe and prosperous.

But what came after that? The awakening. We know it as the '60s and the '70s, a time of rebellion, a time where if we don't like the leadership, we will simply eliminate those who are in those capacities, a time of upheaval. A time of Woodstock, a time that I think musically if we look at it, you have here the British Invasion, you have whom we know as the Rolling Stones, their great declaration, "I can't get no satisfaction." But I think it was in 1971, a guy by the name of Don McLean who probably said it best, "Bye, bye, Miss American Pie. I drove my Chevy to the levy but the levy was dry." In other words, there was an entire generation that rose up, they looked at their parents basking in the greatness of victory of World War II and said surely there's got to be something else. They sought other places to go. They sought other things to ingest in their body, experience to have. In other words, surely there's something more than just a peaceful, simple existence.

Then there came what we know as the unraveling. Now this is where it gets a little personal. This is my generation as far as the context from World War II. My generation is the generation who rose up and said the sky is falling. We were latchkey kids left to ourselves to fend for ourselves and the music of our day really I guess exemplified this. If you look at the music from my generation, the overwhelming majority of it is identified as grunge music. It came from Seattle where it rains every day and everybody's depressed and talking about the problems of life. What do we discover? That my generation as a whole looks at their parents' generation and says, "You are wasting your time seeking

something that's not gonna satisfy." We look at our grandparents' generation and say, "Get your head out of the sand, there are some real problems in life." And we look up and say, "The sky is falling."

But you know and I know as well that my generation isn't the youngest on planet earth or in our culture or society, there's a generation that we're gonna address in just a moment that is coming after us. Historically speaking, it is that generation that's in the throes of education today, it's that generation who's walking through the difficulties of maturing today that will find themselves in the same position as those young people during World War II, and the decision will be made are they going to put their lives on the line for that which was started long ago, or are we going to, shall we say, morph into something completely different?

Allow me to go back a little bit in time and just give you a little bit more information of how this works out in our life today and I promise this has everything to do with Matthew 1 and Ezra 1. Let's go back to the beginning of at least our culture. Let's talk about the turnings for just a moment. If you were to go back to the year 1775, we were all British, were we not? We were colonies of the Brits. We had not yet declared our independence. The shot heard around the world had not taken place. But it was during those tumultuous days of the late 1770s that a group of people rose up and they threw the tea into the harbor at Boston. They wrote a Declaration of Independence and they "fought for their liberties." I don't believe they had any idea of how much on the cusp of history that they were because by the time you get to 1777, we now have an America where as two years before we were the colonies of Britain.

This is so important for us to understand because every time we talk about a turning, every time we talk about one of these events that happens every fourth generation, what we know as our existence, what we know as our lifestyles, what we know as our way of thinking and living life is now on trial. They could have continued to live in taxation without representation, they could have continued to pay the high tariffs of the tea that was being brought across the sea, they could have said it's just not worth it, let's be subjects to the king. But what did they do? They established, they initiated a new culture, a new country, a new way of thinking. In other words, when you go back to the late 18th century, what you and I now collectively know as the United States of America was initiated like all cultures with a turning, with a crisis, with a time period where we must make a decision are we going to continue as we were or are we going to be something unique, new and different, and that is where you and I from a perspective of generations and tonight's message begin as a culture. That was the first turning, if you allow me say, of our culture.

What happened in the days thereafter? Just what I addressed, there was a time of high and of celebration, an establishing of who we were as a people. There was an awakening. There was a rebellion. There was an unraveling. And yes, you guessed it, within 100 years another crisis took place. We as a culture, we're at a boiling point. What would we do, how would we go forward? It's an event that you and I know best as the Civil War. It would fight not only state against state, family against family, brother against brother,

and the decision was going to be made during that generation would we continue as a United States of America or would we be the divided states of America.

Do you see how this unfolds? Do you see how these turnings are events, they are processes in life where we must critically think about who we are, where we're going, and what are we willing to risk to go forward. The Revolution was our first turning. What we know as the Civil War was our second turning. And yes, you can guess it, there was a high, there was an awakening, an unraveling and then the next crisis hit. I think the birth pangs of that crisis is that fateful day in 1929 of the Great Depression beginning but it led us into what we call World War II. Interesting that Tom Brokaw and others have called those young men who fought during those days as the "greatest generation." Why? Because they were willing to give their lives for a way of life, a way of thinking, a philosophy of life that was worth dying for. Again, we had a decision to make, will we continue in the same vein that we've been walking through all these years or we will allow ourselves to be something different.

Now you think back to the Civil War, if it had ended differently it would have been a much different picture. If World War II had ended differently it would have been a different picture. Well, today you and I find ourselves on the cusp or maybe even in the midst of history. For the last 20 years I have been teaching, I have been preaching that we find ourselves walking on the edge of history. It is that time, yes, once again where we find ourselves at a crisis, a critical moment. History tells us and has been telling us for 20 years that another event, another situation, another crisis was coming that will determine who we will be as a community, who we will be as a culture, and who we will be as a country. You see, we've had the high after World War II, we've had the awakening, we've had the unraveling, the big question is are we now "walking through that crisis"?

Now I will confess to you that over the last 20 years I've spoken this message countless times in a variety of manners, and I remember when I first was made privy to this information and we began to look at events such as 9/11. I mean, that was an incredible event. In fact, it's easy to compare the event of 9/11 to World War II. Why? Invasion of Pearl Harbor and what we know as the terroristic attacks of 9/11, and we began to wonder will this change everything? And I think as we look back 20/20 of hindsight, it changed how we travel, it changed how we do security, it changed how we do some things but as a whole I think we'd all have to agree that 9/11 though a tragic event in our country's history did not change life as we know it. It did not alter life as we know it. It changed some things but not everything.

A few years pass and the great financial crisis, the great recession of '07 and '08 occurred and there were many that raised their antennas because, understand, historically speaking we're on the edge of history. There is an event, there is a crisis that will occur much like World War II, the Civil War and the Revolution that we must as a culture respond to. There we had all kinds of different legislations come out and ways of banking and financing and buying houses and we didn't know what it would look like on the backside, and today there's a lot of regulations. When we go to get a mortgage for our home, there's

a lot of rules that have been put in place of how we handle our finances but I think as a whole you don't look back to '07-'08 and say, "Well, man, that changed everything."

So what has this caused? It has caused speculation. It has caused us to look back and say, "Well, maybe just maybe this whole 14 generations, this whole tuning thing, maybe there's really not a whole lot there." And then the last 90 days occurred. You and I are walking through unprecedented days. Now before you say, "Well, it'll be like 9/11, we'll just look back and say it was a blip on the radar. Ah, just like the financial crisis, get us down the road, it won't be that big a deal." Now remember historically speaking we repeat history, do we not? We find ourselves not only chronologically but philosophically right at the point at which something should be taking place in our culture that causes us to respond, that we either continue to be who we were or we cease to be what we were.

Today we're walking through a global pandemic. It's not the first pandemic that humanity has walked through or even our own country or culture, but this one is a little unique because today you and I as pictured by this empty room, we are doing and living life differently than any of us ever can remember, and I don't want to belabor the point tonight and I don't want to emphatically state that this is the crisis of the fourth turning, but allow me to use these simple observations as illustration. They canceled the Little League World Series this week. You say, "Well, why is that such a big deal?" Can you guess the last time that happened? That's right, the time period of World War II. We have canceled sporting events, we have canceled celebrations, we have canceled all kinds of things in our culture and every time something else cancels, what do they say? This is the first time since World War II and the '40s that we have done this. Here's what's amazing: history is unveiling itself before our eyes, we as a culture are responding the exact same way we did as the last turning that we walked through. The only difference is we have not been invaded by planes and bombs, we've been invaded by disease and pestilence. And so the question we must ask ourselves is as we stand at the point of this crisis, as we stand at this part or time in history is are we now in the "last final generation" as you and I know it in the context of which we know it?

Well, that begs an important question. I want to go back to Matthew 1:17 and I want to focus on the 14s for just a moment. Now remember, don't look at these strictly as a chronological perspective, we also have to address the philosophical aspect thereof. I mentioned the fact that the dates don't line up perfectly but allow me to repeat in brief what we see. From Abraham to David, it was circumcision. That was the undergirding there and it was 14 generations from when it was initiated until it was no longer possessing the significance that it had previously. From David or the building of the temple with Solomon unto the carrying away unto Babylon were 14 generations. That temple was initiated at the first generations and it ceased to be on the 14th. From the carrying away or coming back as we just read in Ezra 1 unto the time of Christ where that veil was torn was 14 generations. And so what is interesting and significant if we look at it from just a strict Jewish perspective, Old Testament perspective, we see that as I illustrated, it is not a strict chronology of generations, it is more a mix of the chronology and the philosophy of generations, and so time periods varied but God said it was 14 generations. In other words, just as Strauss and Howe and others have observed and have

tried to teach us for a little over 20 years, every culture, every group starts on the first turning, there's a cycle of generations and on the fourth turning, the fourth one, that fourth major event, we always discover that that is the generation and that is the time where the most important decisions must be made and the actions are most critical. According to the word of God, you guessed it, when they went from David to Solomon, that was the 14th generation, when they went into Babylon it was the 14th generation, and when Jesus Christ and he rose from the dead and the veil was torn, it was the 14th generation.

What I'm about to share with you is not information from my own personal opinion, you can go and look up the scholars who know a whole lot more than I do, but according to what they say, from the time period in which the American Revolution, the first turning took place unto today, we discover that what we know as the X generation, that's me, the unravelers, okay, we are the 13th generation and our children would be the 14th generation. Now it's at this point where we've got to kind of take a step back and view the culture that we live in because that would mean that the 14th generation would be the Millennials. Now I know what some of you are thinking, "Well, I thought you said it's not always chronological, oftentimes it's philosophical?" Even those from a secular perspective state that the American culture is so unique, unlike cultures in the East where they'll walk in the ways of their dads and granddads just because they're supposed to. What do we do? We become teenagers and we rebel against everybody, particularly our parents. That's just kind of the independent American way and that's what we've been doing for years, that's what we continue to do.

So the generation that you and I know or have labeled as the Millennial generation is technically the 14th generation and so it has caused some, in fact, even myself to look back at 20 years of preaching this message, 20 years of saying we are on the cusp of history, 20 years of saying, guys, we're about to walk through something significant, it's going to happen, and then chronologically a new generation has arisen, oftentimes we call it the Z generation. What's interesting is those Z's as we call them oftentimes, in fact, they're in my own home, are actually the biological children of the X generation, and here's what I want to address, something that's happening in our culture today that we have not seen happen up until this point. Thanks to the marvels of technology and medicinal care and sanitation, we now have lifespans greater than we could ever imagine. I know we're concerned about a global pandemic and what that may mean for our future of health but did you know back in the year 1900 just 120 years ago, the average American male had a life expectancy of less than 50 years, and today when somebody dies before they reach age 70, we claim that their life was snuffed out before its time. We now have the ability thanks to the marvel of medicine to elongate our lives, to make our health greater for longer days.

You say, "Why is that significant? Why is that important?" Because when you go back to that "14th generation," when you go back to that point of that fourth turning where everything is gonna come to a cultural historical climax, so to speak, it would be easy to say, "Well, those that are in college today, those that are in high school today, they're really the 15th generation." Here's the thing that makes it so unique, is that what we know

as the Millennials and what we know as the Z generation are both the byproducts of the 13th generation. In other words, if you were to go and look at the Millennials today, they're entering the workforce, they're the young adults, they're the young movers and the shakers, their parents are my generation. You go and look at those that are in middle school and high school today, guess what? Their parents primarily are a part of my generation. I know people that are my age that have students in college and kids in preschool. Because of the ability to have children later in life and health care the way that we do, we are actually the first generation, my generation, the 13th generation, we are the first generation in the history of our culture to actually birth two consecutive generations; the 14th and what we might call the 15th generation, generation Z, are both the children of the 13th generation. If we were to look at this from a perspective of tonight's study, even though chronologically we would hit the 15th with the Z's, we're actually in the 14th because they're still the children of the 13th. It's almost as if that our cultural family tree has not necessarily split, so to speak, but it has multiplied itself.

Now that being said, I want to go back to Matthew 1. How many generations? The 14th generation. How many turnings? Four turnings in each of those scenarios and situations. It's there in the Old Testament history. You and I today are walking not up to history, it's very possible that you and I are walking through history. What that means for you and I today is simply this: historically speaking we are at the point in which a crisis should take place that allows us as a culture to make a very important decision, do we or do we not fight or continue for that which has been a staple of who we are for so many years and in particular the last three turnings, or do we allow ourselves to become like every other culture?

You say, "What do you mean 'every other culture'?" What took place here in Matthew 1 is not unique to the Jewish culture of the Old Testament, in fact, even the secular academicians will tell you that even though societies and cultures go on long after the significance thereof, that time period where they were heightened as a civilization and heightened as a culture was initiated and primarily ended on one of these turnings. It started at the first turning, ended at the fourth. In other words, what you and I discover by looking at history of civilizations and cultures is this, that there has never been a "culture," even the Jewish culture of the Old Testament that went past that fourth turning, that 14th generation. You and I right now are potentially walking through the history that will be written in the books in the days to come.

I don't know if looking back in 5, 10, 15 years we're gonna see this global pandemic as that crisis critical event. There were many of us that looked at 9/11 and thought it had the possibility. We looked at the great, what we might call financial recession of '07 and '08 and thought that could potentially be, but it came and went. It was a blip on the radar. It changed some things but it wasn't what today is. You understand we're doing things today we haven't done since World War II. We're canceling events we haven't canceled since World War II. We're responding today as not just a unique culture but as a global society as if we are walking through a major historical crisis.

So what does that mean for us? Well, tonight I want to close with something that the history books are never going to tell you. I want to walk back through our history, these famous turnings, and I want to share with you what occurred before these turnings that we rarely if ever hear in the secular classroom and even in the pulpits of America. The thing that many of us don't realize is we go through that "Revolution" time period, we got through that Civil War, we got through that World War II era because of how the people of our culture responded to God in the days before.

Allow me to illustrate. Before what we know as the American Revolution that was initiated in 1776, across our land there was a time period that has been referred to even by secular historians as the First Great Awakening. It began in the middle colonies, worked its way to the northern, eventually to the southern colonies. It was such a movement of God that there were so many men of God being called out to preach the word of God that we established seminaries for them to be trained to take the word of God to every nation on planet earth. It's this time period where the birth pangs of the great missionary movement were established. I want you to think about universities today that we consider the Ivy League. Dartmouth University was actually started as a seminary to train pastors to reach the Native American population. Brown University was started as a Baptist seminary to train pastors in waiting. The most prestigious schools of our land today, the overwhelming majority of them were started during the First Great Awakening not to create academicians who would question the validity of Scripture, but to train preachers who would teach the message of Scripture. An incredible time period in the history of our country that lay a foundation, and as we walked through what we know today as the Revolution, there was a foundation, there was an undergirding, there had been a revival, there had been an awakening. The overwhelming majority of those who were a part of the American culture had had some type of experience and relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's incredible to go back and look at what happened in those days before. We call it the First Great Awakening, but as I shared with you earlier, everything came, there was the high, the awakening, the unraveling, then we found ourselves on the doorstep of another crisis. In fact, we know the Civil War as being initiated in 1860 but it was in the years before that that would change everything. There was an event that took place in our culture's life that very few people ever talk about or address, it's called the Layman's Prayer Revival. It was initiated because there was a man who was a businessman who decided, his name was Lanphier, he decided to go to New York City and he decided to be a missionary to a city that he saw had become carnal and secularist and anti-God, and the way that he did it is he advertised that on the top floor, the third floor of the old Dutch Reformed Church, he said one day at noon there would be a prayer meeting. He just put fliers up around town. That day at noon, he gathered there, the year was 1857. He was all by himself for about 40 minutes. Finally some others made their way in and they made the decision not only to pray that day but to come back the next day and to continue to pray. It didn't take long that this movement spread about the people of God and over the course from 1857 to 1859 not only did these prayer meetings move to all the major cities of America, Philadelphia, Boston, New York, can you imagine all the places of commerce ceasing operation for one hour not to have lunch but to have prayer. In fact,

we look back on some of the great stories of the Layman's Prayer Revival, you think about when you've got thousands of people gathered in one place for one hour, you can't do what we call "prayer requests," but there would be people that would slip the leaders notes and such and they would raise up a piece of paper and say, "This woman says, 'My husband is lost. Pray for his salvation.'" And we have records of dozens of men raising their hands saying, "That's me. Pray for me." Did you know that over the course of two years over 1 ½ million Americans came to know Jesus Christ as their person Lord and Savior during what we call the Layman's Prayer Revival? Let me equate that to America today. That would be like the entire population of the state of Texas getting saved in two years. It would change everything because it wasn't just in one state, it was in all of the states of those days.

The Civil War was a tragic event on all scales and on all levels, but did you know if you go back and you read the journals of those who walked through that experience, both the North and the South had their own chaplains. They had men at night, it was a different way of fighting, as soon as dusk would appear and the sun would go down, they would go out and retrieve the injured and the dead, even among themselves bullets were not fired, fighting did not take place, they'd make their way back to the camps. Do you know we have stories of Confederate chaplains being asked by Union troops to come lead Bible studies at night and the reverse, by the way. We have stories of Union chaplains being asked by the Confederate to come cross lines and lead them in a Bible study at night. You say, "How did that happen?" It's easy, there was this major movement of God for two years before this event took place.

Before the Revolution we had the First Great Awakening, before the Civil War we had the Layman's Prayer Revival. What about World War II? What about the Great Depression? What about that era? Well, I call it the Tent Revival Movement. In fact, you go back in "The Grapes of Wrath," the great John Steinbeck book, one of the very first scenes is them traveling in the midst of the Dust Bowl across the country, and if you'll notice in that book, every city that they come across there is a tent, there is a place set up that every evening there would be musicians there, there would be a preacher there, they would give people the opportunity to hear the word of God and to respond to salvation through Jesus Christ. It was an incredible, not really a Layman's Prayer Revival like the 1800s but it was a movement of the people of God in every city no matter how big or how small.

One of the great stories that came out of that Tent Revival Movement comes out of a place that I spent a little over eight years of my life, my wife grew up, Waco, Texas. The First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas. They had a tent set up there in town and in the business meetings of their church there in the 1920s, listen to this, it actually says, this is in the minutes of their business meeting, "There are no known prostitutes left in the city." You say, "How did we get through World War II? How did we get through all that?" I'll tell you why, because in the years leading up to it there was a major move of God that laid a foundation for those who would work in the factories, those who would fly the planes, those who would make the decisions.

Do you see a trend here? In the past of our history, every time we walked through a crisis, every time we walked through one of those periods of time that was so critical to who we were, in the days preceding there was a major move of God, there was a revival, there was an awakening. For 20 years I have been begging, pleading, imploring people that we're on the edge of history and if we don't see revival, if we don't see an awakening, and by the way, I'm not talking about one church here and one group there, I'm talking about First Great Awakening, Layman's Prayer Revival, Tent Revival Movement, I mean major stuff, if we don't see it, then we're gonna have to walk through our fourth turning, the most critical turning according to the historians and the sociologists, without the foundation that had been laid in previous ones.

Ladies and gentlemen, if what we're walking through today is the crisis event, if this is that which will change our culture and society from these days forward to never be the same, you do understand that after 1776 it wasn't the same as being a colony, after the Civil War it was different than the 1850s, the 1950s dramatically different than the 1920s, it changes everything, that if this is that event, if this is that crisis that we're canceling things for since World War II, then this will mean that it will be the very first time that we as a culture have walked through a crisis without experiencing a revival or an awakening in the days preceding. Now again, allow me to remind you, we will not know until the history books have been written if this is the event, if this is the crisis, but after 20 years of preaching and proclaiming what it would look like and how it would impact our culture, it's beginning to look a little suspect. We're doing things differently. The last time we did these things was back in that third turning known as World War II.

What does that mean for you and I? It means the revival didn't come. It means the awakening didn't take place. That means that you and I are now gonna walk through, you got it, uncharted territory. How many times have you heard that in the last two months, that this is uncharted territory, uncharted waters, we've never had to walk through a global pandemic of this magnitude before? Those were trite comments that may now have very serious consequences. One of the reasons that I think Ezra 1 is so important to our study tonight, it doesn't address the 14 generations, it doesn't talk about the stratas of history, but I want you to think about where the people of God had been for 70 years. They had been captives of Babylon that had been transferred to obviously the Medes and the Persians, and because the people of God, now remember Matthew 1:17, from David to the carrying away, in other words, that 14th generation when the temple was built to the time they were taken captive, then there's the 70 years that they're returning from in Ezra, what did they have to walk through? They had to walk through a time period known as captivity. It was the Babylonian captivity. It was different in Babylon than it was in Jerusalem.

Here's the positive and then we'll go to the negative. God still brought them prophets. God still spoke to them through Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel. God still raised up mighty men of God like Ezra and Nehemiah, and mighty women like Esther. In other words, God did not cease to move and operate in their lives but they were having to live their faith in a very different and distinct environment. They no longer had the temple to

worship in. Do you find the fact I'm in an empty room right now coincidental? We no longer have what we had.

Now I know I hear it every day, "Oh, when are we gonna go back to the 'normal'?" I got news, folks, we may never go back to normal. We may now be entering contemporary Babylon for America today. We, the people of faith, just like the Israelites, we did not seek God's face, we did not turn from our sins, we did not pray that he would heal us in our land, and we may be getting what they got all the way back in the Bible. Babylon. God will not cease to speak through his prophets, he will not cease to speak through his word, he will still raise up men and women of faith, he will still allow us to have a vibrant relationship with him, the problem is Babylon looks a whole lot different than Jerusalem. Ezekiel's message was a whole lot different than Isaiah's. If what we're walking through right now is what it historically could be, then the answer to the question is this the last generation, the answer is it is the last time that we potentially could display, proclaim and live our faith as we have been doing for an enormous amount of time.

I know that we're going long tonight. The room is empty. You can't fall asleep unless you're on a couch. How many times have you heard somebody say in recent days, "I can't believe they're doing this. It's unconstitutional." Of course it is. We're entering new days. We're entering Babylon. How many times have you heard somebody say, "They can't do that to us." They are doing that to us because, guess what, when you enter Babylon, you can no longer say the rules of Jerusalem apply. When you're in captivity, you can no longer say, "But this is how we do it in Jerusalem." People, listen, we are seeing things before our eyes that our forefathers could never imagine. We are walking through the fourth turning. It is the 14th generation. Wake up, people, we now potentially are gonna be walking through the Babylon of our lives and God is in Babylon, he's in the Scriptures, he's in the prophets. He has not left us, he has not forsaken us, but it's going to be different.

It's interesting that Jeremiah was the prophet that was allowed to proclaim before they went into captivity and while they were in captivity. The second book that's attributed to him is the book of Lamentations, the book of weeping. It's where we get our famous hymn, "Great is Thy faithfulness." Hear me clearly, if this event that we're walking through is the catalyst for this crisis, then you and I are walking through historical days that every other culture has failed miserably on. You say, "Oh, but we're Americans." You can say that but this is the first time in any of the turnings that we have not had a major revival or awakening movement preceding what we're about to walk through. If this is what it appears and it might possibly be, then you and I will not cease our relationship with the Lord or even with each other, but I challenge you to go back and look how did the Israelites do it in Babylon? They had to pay close attention to the prophecies of God, the promises of God. Hear me clearly, God will not cease to speak to and through us. He will not cease to be among us, in fact, Jesus said, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you." But we must be honest with ourselves, it appears that our environment, our circumstances and our culture may possibly have changed forever.

I cannot tell you how many people come up to me, call me, email me, text me, say, "When are we gonna get back to normal?" If this is that fourth turning event, normal as you and I know it will never be again. What did they do to the Israelites? They were taken into captivity. They were forced to learn the education of the Chaldeans. But who did God raise up? He raised up Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego. So what does that mean? If this is that last generation, if this is historically what it might possibly be, allow me to share with you what's coming right around the corner. Are you ready? The fiery furnace and the lions' den. That's right, you and I rather than having the comfort of exhibiting our faith may have to go into the fiery furnace for our faith. Rather than having those that are in leadership defending our faith, we may have to be lowered into the lions' den to "exhibit our faith." We have not changed who we are in relationship to God but it is very possible the environment that we live in is going to be very different than days before.

For the last 20 years, I have implored and I have begged and I have pleaded for revival to come so we might establish that which we've established in the past. If this is the crisis, if this is the event, revival did not come, awakening did not come, so I beg of you and implore you that now you and I are relegated to living out our faith in an environment that is very similar to the Israeli captivity of the Babylonians in the 6th century BC. That means that our faith is gonna have to be stronger than it ever was before. We're gonna have to have more fortitude than we ever had before. Remember when they came to Daniel and said, "Are you gonna still pray to your God?" What did he do? He went up on the third floor, he prayed in the middle of the day and they threw him in the lion's den. But whether the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego or the lions' den with Daniel, what did God do? He protected and he preserved his people.

Let me implore you tonight in light of all that we've talked about, all the history and all the possibilities, allow me to beg of you to prepare yourself to be those three men in the fiery furnace. When that statue was built, when the music began everybody bowed to the proverbial state except those young men. They said, "We will not abandon our faith." Now let me be clear: it had nothing to do with gathering in large crowds in a room majestic as this, it had everything to do with if you're gonna challenge my relationship with God, I am not gonna bend, I'm not gonna buck, we hear it in the book of Acts 5:29, "It is better to serve God than man." The Apostle Paul ended up in prison. Shadrach and Meshech ended up in the fiery furnace. Daniel was in the lions' den. And if we are walking through what we potentially might be walking through, we would be foolish not to learn the lessons from these great men of God in the Bible.

It is time for us now to realize that these days are different but the Lord has brought his people through days like this before. I don't look forward to a fiery furnace, I don't look forward to a lions' den, I don't look forward to any of those negative environmental possibilities, but this one thing I do know, that you and I must learn from history. We are potentially walking through history and if this is the last generation as you and I know it from our history, then that means welcome to Babylon, 21st century captivity. We're going to have to exhibit our faith with a greater fervency than ever before, in a different manner than before, and you can yell that it's unconstitutional, you can gripe this is not

the America I know, and you're exactly right, it's not. Why? Because we have just potentially entered the time period where we might cease to be what we've been for so many years.

Tonight I realize it's been a lot of information, I realize I've gone over my time, and I realize it's been somewhat "negative," but that being said let me give you the final words of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Matthew 28. He said, "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. I will be with you to the end of the age." He was as present with the apostles in the Upper Room when the Holy Ghost fell as he was with the Apostle Paul when he was in jail that night the doors were opened. He was as present with them when the miracles took place all across the lands in the book of Acts as he was with the Apostle Paul when he was beaten within an inch of his life. Our circumstances, our situation does not dictate our relationship with God but it is possible that our circumstances and our situation have changed and if they have, that means our fervency is gonna look a little different than it did in days past, it's gonna look a whole lot more like the Israelites in Babylon than it did the Israelites in Jerusalem. It's gonna look a whole lot more like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus than it did the kings and the leaders of the Jewish state.

So you and I today have reason even in the midst of this to keep our head lifted high as Psalm 121 says to the hills, to the Lord who takes care of us and provides for us. You know, Ezekiel was the prophet of that exile. Do you know what the Lord did? Fed him by a raven. He supernaturally took care of him when he could not go and find food for himself. God has got this. He's going to take care of us, it's just going to look different.

I'm gonna close tonight, I know I could go on, but I believe that in our own context the fiery furnace is coming, the lions' den is coming. I don't know exactly what that will look like but I'm gonna implore you to do something, to be standing there with me and to be standing there with others. The day is coming where we're going to be told to bend and bow contrary to our faith, not the gathering in large crowds but the tenets of our faith, and we must in the midst just like the Israelites did, we must stand in the face of that opposition of biblical truth. Don't worry, folks, God's got this, it's just going to look different.

Now as we close tonight, I know that you may have questions, you may have concerns, whatever, feel free to make contact with us, give us a call, give us an email. We'd love the opportunity, I'd love the opportunity to dialogue with you. I miss talking to people. I'd love the opportunity to talk with you. With that being said, as we walk through these days, let me encourage you in these days to stand firm in these days even though they don't look like the days we wish they would.