

Ask Jeff 9.5.18

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Crossroads Ministries

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Alright, ladies and gentleman, if you would, please turn your attention to what we call the Circle of Concerns. If you're brand new here at First Baptist tonight, this is otherwise known as our prayer sheet. If you're a guest with us, if you're visiting with us, you do not have to be a member of us to be a part of our prayer sheet. So, if you have an issue, a concern, a situation that you want us to be praying for, please let us know. We will make sure that it gets on this sheet. We print this about ninety minutes before we gather. So, we try to get it as up to date as possible.

Just call your attention to a few things. As always, you'll see those that are in medical facilities both near and far. You will notice at the bottom, tonight, that there isn't a section for sympathy, which at this time is always good that there's not any loss of family members or friends within our church body. But we also want to recognize those when they occur as well. On the back side you will see those that are serving in a missionary capacity, as well as those that are serving in our military, both near and far. And let me give you an encouragement, as I do every week. Don't throw this away. Hopefully, you'll make this a part of your daily routine of praying for those both near and far, and a part of our church, and outside of our church. And just a reminder, if you want us praying for you or a situation that you know of, please let us know, and we will make it a part of our weekly prayer time.

So, let's pray, and we'll get started.

Lord, as we gather tonight, we recognize that every name on this list represents an opportunity for you to be a part as a healer, Lord, for you to be involved as a restorer, Lord, for you to be one of an encourager. But Lord, we also know that for every name that's on here, there is probably ten that are not. For whatever reason, it has not been vocalized or has not been advertised. And so, Lord, we lift up those that we don't know the specific name. We don't know the specific situation. We just know that there is hurting, and there is pain, and there is a struggle. God, we believe tonight that you're beyond capable of addressing each and every one of those issues. And so, Lord, we just simply come as you say in Hebrews 4, we are coming boldly before your throne, praying for you to address every issue. Lord, for those that are serving in the military and those that are serving on the mission field, when times often get lonely, when distance makes the time move very slow, Lord, we pray for encouragement. We pray for comfort. But more than anything, God, we pray that you would give them the opportunity to see the

fruit of their labor and their sacrifice. And Lord, tonight on our campus, whether it be several hundred in this room or the thousand more that will be scattered across, Lord, whatever the age, whatever the specific assignment, God, we just pray that your word would have the preeminence, and that we would just subject our life to it. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Alright, I do want to welcome you to Wednesday nights here at First Baptist. If this is your first time with us, allow me to kind of give you the lay of the land. Our adult Bible study on Wednesday night typically comes in two sections. And I've used the word typically for a reason, and you'll find out why in just a moment. Typically, we begin with a time of question and answer. This is where you have the opportunity to drive the whole conversation. It's not about what I want or desire to teach, it's what you want to know. What do you want to have answers to. This is your opportunity, whether you're in the room or outside of the room, thanks to the wonderful world of the internet, to submit a question that we will then go to the word of God and see what does the Bible say. That's important. This isn't what does Jeff think. What does First Baptist think. This is what does the Bible say about the specific issue, topic, or passage.

Now, the best way to submit a question is just go to our website. Go to fbcopelika.com/askjeff. When you do so, you can submit your question, and you can put your email address. When you put your email address, you still remain anonymous. It doesn't come up on the database. I have no idea who you are. But when I push the answered button, it will send you a link back to the evening of which it was answered. So, just in the event you were not here for whatever reason, your question was answered, and you had the opportunity to see so.

Now, many of you are saying, "Well, but I have had a question in there for months. Why won't it get answered?" Well, it goes into this little algorithm, and it's not based on chronology, and it's not like it's the next question submitted. They're just completely random. So, you might have submitted a question a year ago that hadn't come up, or you might have submitted one this week, and it does come up tonight. But you have the ability to change that, because you have the ability to raise your hand and say, "I'm willing to lose my anonymity. I'm willing to lose that, because I want to talk about this." Now, when you raise your hand, we know who you are, but you can steer the conversation anyway you want to.

Then, after our Q&A time, we will continue our Bible study, which is very slowly and systematically walking through what we know as the book of Revelation. That is why you have that outline that hopefully you picked up on the way in that we will get to.

Now, I did say the word typically. There are times where your hands go up so frequently and the conversation gets so rambunctious, so to speak, that we take more time with the Q&A. So, tonight is all about you. It is up to you. And I'm going to go to the database, unless one of you wants to raise your hand and say, "Hey, let's just take the train off the trails right now." So, just checking.

Oh no. Yes?

[unintelligible]

Okay. Comes right after nineteen and right before twenty-one.

[unintelligible]

Alright, this is a great question. Now, for those of you who could not hear, because of the faint of voice, he asked a question about Genesis 20. And some of you all may be thinking, “Why Genesis 20? That’s random.” No, it’s not random at all, because if you’re familiar with we are as a church body encouraging you to walk through a three-year reading of the Bible together. That’s available on the website. It’s available on our app. There are paper copies available of such at the welcome center. But as you’re walking through, obviously, this is one of the passages this week. Genesis 20 where Abram, or in this point he is now Abraham, because Isaac, you know, that whole promise is coming to fruition, that he again makes, shall we just say, the error of claiming his wife was his sister.

Now, his wife, technically, was his sister. In fact, he explains it in chapter 20. He says that my wife and I had the same dad, but we have different moms. So, it’s his step-sister, and earlier in chapter 14 he did this when he was down in Egypt with the Pharaoh. Here in chapter 20, he is doing it with Abimelech. Is that the guy’s name? Yeah, Abimelech. Yeah, he’s doing it with Abimelech. And the question was, why didn’t he learn his lesson? The answer is, he is a man. I did not mean that gender exclusive. I meant that humanity, but I will say one thing. Before I address this specific question of why didn’t he learn his lesson, I brought this up the other night with somebody conversing about the same subject matter, and I don’t think they saw the significance that I did, but maybe you all will. How old was Sarah when all this stuff started taking place?

[unintelligible]

Sixty-five, seventy, she was a bonified social security senior adult, right? And Pharaoh liked her. Does that communicate? And then, later on, she is about to give birth in chapter 21 at age ninety, and Abimelech finds her attractive. Do you all not find that interesting to the story?

[unintelligible]

She said, “We don’t know how old Abimelech is.” He might have been one hundred ten, you know. I don’t know. I just find that interesting to the story that all she says is, “I am way past the age to have a child,” and all these rulers are attracted to her. So, that’s a side note, but I find it an interesting note in the story.

The question though is, why did he not learn his lesson? I jokingly said, “Because he was a man.” We have a natural tendency as humanity to do as exactly what the Bible says.

The Bible calls us dogs and pigs. That we return to the slop, do we not? We have a natural gravitation toward sin and debauchery, and to make excuses, and to try to cover ourselves, and try to carve our own path, so to speak. And what happened with Abraham? He didn't just fall into the trap for the second time. I'll say he fell into the trap for the third time. You say, "The third time? This is only the second time with his wife." Well, yes, but in chapter 14 he falls into this trap of not trusting God. That somehow God can't preserve our marriage. The Pharaoh's going to take her. So, I'm going to lie about it. Chapter 16 he falls into the trap God can't provide a child, so I need Hagar to fulfill that. And here in chapter 20, he says, "Well, the same trap has come up. I don't believe God can get me through this again." You see the same issue come up and up and up until chapter 22. In chapter 22 he takes whom we know as Isaac up on the mount. Remember the famous sacrifice? That Isaac says, "Dad, I see the wood. I see the knife. But where is the lamb?" And he says, "Don't worry. The Lord will provide the lamb." He takes him up there.

Two things I want to draw your attention to. One is in Genesis 22. One is in Hebrews 11. In Genesis 22, Abraham makes this statement to his servants. He says, "We will return." Not, "I will return," but "we will return." And in Hebrews chapter 11 there is a commentary that he believed that God was able to raise him from the dead. The reason I allude to that story is I think you're exactly right, sir. He didn't learn his lesson in 14. He obviously didn't learn in 16, and again he makes the same mistake in chapter 20. But he finally gets it in chapter 22. How many times have you all heard me say, "We serve a God of second chances, third chances, fourth chances?" I got one for us. How many other incidents did Abraham have that we don't know of that he struggled with the same doubt, the same struggle, the same fear?

But don't you know that that night when they got home they had an interesting conversation. "Hey buddy, this was round two that you did this." What's also interesting is that the Pharaoh and Abimelech both recognize the power in the movement of God in spite of their lack of knowledge of the one true God. It almost reminds us later in the book of Numbers of Balaam and the donkey. The donkey was able to see God move before the prophet of God. Here you've got this ruler with no, that we know of, knowledge of the things of God who sees God, and recognizes God, and says, "I have sinned" before Abraham himself even acknowledges it.

So, technically, sir, he is a man. Biblically speaking, boy, we fall in the same trap over and over. Have any of you all ever fought, you don't have to raise your hand, have any of you all ever had that conversation with the Lord, "I can't believe I did it again. I can't believe I fell for it again." And I have a funny thing that I bet Sarah came and said, "I cannot believe you did that again." I'm just saying, but I don't know if that helped with chapter 20. But I don't know why he did it other than that we return to the slop is what we do.

Anything else on Genesis 20? Yes ma'am.

[unintelligible]

Well, that's in chapter 22, yes ma'am.

[unintelligible]

For those of you who cannot hear, she is saying that Isaac is the hero. Oh, absolutely. And because what you see in Genesis 22 is you see Isaac going up with his dad Abraham up on the mount. The picture of what we later know the picture of the gospel is what it is. The sacrifice of one of the son, you know. And you're saying, "He's the hero." Because he willingly did it. And what we see in Hebrews 12 is it says that Jesus willingly went to the cross. And so, what you see in Genesis, and by the way, as you all are going through this Bible reading program, though you have almost every aspect of biblical theology in the first eleven chapters, when you get to Abraham and his family, you do understand it's really going to be a focus on his descendants all the way through the book of Malachi. What you see though, in context there, is an abundance of what we call typology. In other words, Isaac's behavior shows us a picture of Jesus. Joseph's life will show us a picture of Jesus. Moses's miracles will show us a picture of Jesus. But understand this, that the type, whether it be Moses, Isaac, whomever it be, the type does not determine Jesus. Jesus fulfills the type.

So, don't read Jesus into Joseph. Does that make any sense? But allow Joseph's life to give you a more graphic picture of Jesus. For example, we know that Jesus, and I'm just going to use the Joseph analogy, we know that Jesus was betrayed by his brethren, right, the Jewish people as a whole. And yet, you see this story with Joseph where his brothers sell him to their enemies and then say, "Let's tell a lie to our dad." Well, you see the enemies of Jesus not only sell him, Judas with thirty pieces of silver, the Jews saying, "Let his blood be on us and everybody else as well." But then when Jesus rose from the dead, what did his enemies do? They spread a lie that the disciples stole the body. And so, it's a picture of, but don't read too much into. But you're right. I think Isaac is the hero in type, because he willingly allowed himself as Jesus allowed himself as well.

So, any other Genesis? I had a feeling Wednesday nights were going to turn into, "Hey, I read this this week. What about this?" nights. But that's okay. Here we go.

Alright, here it says, "I am," and I just read it as it's written. It says, "I am and I have been saved for years. I am active in the church in Bible studies, and the past few years I have started having terrible nightmares, very vivid and usually tragic, and some I would even call satanic. Does Satan get into your dreams? Why would it start now in my sixties? Figured you would want to know."

Okay. But you didn't tell me your name, because you're anonymous, but okay. Thank you, whoever wrote this. But the question is someone who is, really let's look at the precursors here. We've got someone who says that they're a believer. And even though they know they are a believer, they are dealing with attacks from the enemy. So, let's begin there. You do realize that's par for the course, right? Every passage in the New Testament that is written about what we call spiritual warfare is written to believers, not

to the lost world. Specifically, Ephesians 6 beginning in verse 10 where it says, “We don’t fight against flesh and blood, but against principalities, and powers, and rulers of darkness.” We actually wrestle with the devil. We put the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, etc. I mean, that definitive passage says that we are going to wrestle with, we are going to fight with, we are going to struggle with the ways of the enemy.

But more specifically to this, let’s go to 2 Corinthians 10, and I want to show you something, because it involves the concept that was brought up regarding dreams. Now, I am not an expert on dreams, and my name is not Daniel. Hopefully, you all notice the biblical humor there. The one who not only could interpret dreams but also could tell you what your dream was once you forgot what your dream was. But in 2 Corinthians 10 I want to begin in verse 3. I think this is an important passage regarding spiritual warfare in light of the question that was asked regarding dreams, not only them being vivid but almost of a satanic almost spiritual warfare nature.

Verse 3. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.” In other words, this passage says that the warfare that we are fighting is not physical. It is spiritual in nature. We recognize that. But it says that our weapons of our warfare, and which, by the way, you realize in Ephesians 6 there is only one offensive weapon or offensive. Do you know what it is? This. That’s it. It says, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” So, it is of my biblical opinion that the only way to pull down these strongholds and these imaginations is with the word of God. That’s it. Every time Jesus is tempted, what does he say? “It is written.”

Now, the question said, “But what about in my dreams?” You know, that’s one of those, alright, let me give you some advice. I got this advice years ago, and I do my best to adhere to it every single night. Okay? I go to bed either reading or listening to the word of God, or to a Bible study, or to a sermon every night. Every single night. I want the last thing that I hear to be based on the word of God. Now, I don’t remember, now watch it happen tonight, I don’t remember the last time I had a dream that’s described such as this. Because my last thoughts, my last concepts, my last imaginations are based on the word of God. And I’m going to be honest with you. You all do this on Sunday morning. Sermons are a great way to go to sleep. It is! I’ve put myself to sleep. You’re saying “Well, how?” Well, because I’ve listened to a recording of me. I can put myself to sleep. It’s easy.

Now, if you’re really struggling, I mean, you’re really struggling, there are some really boring preachers out there. And they’ve got their sermons recorded, and if you listen to them at night, you will go to sleep. I promise you. You say, “Well, I’m really struggling.” Go to the book of Numbers. Push play. I promise you. You won’t even get to the prophet Balaam before you go to sleep. I’m telling you, I listen to the word of God and or

sermons every night when I go to bed. When I put it on the Bible, it doesn't matter what passage I start in, I'm usually asleep within ten minutes. But you know, the funny thing is those words are still playing, right? And typically, in the middle of the night I wake up and I'm three books over. And I pull it all out and all that kind of stuff.

But the reason that I bring that up is if you personally are experiencing spiritual warfare, the only way to address it is through prayer and scripture. That's it. But when you're asleep, and you're in, what we would call, an unconscious state, you need the word of God to be present, even if you're not conscious with it. So, let me encourage you. Make it the last thing you read when you go to bed and the first thing you read when you wake up in the morning. I got that advice years ago, and it serves me well.

Now, hear me clearly. You may say, "Well, I've been trying that, or I did try that, and it didn't work for me." Well, that's okay, because what did Jesus say in Matthew 17? Some of these only come out by what? Prayer and fasting. And so, just we'll kind of go through here, number one, pray about it. Quote scripture about it. Make yourself a part of scripture. Make it a part of your life. And Third, last but not least, Jesus gave us a prescription. Prayer and fasting. And just commit yourself to it to address that specific issue, because one of the problems is once we go to sleep, there are those thoughts and things that we've seen and that we've heard that sometimes get brought up in our minds and I want the last thing on my mind the word of God. End of story. Even if it's the book of Numbers.

I tell you what will scare you though. And I don't know if you've ever done this. Is you go to sleep like in Ecclesiastes and wake up in Ezekiel. That's weird stuff. Because you thought you were hearing about the wisdom of Solomon, and you wake up, and all of a sudden there is a cherubim with all these wheels and eyes around it. That's kind of scary stuff. But nonetheless, that's what I do every single night. That's what I do.

Anybody on that issue, concepts, issues, ideas? We're good? Thank you for whoever did. I want to real quick. I got to push the right button here.

Alright, it says, interesting, "Can you speak on the subject of near-death experiences. Is this what Paul was talking about in 2 Corinthians 12?" Okay, 2 Corinthians 12, which is only one page over in my Bible. Talk about NDE's. That's the formal acronym for near death experiences. Let me share with you. I am not, or was not, a biology major. I am not a medical doctor. I am not a psychologist. But we are going to go to what the Bible says in regards to this particular issue.

Chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians verse 1. It says, "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven." I'm going to stop there for just a moment. When it says third heaven, don't think like some groups think out there. When it speaks of the third heaven, there is the heaven that the birds fly in, the heaven that the stars are in, and the heaven that the throne room of God is in. So, when he

says I was caught up to the third heaven, please understand, he is saying, “I am in the throne room of God.”

Alright, so, verse 3. “And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. or though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

Now, this passage, beginning in verse 3, talks about this famous thorn in the flesh. This issue that Paul deal with that three times he begged the Lord to remove from him, and he did not. But it begins by him saying, “I don’t know if I was in the body or out of the body.” In other words, the thing that we’re able to do with this passage, we don’t know if it was a dream. We don’t know if it was a trance. We don’t know if it was one of the three times that he was stoned and left for dead. And they literally thought he was dead, and they drug him out to bury him. It doesn’t give us the specifics. But when we speak today of what is called a near death experience, there are individuals, many of them have written books, they’ve written articles, they’ve shared their stories, about how they flatlined, so to speak. They had a medically pronounced death, but then there was a medically pronounced resuscitation. Notice I did not say resurrection. Resurrection is to be raised to never die again. Resuscitation is to be raised to again die later at some point in life. So, they are resuscitated. And there are all kinds of stories out there and all kinds of issues involved with this. But let me just address a couple of the ones from a biblical perspective.

Number one. Almost everybody who has a “near death experience” says that they saw a bright shining light. Almost every one of them. Almost every medical doctor will tell you that one of the last things to shut down are your oculars, is your eyes. And everything that is in the room, as far as vision, begins to get focused and focused and focused. You say, “Why is that important?” Just because somebody sees a bright light doesn’t mean they’re going to heaven. Did I make myself clear? Why and how does somebody go to heaven? Through Jesus Christ. Everybody who has a near death experience sees the light, because that is what happens medically. That’s what happens physically. All of the light begins to get centered in, and it just, that’s what it does. And so, don’t take the bright white light as an assurity for salvation, shall we speak. Okay?

The second thing we've got to address is this. Well, if they flatline, if they died, and then they come back, where were they? Well, there are two things that we got to address here. Number one, we've got to address the life and the death of the flesh and the body, because he says whether in the flesh or not, I know not of. And then the departure, or the retaining, of the soul. The Bible says, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." And so, inside each and every one of you is a soul and a spirit. That's what the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. And so, even if I flatline on the table. That does not mean that my soul has departed and returned. Does that communicate? So, just because there is a medical death does not mean there has been a soul departure. And I'm of the opinion, based on 2 Corinthians 12 and other thoughts, that what we know as near-death experiences is the physical medical death of the flesh but not the calling out, or the departure, of the soul. Does that communicate? Does that help there? And so, they are real. They do happen. And ultimately, what it lets us know is that we ourselves, the medical community, and even as wonderful as they are, they are not in control of our eventual soul departure. They can help us in the flesh.

Now, let me give you a vivid example. A couple of months ago, we were outside the courtyard a couple of hundred yards behind me right now, and at vacation bible school. And we had an individual who is an elite athlete, former Olympian, strong man. And those of you that were here, you saw it. Those of you who weren't, you heard about it. He had a cardiac issue on the stage. He was medically gone for four minutes. I will tell you, because I am not in the medical field, that is the first time in my life that I've actually been with somebody when that happened and been there when they came back. Usually, when it happens, they take them in the ambulance, or usually I hear about it in surgery. Here is the interesting thing. So, Chip, who that occurred to, we got to talking later, and I said, "Chip," I said, "That's pretty scary." I said, "Man," I said, "You know, you were flailing. You were turning all kinds of colors." I said, "The veins were popping out." I said, "It was scary." And he said, "Really?" I said, "Man, you were flopping like a fish." You know what he said to me? He goes, "That's funny. I didn't feel anything." I don't know about you, but that gave me a lot of confidence, because I am going to tell you something. I am not nervous about heaven. I'm just nervous about how I'm going to get there. How about you all? I mean, there is a lot of ways to get there that I'm not real interested in. Have you read the last part of Hebrews 11? It says, "Some of the believers were sawed in half. Some of them were pulled apart limb by limb." I'm not interested in that! But here is a man who from our physical perspective was experiencing all kinds of physical suffering, and he said, "I didn't feel a thing." And for those of you that were here that Sunday he came and shared his testimony, he made this statement. He said, "But I wasn't scared, because I knew where I was going. I knew where I was headed."

I heard a story just this week. A pastor friend of mine was sharing this story. It was one of those it wasn't late at night, but I was listening to a sermon, because, I tell people all the time, "I may preach a lot sermons, but I listen to more than I preach." He was telling this story of a funeral that he had just had to officiate of a fourteen-year-old young boy tragically killed in a car accident. And he said when he showed up on the scene the mom was there, and she was crying. And the first thing out of mom's mouth was, "I know

where he is. I know where he is.” You realize only Jesus can give us that comfort, folks. Only he can.

When it comes to near death experiences, one of the beauties of them, it is has caused some people to get on their knees and profess Christ, because they realize that there is death, and it does happen to all of us, and it is real. There is a lot of books out there that talk about what happened during their near-death experience. Can I give you some warning? If their story doesn’t line up with scripture, take scripture not their story. And here is the one thing that I want to share with you about that. Because they say, “Well, that’s what I experienced. That’s what I saw.” I don’t mean this ugly, but why would somebody give you, why would the Lord give you more information about heaven than the apostle Paul? Have you ever thought about that? Why would he give you more information about heaven than the apostle John? Think about that for a moment. Yet, there is all kinds of books out there about people writing about all kinds of things they experienced in heaven. And I’m not denying they had a near death experience. I’m not denying there was some type of cerebral activity going on. I don’t know what was happening. But nothing Paul says contradicts anything else that we see in scripture regarding these experiences. He says, “I heard words that were not even lawful for me to repeat.” In other words, he said, “I can’t even come back and share with you what really happened it was so amazing. But just trust me. It’s really good.” Near death experiences. They’re medically valid, but it is the departure of the soul that is the critical part there, not the physical death of the body.

Yes, sir?

[unintelligible]

Well, none of us are perfect people, so thanks for hanging out with us.

[unintelligible]

Really imperfect. Okay.

[unintelligible]

Sometimes the Lord gives you a glimpse of hell so that you’ll end up in heaven.

[unintelligible]

Oh, I believe it. Yes. But it’s got to match scripture. So, let’s take this account, for those of you who could not hear, he had a man that lived across the street in another state who had one of these experiences. But afterwards, became a believer, became faithful to the things of God. But his description was there was, what did you say again? I don’t want to mess it up.

[unintelligible]

Demons pulling at him. What else?

[unintelligible]

Falling down a hole.

[unintelligible]

Is there anything about what you just heard that contradicts scripture when it comes to hell? Not a thing. Not a thing! And so, again, I am not trying to be blanket case here, but in that man's case he is...

[unintelligible]

There are multiple cases if you've read of doctors talking about surgery and things happening where people have come up saying, you know, "Save me! Save me! Don't let me go back! Don't let me go back!" And they're experiencing just those things.

Tonight, as we kind of transition, because this really is an issue of eternity, I want to share a story with you all that's in regard to this. If I get choked up, you'll understand. And by the way, I've shared this story before publicly before, because it's regarding my wife and her family. And she won't mind me to do so again.

My wife's grandmother, her maternal grandmother, grew up as a Christian Scientist. I don't know if you all know much about Christian Scientists, but to them, you know, doctors are the devil. They, I mean, she had, you know, root canals without novacaine. She gave birth twice without any help. I mean, arms compound fractures set without any medicine. They just would not do any medicine. It was all about positive thoughts, positive thinking etc. Completely rejected the truth of scripture. Probably was witnessed to a thousand times in her life, and always rejected.

Well, it came to the point in her life where she was dying. And she went to a Christian Science nursing home. You say, "They have nursing homes?" Yes, so that you don't get medical treatment. That's where they go, and they just allow them, I would say peacefully, but it's not real peaceful, to pass the way they desire. And so, it was there in the Dallas Fort Worth area and Tracy and I lived there at the time. And so, all the family had come in, and they were staying with us. We got a phone call at four o'clock in the morning. And the lady who was working there at the nursing home called and said, "She probably won't make it through today. You all need to come out." We've all kind of experienced those phone calls, haven't we, before. And they're tough anyway. And so, family started out. It was on a Thursday. And here is how I remember it was on a Thursday, because this is when I was working on my doctoral work. And our seminars were every Thursday morning out in Fort Worth. And we got to our seminars, and the way that we did this, and I promise this is pertinent to the story, is every week you presented a paper to the class, and you discussed it. But if you presented a paper last

week, you were in charge of the prayer time this week. That way we could just keep order. And so, it was a friend of mine by the name of James who was in charge of the prayer time, and he was taking prayer requests. It was probably about nine in the morning, and I just said, “James,” I said, “I got a pretty serious one today. My wife’s grandmother is dying, and she is lost.” And I said, “If she breathes her last breath before she professes Christ,” I said, “I know what the Bible says.” And I said, “Would you just pray she gets one more chance?”

My professor was Roy Fish. One of my heroes of the faith. I will never forget Roy Fish putting his hand up and saying, “James, with all due respect, I’m praying today.” And he prayed that my wife’s grandmother would feel the flames of hell on her face, that she would see the demons with her eyes, and in her last moment she would turn and believe in Jesus. If my mother-in-law were here right now, she would tell you right now that as her mother passed she talked about how hot she was. Her face was burning. How thirsty she was. And that she said, “I just hear all this noise. Can someone turn off the noise.” I don’t know about you, but I’ve been at a lot of people’s bed side when they die, and they get cold. They don’t get hot. They want more blankets, not a fan. They usually have a hard time hearing, not complaining it’s too loud.

It’s real. Heaven is real, and hell is real. Don’t play around with it folks. Don’t wait until you get flatlined on the table before you get serious. Don’t wait until you read somebody’s story. This stuff is real, and I know a lot of times on Wednesday night, we chase a lot of crazy questions, and we’re in Genesis, and Revelation, and everywhere in between. But let’s not forget. Every single one of us are going to step into heaven or hell one day, and it’s only Jesus Christ that determines where you go. And it is real. And I think sometimes we just need a fresh reminder. A lot of folks are like that story you told us. That, you know, they had a wake-up call by the Lord. And I’ve heard people say, “Well, if God would give me that wake-up call, I would pay attention.” Don’t be so sure. Because there are a lot of folks that have had that same experience that have not responded the way that your neighbor did some years ago.

But again, near death experiences, they’re real. Medically, physically, yes. But it is the soul that is the critical part. This body, hey, according to 1 Corinthians 15, I’m getting a new one, one day. I don’t have to hang on to this old thing. And just remember, I’ve told you once, I’m going to tell you again. When you show up to heaven, don’t be looking for me at 5’6”. I’m going to be 6’5”.

Alright, let’s turn to Revelation 12. Revelation 12. For those of you who are new to us or with us, we are slowly working through the book of Revelation. By the way, this time period between chapter 6 and chapter 19 Jesus called the great tribulation in Matthew 24. Daniel called it his seventieth week, a period of seven years. Some of you may be thinking, “It may take us seven years to get through this.” No, it’s not going to take us seven years. But today, we come to chapter 12. And chapter 12 in the book of Revelation is significant for multiple reasons. Allow me to kind of walk through those. Then we’re going to walk through the specifics here.

We've just come out of chapter 11, which I think is the most critical chapter in the book of Revelation. Not only do we have the temple and the two witnesses, but we have the famous seventh trumpet. And it's at that seventh trumpet where it says, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord." And we're about to see everything shift. Everything is about to change up from this point forward. But chapters 12 and 13 are maybe two of the most intriguing chapters in all the Bible, particularly in the book of Revelation.

Chapter 12 is what we call a parenthetical chapter. That means it's outside the chronology. It gives us a story line. Kind of the color commentary behind the scenes. Chapter 13 is all about the famous antichrist. Just hold on. We'll get to chapter 13. I promise. It's all about this character who shows up during this time period with all kinds of antics, and activities, and actions, and such.

But chapter 12 is what we call a parenthetical. And I'm not going to read the entire chapter tonight, but I am going to read the first six verses. And then we'll go to our outline. And then we'll come back too. It says, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven." Now, remember. I'm going to stop there. We're not necessarily within the strict chronology of Revelation here, okay? Any time you have a parenthetical, we're pulling out of the chronology. It says,

1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: 2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. 3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. 4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. 5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. 6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore [or 60] days.

Now, this chapter, this passage of scripture, has been traditionally looked at three very distinct ways. And I want to look at tonight with all three of these perspectives, and I want to share with you, as I put on the outline, the positive and the negative of looking at it from this perspective.

So, we have two main characters. We have the woman, and we have the dragon. Now, I have a funny feeling you all are not going to struggle with who the dragon is. It's the woman that we struggle with. There are three main series of thoughts, or main perspectives here. There are some people who believe that this is specifically talking about whom we know as Mary. There are others who believe that this is a reference to the

church. And there are others that believe this is a reference to Israel. So, let's look at all three of those ideas in light of what we just read and see which one would better fit.

So, let's begin by looking at her attire. She is dressed with the sun, the moon, and the twelve stars under feet. There are many particularly within what we know as the Roman Catholic tradition who believe this is speaking of Mary in particular, because of the way that she is dressed. Now, maybe this is just because I am from Texas and from a very, what we would call, Catholic area, so to speak, but have any of you ever been in a grocery store, a convenient store, where they sell the Catholic candles with the imagery of Mary on them? Oftentimes, those candles will have her pictured exactly what we just read. They will have the sun, and the moon, and the twelve stars around her giving the ideology that Mary is this person in Revelation 12.

So, what's the positive? Well, all the pictures painted throughout the ages. If you just do a history of painting, or of art, particularly from the Roman Catholic tradition, the Byzantine era, Middle Ages, and such, there is a whole lot of imagery of whom we know as Mary with the stars, the moon, and the sun under her feet. It's just very common. You go do a google search for this out there, and you will see all kinds of pictures out there. It's a very common, that's kind of the positive of this. This has been going on for two thousand years, this idea.

Here is the negative. There is an age discrepancy. Look in verse 6 and 7. "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and sixty days." And then it speaks about this war in heaven. If this passage is specifically about Mary, then how does she live the amount of time she would have to live for all this to take place? In fact, you go on later, in fact, the word woman is used in this passage eight times. And when you get to the very end, beginning in verse 13, it says, "And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman." It says that there "were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness." The end of this chapter is about the woman being chased by whom we know as the antichrist. If that is the case, that this is whom we know as Mary, then she'd have to still be alive today, because the whole chapter, remember, we're in parenthesis. We're outside the chronology here. So, we're going all the way back to this woman who has given birth, and we're following this woman through time to where she is even persecuted herself by the dragon who desired to destroy her child. And so, even though there is a lot of tradition that paints her as the representative, just looking at this passage from a chronological perspective, there is no way she could be the fulfillment of all of this story in one individual person, alright?

The second idea is that this is the church. That the woman represents the church, and the church, and you see Jesus Christ as this one who is caught up into heaven, who rules with a rod of iron. Well, obviously, we have the church in Acts 2-10 beginning with Pentecost, moving through the Jewish people to the Samaritans. Eventually, in chapter 10 to the Gentiles. And we see, laid out in the book of Acts, the physical manifestation of the body of Jesus Christ, the church of Jesus Christ. And so, because you see the persecution of this woman by the dragon and a great history of the persecution of the church. In fact, in

the first three hundred years since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there were ten official Roman state sponsored martyrdom experiences. Where they actually wrote some type of formal edict that said, "They can be and should be persecuted." And so, you see a lot of persecution here. You see a lot of running away from.

Here is the problem. Here is the negative. The birth order. The church didn't give birth to Jesus. Jesus gave birth to the church. In this passage, the woman being with child travailed in birth. The church didn't birth Jesus. Jesus birthed the church. You also have the issue of the feeding in the wilderness in verses 12 through 14. And finally this, that the church of Jesus Christ is called a bride. It's called a virgin all throughout the New Testament, but never referred to specifically with the word woman. And so, the positive is, sure, we have the birth of the church of Jesus Christ, and we have the persecution by the dragon. But I think the order is messed up.

So, dealing with these first two, there are those who believe that this is Mary giving birth to Jesus. The problem there is how do you fit her brief physical life into this whole spectrum of time. Then you got the idea of the church, but the church didn't give birth to Jesus. Jesus gave birth to the church. And then finally, there is the concept or the idea that this woman, being referenced is whom we know as Israel, whom would make up later in chapter 14 of these famous twelve tribes.

So, what's the positive here? Genesis 37. So, go the opposite end of your Bible to Genesis 37, and I want to share with you about the dream that Joseph has. This is famous. You know Joseph and his coat of many colors. You know the fact that he was sold by his brothers, eventually ended up in Egypt being the second in command. Before we read this passage, let me just remind us all of this. The best way to interpret scripture is with other scripture, not tradition or the way it may appear.

Genesis 37. I am going to begin in verse 8. It says, "And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" So, when he tells this dream to his family, his dad interprets it as, "You mean that I, and your mother, and your brother are going to bow down to you?" Go back to Revelation 12. "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered."

So, let's do a little chronology here. Abraham begets Isaac. Isaac begets Jacob. Jacob begets what we know as the famous twelve tribes. You eventually find yourself with Joseph here, who is not only a type of but a representative of and a member of the people of Israel. And so, what we see happening here in Revelation 12, remember we're out of

the chronology here. Revelation 12 is really a history, we've talked about this tonight, of spiritual warfare. That the desire of the enemy to thwart the purpose of God from time beginning. We go all the way back to this woman who is giving birth. Who did Israel give birth to? The Messiah! Jesus was born of the lineage of David and of Abraham as prophesied all through the Old Testament. You get to the book of Matthew 1 and his genealogy in Luke 2. What do you see? You see all these names going back to all of the picture that we have going all the way back to Genesis 37.

So, again you have this picture in Genesis 37. What's the negative? Here's the negative. That what we know as Joseph's dream is actually prophetically fulfilled in the person of Jesus. You say, "Well, why is that a negative?" Well, because any time you're dealing with prophecy, people struggle with it. And the fact that he would have a dream thousands of years in advance that Jesus Christ would be the fulfillment thereof.

Now, why is this important? This is very important, because a lot of people believe that the woman is the church. And if the woman is the church, then chapter 12 is about the church. But if the woman is Israel, chapter 12 is about Israel. You see how that's completely different? The church is the body of Christ. Israel, as hopefully you read this week in Genesis 17 that Abrahamic covenant of the everlasting covenant of the land that they would be given, that covenant of that relationship with the Lord of the land, and so whom we know as Israel, Israel and the church are not synonyms. The church is the natural, shall I say the supernatural, extension of Israel, because it was Jesus, Israel's Messiah, who gave opportunity for the church to be in existence, even though Israel proper and a majority of it have resisted and rejected that truth thereof.

So, when you come to chapter 12 of Revelation, very few people actually believe this is Mary, but there are those that do. The majority say it's either the church or it's Israel. I believe if you make it the church, that you've skewed, not only the concept of the woman, but the chronology thereof, and you somewhat, for lack of better terms, when you get to the end of chapter 12, you have the church in a place the church is never going to be. But Israel, my friends, you read Jeremiah, and you read Daniel. They are always going to experience persecution even until the Lord himself physically returns. And that's exactly what you see.

What are the actions of this woman? She gives birth. Actually, Psalms 110:11 talks about the birth of the Messiah coming from Israel. And she travails. Did not Israel travail at least four hundred thirty years from Malachi to the birth of Jesus? There was always this travail that the Messiah would come, the Messiah would be birthed, and he would deliver them. Here is the struggle. When he came, they didn't accept him the way he came, did they? They wanted a crown. He said, "I'm coming with a cross." Now, the cross will eventually lead to the crown.

Yes, sir.

[unintelligible]

Oh, Israel did have their chance, absolutely! Okay. So, the statement was made that true Israel are believers in Jesus Christ. My family is not Jewish, but that's okay.

[unintelligible]

So, alright, so that being said, go to Romans 11. Go to Romans 11. Romans 11:25-26. It says, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so, all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." I am not going to deny the fact that what we would call spiritual Israel or true Israel is the body of Christ, but the people, the tribes, they still exist today. And when you get to the book of Revelation, there is a reemergence of their prominence, shall we say. And what you've got in Revelation 12, is you've got a decision to make. As we get to the very end days, is it the church that is running from the antichrist or is it Israel that is running from the antichrist? You cannot make chapter 12 about the church, because the church didn't birth Jesus. Jesus birthed the church. And then Israel birthed the Messiah Jesus.

And so, when we're dealing with the personalities here, it's all based on who is going to be enduring all this severe persecution, okay? Chapter 12 the woman brings forth the child, the dragon, which by the way, if I counted it up right, the dragon is mentioned three specific times in this passage as addressing his desire for death and destruction.

So, let's talk about this old dragon. This is where it is going to get fun as we end tonight. He is described with seven heads, ten horns, and a tail. Now do you know why we get all those cartoons with the red suit there? That's how he's described.

Yes, sir.

[unintelligible]

Well, we don't have to go back. I got eight minutes. We're not going back. So, we talk about this dragon guy. It talks about the dragon and his heads. This is where I think it gets a little interesting. The concept of a dragon, alright, there's been cartoons about the dragons. There's been all kinds of ideas about dragons. And I've heard people say, "Well, the Bible talks about dragons. The Bible is crazy." No, the Bible is not crazy. We're crazy for not believing it, okay? In the book of Job specifically, chapter 41, it talks about a creature that comes out of the sea by the name of Leviathan. Leviathan has multiple heads. Leviathan has a strong tail. Leviathan is this creature that wreaks all kinds of havoc. And there are good dear friends of mine who believe that this is describing the dinosaurs. Okay. But the problem is, when you get to the end of Job 41, Leviathan is called the king of the children of pride. That can't be a physical creature if you're the king of the children of pride. In fact, as you read through Job 41, I believe, as you read through that whole chapter, the description of the dragon, or the Leviathan. is the description of whom we know as the dragon Satan himself, this supernatural entity who wants nothing but death and destruction.

Now, let me kind of just walk, for the sake of time, I'm just going to walk through these passages right here. Leviathan Job 41:1. In Psalms 74 Leviathan is described as having multiple heads, okay? In Isaiah 27 it talks about receiving the punishment of Leviathan. In Job 41 it talks about the different types of weaponry that is not only used by Leviathan but is to be used contrary to. And at the end of Job 41 it says that we are not to fear him, even if he is the king of the children of pride. What do we read in 1 John 4? "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world."

And so, what you see here, and I don't think any of us are going to struggle with the dragon being Satan. I think we all get that. What's important is the imagery that as you read back in the scripture this concept of the Leviathan, because Leviathan is seen as this horrific creature, all types of punishment, multiheaded. Well, how is he described here? He has seven heads. He has ten horns and a tail. But what's interesting here is it says that on his head is a, or on the heads are a crown, okay?

And so, as we look at this imagery that's been given here, I've given you one of those could it be's here. Those of you who have been around long enough with me, could it be means don't write it in concrete, but get out a pencil. In other words, let's look at something that we have laid out in scripture for us, and let's just look at how things have lined up and see is it possible that this creature, because remember in Revelation 12 we're dealing with a parenthetical here. We're dealing with a scope of time. If this is describing Israel, then we're going all the way back to Genesis. And by the time you get to chapter 12 when they're fleeing from the beast, we're all the way at the second coming of Jesus. So, chronologically, chapter 12 may be taking up thousands of years of time. Why is that important here? Because it says this dragon has seven heads. Is it possible that in the context of Revelation 12 these seven heads have found themselves throughout the course of time?

So, what I have laid out for you on your outline here is just an interesting synopsis of the one world rulers that we have had in our world's history. Now, by the time that we get to the antichrist or this famous beast, is he not one world ruler? If you don't believe me, read chapter 13. He is.

So, let's begin. In Genesis 10 we have a guy by the name of Nimrod who will not only be the founder of but the promoter of what we know as modern-day Babylon, Babel. Those of you who read chapter 11, you know about the famous tower of Babel. This was the initial, Nimrod was a warrior, a man of weaponry. He was the original one world ruler, okay? And there is a lot behind who Nimrod is, and it's not just what my football coach used to call me when I wasn't running fast enough. You know, you say, "Come on, Nimrod!" But nonetheless, he was a one world ruler.

Then we move to Pharaoh in Exodus 5 and Egypt. Obviously, one dominating world figure exerting power, currency, authority.

Then we move to Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18. He was the ruler over Assyria. It would be the Assyrians who would come in and ransack the northern half of Israel and take the ten northern tribes into captivity in 722.

Then we've got Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 3. He would be the Babylonian ruler who would come in in 586, take the southern kingdom, take them into captivity, and that's where we get the famous Ezra, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, and all those passages and stories in the Bible.

Coming out of Babylon we get Darius in Daniel 5, who is the Medes and the Persians. Now, these are the two branches that not only would come in and take over Babylon, but separate themselves into two equal parts but yet ruling the world.

Then we get Alexander the Great. Daniel 10 it talks about the entity known as Greece, and it will be divided up into four areas and such. A lot of the reasons that some people struggle with the veracity of Daniel is because of this prophecy regarding an entity that did not exist when Daniel actually wrote it. But nonetheless, you get this world power known as Greece.

And then we have Caesar Augustus, that is a title, not just an individual, and what we know as the Roman empire, which was in existence not only at the turn of the millennia but at the birth of Jesus and actually the death and the resurrection thereof.

Why is this critical? Because it says here that this dragon has seven heads, correct? There are seven historical, even biblically verified, world rulers that we can say per our previous question are types of the antichrist. Every one of these individuals despised the Jews and tried to get rid of them. Every one of these individuals tried to bring the whole world under their control, just like the antichrist will.

That being said, we've only got a couple minutes. Turn over to chapter 13, and I want you to see something in verse 3. I want to leave you all with a "could it be" and "oh my, what about that?" This is about the famous beast. It says, "And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast." The reason I bring that up is, the beast or this famous dragon is described in Revelation 12 of having seven heads with seven crowns. These are seven rulers. There is a very prominent thought that says, "Well, when he reigns over the world, he will have seven vice presidents, shall we say, that are under him." That is possible. But it is also possible, because it is mentioned in Revelation 12 with this long chronology that it's actually giving us a succession of these types of the antichrist. Just like Joseph is a type of Jesus Christ. And that according to chapter 13 when it says, "a deadly wound in one of his heads," is it possible, and I'm going to leave you with this thought, that the one day beast/antichrist will actually be a return of someone who once lived? By the way, when you get to Revelation 17 it describes the antichrist as one who was, was not, and comes out of the bottomless pit. Just some fun food for thought as you close your Wednesday.

Let's pray, and we'll go get our kiddos.

Lord, we just love you. We thank you for our time together. Lord, thank you for the ability to study your word, not just with all that takes place in the book of Revelation and as we begin in Genesis, but the importance of you, Jesus, as our Savior. May we never forget that in the midst of the seven heads, and the midst of the ten horns, and the midst of the tail that draws a third of the stars out of the sky, that all that is worth knowing, and all that is interesting, but it is futile without you as our Savior. So, may we remember that as we depart from this place. May you have equipped us tonight to go forward with the truth of your word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Go get your kids, unless you didn't bring kids. Then don't go get your kids.