

Getting to know your Bible – Part 6, Paul's Letters

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Getting To Know Your Bible

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Preached On: Sunday, February 11, 2024

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I mentioned earlier that tonight is somewhat providential, and the reason I say that is on Sunday evenings, at least for the last few weeks, we have been walking through just kind of an overview that I've entitled "Getting to Know Your Bible." If we as a church family are going to take the entirety of God's word and place it in our hearts, if we're going to memorize passages outside of the familiar ones, then it would do us well to kind of understand where all these respective books of the Bible and chapters fall into the bigger picture.

One of the things that we've discovered is that when you look at the Bible in totality, we naturally divide it into two testaments, what we know as the Old and the New Testament. Within those two, chronologically, we have 430 years of the silence of God from the last prophetic statement that we know as Malachi into the beginning of the gospel story that begins with John the Baptist, 430 years. But within respective Testaments, we have three very clear divisions. In the Old Testament, we had the first five books, the books of Moses, the Pentateuch, the Law, the Torah, there's a host of names for Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and the reason they're set apart so strategically is particularly the Pharisees, when they would interact with Jesus, would refer to the law of Moses, it's those first five books, and today, if you're dealing with anybody who wants to be an ultra-Orthodox Jew, they only subscribe to those five books. But then we also have the writings, Joshua, through what we know as the Song of Solomon. And then we have the prophets, Isaiah through Malachi. Three very clear divisions, the law, writings and the prophets. When we get to the New Testament, we most naturally divide them into three sections. the gospels, the letters of the Apostle Paul, and what we know as the General Letters or the General Epistles. And the reason that tonight is so providential is because originally I was going to address Paul's letter one evening and the General Epistles on another evening, but there are some concerns that tonight allows us to address because when we come to these two respective sections of the New Testament, there are times where they seem more combative than they do complementary, and so one of the things that we're going to be able to do tonight is to reconcile some of those issues, address the message on a big picture, but also kind of streamline to some specifics.

So tonight, I have two respective passages that I'm going to ask you to turn to, and then we're going to look at two-thirds of the New Testament in less than an hour. The first passage is found in Romans chapter 11, the second passage is found in James chapter 2.

Now as you're turning to those respective chapters, let me address these sections in a broad overview. Beginning with the book of Romans through Philemon, we discover that these respective books of the Bible that are attributed to whom we know as Paul the apostle, they have a very unique order to them. They begin with letters to the respective churches, and they end with letters to respective individuals. In other words, it starts with Romans, and then we make our way, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians, we make our way all the way through Colossians and then Thessalonians, and then we have the books to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Here's the other interesting aspect about this section, the order that they are in is from longest to shortest. Romans is actually the longest of that first section, and obviously what we know as 2 Thessalonians is the shortest, and then 1 Timothy is the longest, and Philemon is the shortest of their respective section. What is important to know for tonight's study is this, that the concept of the church is the overwhelming thing. Whether it be a respective church such as the church at Corinth, or whether it is a member of a church such as the man in 2 Corinthians who is removed from the fellowship because of his unconfessed sin, it is the church that is of greatest concern. When you get into the pastoral epistles, which is 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, we deal a whole lot with the order of the church, the structure of the church, the leadership of the church, how do we go about doing this thing called church not just 2,000 years ago but even unto today.

And so the concept or the idea of the church is a primary theme throughout the section. Then we find ourselves in the General Epistles, Hebrews through the book of Revelation. You're going to be hard pressed to find the term church in that part of your Bible. The word's not there. In fact, what you'll discover are terms such as brethren, elect, strangers, sojourners. The terminologies that you and I are so familiar with as a, quote, New Testament church are readily absent in this section. And so one of the things that we discover from the very beginning is that there are two overarching different paths of communication by which these respective sections address and so what I want to do is go to two respective passages, Romans 11 and James chapter 2, to illustrate what I'm addressing.

Romans chapter 11 verse 13, I want you to hear what the Lord inspires the Apostle Paul to say. "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." Now let's unpack that for just a moment. Even Paul called himself or referred to himself as the apostle out of due order, that he was different than all of the others. He did not walk and talk and minister with Jesus through his three and a half year of ministry. He did qualify to be an apostle because according to the book of Acts chapter 9, he actually witnessed the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. That being said, notice what he says, "I am the apostle to the Gentiles." Peter and James and John were commissioned to stay in Jerusalem and in Judea, they were to minister. Remember in Galatians chapter 2, Paul and Peter have what I like to call the great barbecue throwdown. Remember that story? That there was an all-you-can-eat barbecue buffet that broke out and Peter is found, I mean he's elbow deep in barbecue sauce. I mean he's just having a good old time because he's now free in Christ. He's not subjected to the laws of the Levitical system and such. But remember, Paul calls him out. Paul doesn't call him out because he doesn't have the freedom to do what he's doing. He called him out because

he was the apostle to the Jews, and by doing what he was doing, it laid open the possibility of compromising the message of Jesus Christ. And so that being said, we see this distinction, we see this difference. So again, here in Romans, the mentioning, the very first book of this section, Gentiles, the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul is going to be the primary representative and spokesman of which the Lord is going to use.

Now, hopefully you can place a marker or your hand there. You turn over to James chapter 1 and I want you to notice the difference in this section versus what we just read. Now, Paul and apostle to the Gentiles to the Gentiles. Notice James chapter 1, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Now the last time I checked, what does having to be a part of a respective tribe have to do with your church membership? Absolutely nothing. In fact, Galatians chapter 3 said, in Christ there's neither male nor female, there is neither servant nor is there lord. In other words, we all come to Christ the same. We all are equal at the foot of the cross. And yet, what we know as the book of James, he doesn't refer to himself as an apostle, he's simply a servant, although Peter would call himself an apostle, to the 12 tribes. As I mentioned, what is noticeably absent from this section is the concept, the idea, or the word that you and I know as church. In fact, one of the things that is so unique about this section of your Bible is that almost every illustration, in fact, it's just like the old Dove Bar, it is 99 and 44/100s of all of the illustrations are from the Old Testament.

Now what's interesting is you go back into the book of Romans, you know what it said the one advantage to being Jewish is? The one advantage is that they as a people have had the scripture for thousands of years. In other words, their grandfathers and great grandfathers, and you go all the way back, it was something that was passed down, it was something that was known, and so therefore, the General Epistles spend the majority of their time going back into the Old Testament, whereas what we know as the epistles of the Apostle Paul do occasionally refer to, but rarely if ever, an audience that is Gentile and an entity known as the church.

Now those are just some overarching concepts there. I want to again look at the New Testament kind of from a 40,000 foot view. One of the things the New Testament possesses that the Old Testament does not, there are two books, I believe, within the New Testament that serve as transitions. You say, what do you mean transitions? They take us from one entity unto another. So let's begin with the New Testament, the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we studied them last time that we were gathered. I'm going to ask my rhetorical question that I know each and every one of you knows, but before Jesus goes to Mount Calvary, how many people in the audience of every sermon, every miracle, every healing he did, how many of those were born-again Christians? None. Not one of them. In fact, one of the things you discover about the gospel accounts is the overwhelming majority of those who heard Jesus speak, discussed with him, or witnessed his miracles, they were from a, quote, Jewish background. They believed that if they showed up at the right day at the right time, they offered the right thing, that somehow God would be pleased with them, and Jesus spends the entirety of the gospel saying, "Hey, this is a futile experience. You're never going to make it. You're never going to be good enough. I am the answer to your sin problem. Believe on me and you

shall be forgiven and you shall be saved." The book of Acts, an amazing book within our Bible, of course that's every book of the Bible, but it serves as a transition. The book of Acts, more than any other book, transitions us from the gospels unto the church, from the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ earthly, to the ministry of Christ heavenly. In other words, what we see in the book of Acts is a chronology of really the first 30 to 35 years of what you and I know as the church.

Now allow me to summarize the book of Acts in brief. It begins at the end of a 40-day journey. The disciples, the apostles have been with Jesus according to Acts chapter 1 for about 40 days. He's been teaching them. He's been addressing matters because if you think about it, what we know as the church was handed over to these men. They would be the foundation. They would be the cornerstone for a lack of better terms, and in Acts chapter 1, Jesus ascends into heaven. When he ascends into heaven, he makes this statement, he says, "When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth." And what we discover is that commission that Jesus gave them was not just geographical, it was also what we might call people or ethnos-based. I'll discuss that in just a moment. So what do these early apostles do? Well, according to Acts chapter 1, verse 14 and 15, they go to the upper room and for seven days, 120 of them gather plus the women. Now, ladies, I apologize, I don't know why you are not included in the number. It just says 120 plus the women. For seven days, they pray, they pray, and they pray, and then in Acts chapter 2, something amazing happens, we call it Pentecost. By the way, it's not called Pentecost because the Holy Ghost showed up, it's called Pentecost because it was the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, which takes place 50 days after the Passover. But it was there at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit showed up in such an incredible fashion that we're still discussing it and debating it 2,000 years later.

Here's what's important about Acts chapter 2, it is the public initiation of what you and I might refer to as the church, right? Because previous Acts chapter 2, the only believers we had with those 120 plus women in the upper room and specifically according to John chapter 21, only the apostles had Jesus breathed on them and they had received the Holy Spirit. What's important about Acts chapter 2 is actually found in verse 5 where it says in that verse that there were Jews present from every nation of the earth. Every people group. Why? Who shows up to Pentecost? Jewish people. It was a Jewish feast. It was a Jewish celebration. It would not have been anything that a Gentile would have showed up to except to sell things to the visitors coming in. That would have been the only purpose, right? And so therefore you have Jews from every nation. We know about the famous tongue event. Let me remind you, the miracle of tongues wasn't in the speaking. It was in the hearing. They said, "How is it that every one of us, we hear in our own language?" There in Acts chapter 2, when you get to verse 45 and 46, it says they added unto the church about 3,000 souls. Every one of them, according to Acts chapter 2, was of a Jewish descent and a Jewish background.

Between Acts chapter 2 and Acts chapter 7, you see the apostles in and out of prison, in and out of trouble. I mean, everywhere they go, they preach Jesus, they get in trouble, they get out, they preach Jesus, they get in trouble. In Acts chapter 7, we have a very

important event take place in the life of the early church, we have the first martyr, a man by the name of Stephen. And if you read Acts chapter 7 at some time on your own, let me summarize Stephen's sermon. By the way, his audience was nothing but Jewish men. Here's what he preached, "You killed the wrong guy." That was his sermon. They didn't like that. In fact, they pulled an Evander Holyfield on him, they gnawed on him with their teeth. That's what the Bible says. They gnawed with their teeth. I don't know if they actually bit their ears off, but my goodness, it didn't sound good, right? They throw him into a corner, respectively speaking, and they stone him to death. Acts chapter 7 ends with this very haunting statement, they took the clothing of Stephen and they laid it at the feet of Saul of Tarsus. Saul, who would become as we know the Apostle Paul, it was Saul of Tarsus who was there.

Well, guess what happens in Acts chapter 8? In Acts chapter 8 we have a man by the name of Philip. Philip, for all intents and purposes, was a man who was faithful in his faith. He finds himself out in the middle of the desert, minding his own business, doing what God's told him to do, and all of a sudden an Ethiopian chariot goes by and inside that chariot is a eunuch. That's a fun story to teach your kids at home. But nonetheless, here comes this chariot and what happens? It stops. The man providentially is reading from the book of Isaiah, and he says, "How must I be saved?" It's an incredible story. But where Philip came from is even more important than that. Prior to this, quote, wilderness or desert experience, he was in a little area by the name of Samaria and there in Samaria, which by the way, a Samaritan in the Bible is somebody who has two parents, one Jewish and one Gentile and that is why they were so despised. They were neither Gentile, they were neither Jewish, they were technically both. And there, in Acts chapter 8, there's a man by the name of Simon the Sorcerer, one who they believed to be of the gods, great power, great authority, and the gospel goes there in the community. In fact, these Jewish men, the early apostles show up in the middle of Acts chapter 8 because they want to witness, they want to see that Samaritans could actually be saved? Samaritans could be a part of the family? A Samaritan could go to heaven? This was unfathomable in their mind.

So in Acts chapter 2, Jews are getting saved. In Acts chapter 8, Samaritans are getting saved. And then in Acts chapter 9, Paul gets saved. He's on the road to Damascus. I know the Bible says it was a bright light, but in my language, the Lord hit him with a proverbial heavenly two by four. He slapped him right there and said, "Hey, you and I need to have a conversation." I love the Lord's statement, "Why do you kick against the pricks?" In other words, why are you putting so much energy into something that you're never going to accomplish? We know that for three days he was physically blinded. We know that a man by the name of Simeon had the task of coming and praying over Saul of Tarsus. Can you imagine that assignment? Can you imagine in a day where Saul of Tarsus had as his assignment, the legal authority to apprehend and, if necessary, kill Christians, being told to go and lay your hands on that one, the architect of destruction. So he lays hands on him, they [unintelligible] and guess what happens? By the time you get to Acts chapter 10, do you know who's getting saved? Gentiles. A man by the name of Cornelius. He's a Roman centurion. He was a pagan by belief, but according to Acts chapter 10, he prayed often and he gave alms.

That being said, he's praying one day and he says, "Lord, I want to know you." What happens? Peter. Good old Peter. He's on the top of a building. The Bible says he was in a trance. I don't know exactly what that means, but let's just say God spoke to him. Nonetheless, remember the famous thing where there's this sheet that comes down tied at four ends? And within there are all the animals that according to the Levitical law should never be eaten. What did God tell him? He said, "Get up, go." And he said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, time out, God. I've never eaten any unclean thing." He says, "Do not call unclean what I've called clean." Basically, he sends him to Simon the Tanner's house. He says, "There's a man by the name of Cornelius there, the Roman band. You need to share Jesus with him." So Peter, the apostle to the Jews, walks into Simon the Tanner's house with Cornelius, a Roman pagan Gentile, and guess what he does? He shares Jesus with him and that man and all his group, they all get saved and they marvel that the same Holy Ghost that came upon the Jews in Acts chapter 2 has now come upon the Gentiles.

Now the reason this is so important, the reason that this is so strategic is when I talked about the book of Acts transitions us, it doesn't just transition us in 30 years of time, it transitions us from the gospel primarily being of a Jewish scenario to a Samaritan scenario, onto ultimately a Gentile scenario. In fact, the Jews, obviously the Samaritans, the Gentiles, it is Acts chapter 10, we see the quote unquote Gentiles. It's Acts chapter 17 where we get the first letter of whom we know as the Apostle Paul. The first letter is 1 Thessalonians, even though it's not the first one in our biblical order, it is the first one chronologically. And for the second half of the book of Acts, yes, the Apostle Paul goes into a new town, and yes, he goes into the synagogue, and yes, he addresses those from a Jewish background with the truth of Jesus Christ, but primarily, guess who his audience is? Gentiles. And what does he do? He establishes churches in places that are primarily Gentile. Corinth. Colossae. Ephesus, Thessalonica. All these places are not filled with Jewish people, they're filled with pagan Gentiles just like you and I. And so what we discover is the book of Acts doesn't just take us chronologically, it sets the stage that the primary audience for the gospel of Jesus Christ upon Acts chapter 28 are Gentiles.

And guess what we have in the book of Romans? Guess what we have in 1 and 2 Corinthians? We have Gentiles, and we have the church, and we have the body of Christ functioning and learning how to function and struggling and encouraging one another. But what we know as this section ends with Philemon, and then the next section begins the book of Hebrews. Now I would dare say that for most of us Bible-believing Baptist Bible-thumpers, the book of Hebrews can be and has been for many people one of the hardest books of the Bible to reconcile. Let me remind you of something about the book of Hebrews, it's addressed to Hebrews. I don't have a Jewish background. You don't have a Jewish background. And you know what the theme of Hebrews is? Jesus is better than, fill in the blank. But every single illustration in Hebrews, listen, is from the Old Testament. Every single one of them. And so one of the things that we need to address tonight is this, there is a valid reason why these two sections tend at times to be somewhat combative. They have two different audiences. They have two different agendas. And so therefore, when we allow ourselves to see it all as just one big mashed-up, smashed-up thing, we're going to have issues. That's why 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse

15 says, rightly divide the word of God. Divide. Who is it written to? Why is it written? And what is the purpose?

So when you get to the General Epistles, you discover, number one, the word church isn't there. It speaks to the brethren in which, by the way, when it says brethren, in the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul distinguishes between saints and brethren. Saints are believers. Brethren are specifically those that have been delivered from the curse of the law. So when it talks about the brethren, it's speaking of those with a Jewish heritage or a Jewish background. Again, the book of Hebrews, it's called Hebrews. Every illustration is from the Old Testament. The book of James, we just read from the beginning of the book of James, where every single illustration is, yes, you guessed it, from the Old Testament, okay? How about 1 and 2 Peter? Oh, remember, Peter was the apostle to the who? Jews. And then we have 1, 2, and 3 John, which again, no mention of, quote, the church. What does it speak of? It speaks of us as children, young men, and fathers within the respective faith. Then we get to Jude. I love the little book of Jude not just because it is short, but because of its content. It talks about those who have filtered into the faith, the word church is not used, and they are striving or they're desiring to take what we know as those that are a part of it and deter them to another belief system. It's very apologetic in nature. And that's what we see in this section, the book of Hebrews James 1, 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John and Jude are very apologetic, a defense of the faith as an extension of the Old Testament prophecies, not this church based Apostle Paul section.

And then we get to the famous book known as Revelation. Yes, good old Revelation. Now, here's one of the fascinating things about the book of Revelation, and that is a study in and of itself, but in chapters 2 and 3, it does address seven churches. It begins with the church at Ephesus, okay? Then it lists all these churches, and it ends with the church of Laodicea. What is fascinating, though, is by the time you get to chapter 4 of what we know as the book of Revelation, the word church is never used again. It's not there. It speaks of tribulation. It speaks of chaos. Guess what it speaks of? The 12 tribes. It speaks, again, you see this incredible Old Testament feel coming into the mix of what we know as the book of Revelation.

So why is that important? Again, I know tonight on your outline, I have given you a quote unquote summary of all these respective books and we could walk through all of that, however, I want to keep it more at 40,000 feet. Let's begin with the section known as the Pauline letters, specific churches, specific believers, specific struggles, specific problems. They are a carnal bunch. Why? Because they're Gentiles. In fact, one of the things that I've said throughout the years, and I will stand on again tonight, is if you ever believe that your church has problems, read 1 and 2 Corinthians. You talk about some issues. In fact, in 2 Corinthians, one of the things it says is they're doing things not even the pagans would consider doing. And yet, in this section, here's what's amazing, you never even have any allusion to somebody born again who loses their salvation. There is no mentioning to somebody who's been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, sinning so bad that it voids out their salvation. In fact, the thing that we discover in this section of the New Testament is that if you've called on the name of Jesus to be saved and he has forgiven you and you are his child, there is a big difference between relationship and

fellowship. And I know I address this a lot on Wednesday night, but for those of you that are faithful there, just give me a few moments. Relationship is your, quote, standing with God, fellowship is your state.

Let me unpack that for just a moment. The best illustration that I give is just the one that I live with every day of my life, and you have your respective one. My wife and I have three children. They are our children and there ain't nothing we can do about that. I mean, it is what it is. In other words, there is nothing that any of my children can do that can void out that relationship. Nothing. Now, trust me, they've tried, okay? But there's nothing they can do. Now, here's the difference, my children can do something, or some things, plural, to hinder fellowship. In other words, they can participate, act, do, or not do something that causes a little bit of discord within the home. Now, that discord does not disqualify them from being my children. In fact, those of you who've raised kids say there are times you wish you could do that. But you can't, right? Because guess what? According to John chapter 1 verse 12, when we believe on Jesus, we become a child of God. When you go to Romans chapter 8, we are joint heirs with Christ. We discover that there's a big difference between fellowship and relationship. You can have a fractured fellowship, but not have a voided out relationship.

There is nobody in this section of your New Testament, not one, who ever even is remotely described as somebody who might have or could or should have lost their salvation. In fact, there's a man in 1 Corinthians who is so despicable with his lifestyle, again, it says not even the pagans would do this. They remove him from the local church not to, quote, cast him out into utter darkness. Basically, the Bible says they left the door open, if he repents, come back. Then in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, I believe we have evidence that he repented and he came back. If there was anybody that, quote, unquote, could have lost their salvation, it would have been this guy. I mean, he was sideways. But think about the terms that we use in the Bible for salvation: born again, reconciled, redeemed. Those are Bible words, right? Regenerated. Nobody in this section is ever even possibly mentioned as getting close or even sniffing the loss of their salvation.

Now, I'm gonna be completely transparent with you, that's not the way it sounds in the General Epistles. You read Hebrews. You read James. You read 1 and 2 Peter. You read Jude. You read Revelation. And a lot of times, every now and then as you're reading, your little Baptist antenna goes up and goes, "This does not reconcile with Galatians." Guess what? You're absolutely right. Okay? I'm just gonna go...you're right. I've got news for you, did you know that Galatians does not reconcile with the gospel of Matthew? Look at the audience. Go back to Matthew. Who is the audience? A bunch of Jewish people trying to realize they can never do enough to get saved. Jesus is showing them, "You'll never do enough. I'm the only way you can be saved." What's the audience in Galatians? A bunch of Gentiles who repented of their sins, asked Jesus to save them and they're saved. It is what it is. But then we get to those General Epistles. Who's Hebrews written to? Hebrews. Who's James written to? We just read it, to the 12 tribes. When you look at 1 and 2 Peter, it's written to those that are scattered abroad. In other words, the word church isn't there and one of the things that we discover is that section of your New Testament, boy, it looks awfully Jewish, does it not? It just smells very similar to the

gospels. And so tonight, what I hopefully want to do from this 30-40,000 foot view is I want to reconcile the tension. I want to share with you tonight one of those great "could it be's."

Now, those of you who've known me for a while, when I use the phrase "could it be," you may not want to write it in concrete, but you may want to get out an ink pen. This could be pretty good, all right? When I say a "could it be," is it possible that when we look at the New Testament, because in the gospels we have primarily a Jewish audience, in Paul's letters we have primarily a Gentile audience, and in the general letters we have primarily a Jewish audience, is it possible that the New Testament is so divinely laid out that God has communicated his message of hope and grace over the course of the entirety of what we know as human history post the Old Testament. Allow me to unpack that for just a moment. It is without question that the four gospels are aimed at Jewish people who are doing their best to, I guess, remove themselves from that traditional expectation of worship and performance-based spirituality and trusting that Jesus is the answer, not their own deeds and expectation. We get that. When we get to the letters of the Apostle Paul, there's without question, we've got a Gentile audience, we've got the apostle to the Gentiles, and there's no struggle except for the fact that us Gentiles bring a lot of baggage to the cross is what happens. Is it possible, could it be?

You know, there is this famous event prophesied in the Old Testament, we call it Daniel's 70th week. I don't know if you're familiar with it, but in Daniel chapter 9 it says there's a time period coming, it's a period of seven years of quote-unquote great tribulation of the judgment of God upon the Jewish people because of their rebellion against him. Not the church, Jewish people. Okay, it is Jeremiah that refers to it as Daniel's 70th week. Okay, what's fascinating about that in Matthew chapter 24, Matthew 24 Jesus is on the Mount of Olives. Now if you've never been to the Mount of Olives, he is literally looking over what we know as the temple Mount. Now today there's a Muslim mosque there, in Jesus' day there was a Jewish temple, the same temple that the veil tears, right? Jesus is overlooking that. Peter, James, John, and Andrew, not the big three, it's the three plus one, they come to Jesus, and they've got some very important questions. They ask him two very strategic questions. "When shall these things be," which is referencing the tearing down of the temple, "and what will be the sign of your coming?" Jesus begins to expound, listen to this, for two chapters. Matthew chapter 24, Matthew chapter 25 are nothing but Jesus talking about how it's all going to go down one day. In Matthew chapter 24, beginning in verse 15, Jesus talks about a day coming that Daniel prophesied called the abomination of desolation. Now, if you go into 2 Thessalonians 2 and you go back to Daniel chapter 9, you know what you discover the, quote, abomination of desolation is? It's when the Antichrist goes into the temple of Jerusalem and claims he's God in flesh. That's what it is. You know what Jesus says to do when that happens? You ready to hear? Run! That's his commission. He said, "Man, you need to run for the hills. You need to get out of here," for this, Jesus' words, "the great tribulation." Those are his words. That's not a Baptist thing. That's not a church thing. That's a Jesus thing. Jesus called it the great tribulation. He said there's never been anything as bad since the creation of the world.

Now the reason that's important, is that Jesus spends a chapter and a half about how to respond post this event. How do we act? How do we live? What do we do? But the thing that's amazing to me is the abomination of desolation isn't about the Gentiles. It's not about the church. It's about the Jews and the temple. So don't you think that if Jesus is going to spend a chapter and a half instructing people on how to live during this time period, he might give us some scripture to go along with it? Is it possible that once you enter into what we know as this area of the book of Hebrews, that we actually have a doctrinal treatise on how those in those days are to live? Peter says they're scattered. James says they're scattered. That's a time period where everybody's, you guessed it, scattered. And the primary recipient of that quote Daniel 7th week are the Jewish people. It's not the church. What we know as the abomination of desolation has nothing to do with the church and the last time I read my Bible, I'm not worried about the Antichrist because he doesn't come to the church. He goes to a temple in Jerusalem that's not there right now.

So in other words, even though there's not a single passage of the Bible that we can say, you know what, that's not for us, I don't have to abide by that. I get that. But doctrinally speaking, when we talk about respective passages of the Bible, one of the things that we have to be honest with ourselves is Exodus chapter 20 has nothing to do with you going to heaven one day. You say, what's Exodus chapter 20? That's the Ten Commandments. Nobody goes to heaven on the Ten Commandments right now. But you know what the Lord told them in Exodus? "If you do these, I'm your God and you're my people." That was before Jesus. That was before the cross. That was before an empty tomb, right? So isn't it fascinating that we shouldn't neglect the Ten Commandments, but I wouldn't base my heavenly entrance in obeying them because you've all broken some or more of them. That being said, if we're not going to use that as our guide, then why would we use James chapter 2? Oh, I know why. Please forgive my gift of sarcasm, because it's in the New Testament. Well, so is Matthew. Matthew's in the New Testament and if I've read the Sermon on the Mount right, it basically says there's nobody good enough to get to heaven on their own. You've got to have Jesus. Again, let me go back. How many born-again Christians are in the gospels before the crucifixion? None.

So again, what we've got to do is not try to make the Bible say something that we're comfortable with it saying, we've got to let the Bible say what it says and conform ourselves to its message. Do you realize your Old Testament is two-thirds of the Bible? Some would even argue up to three. It's a big section. By the way, I know you're shocked. You know our Bible memorization plan? Every chapter left is in the Old Testament, right? It's just part of it. The Old Testament is a massive, quantifiable section of our Bible and if you include the four gospels as an audience of Jewish people, it even gets a little bit bigger. Within the Old Testament, listen to this, for every prophecy about Jesus' first coming, there are eight about his Second Coming. So the main message of your Old Testament, listen to this, when it comes to prophecy, isn't Christmas. It's not Easter. It's the Second Coming. And the Second Coming involves all of these matters that Jesus spent a chapter and a half educating us on how to live during those days. So does it not make sense if the majority of your Bible is Old Testament Jewish flavored and based and

prophetically about the Second Coming, that the Bible would at least give us some instructions on that?

So what does this mean? Well, what this means is when you and I as born again Christians today, when we read Hebrews and we read James and we read 1 and 2 Peter, they're going to challenge us and at times we're going to struggle with them just like we struggle when we read Nehemiah, and just like we struggle when we read Isaiah because that's not our background. We're a bunch of pig-eating Gentiles that are saved by grace and when you go into Hebrews and James and that section of your Bible, you have to admit it's a struggle because every illustration is from the Old Testament and the word church is never mentioned.

What does this mean? Let me give you the implication for tonight. This means that the church was established out of an empty tomb in Pentecost, but the church is one day gonna be called up to be with the Lord. Now, I know people that argue with me about that and say, "I don't think that's actually gonna happen." Well, I've got news for you, that one and only time in my life as we're headed up, I'm gonna give you a big fat Baptist I told you so, all right? We're going up one day to be with the Lord and we're going up before the abomination of desolation, and we're going up before all that other mess. Which means, for you and I today, tomorrow morning when we wake up, how do we live as a church? How do I navigate life as a believer? We're to read, we're to memorize, we're to learn Genesis to Revelation, but if you want to put it right in the strike zone, keep it between Romans and Philemon because it's written to Gentiles and it's written to the church. Can we learn lessons from days past? Absolutely. Can we learn lessons from days future? You betcha. But the last time I checked, the best lessons are from days present.

And so again, there is a reality to this combative nature, but there's also a reconciliation as well and I think tonight, because the Lord gave us the night that we have and the structure that we have, we were able to kind of put it all together. Now, I know what some of you are thinking as I close. What about that book of Revelation? That just kind of stands on its own. We've been talking about that thing for 2,000 years. We're not going to solve it in the next nine minutes. But what we are going to do tonight is this, we're going to close our time together. In fact, Todd McCreece is actually going to come on the piano in just a moment. I just want us to have a time of prayer. If you so feel led to make a decision, feel free to do so. You can walk down front just as well from your seat as you can standing up. There's nothing wrong with that. But what I want us to do is in a time of prayer, I want us to at least express our gratitude for the blessing of grace through Jesus Christ. I'm gonna say this crassly and I don't mean it, but I want you to hear me, there has never been an easier time in the world to get saved. You don't have to worry about turtledoves in Jerusalem. Aren't you grateful? You don't have to worry about running from the Antichrist. Aren't you grateful? You know what the Bible says? Just admit that you're a sinner. Call on Jesus to save you and he will. There has never been a better time to be alive than today. Let's take advantage of it.

Let's pray. With our heads bowed, our eyes closed, Todd in a moment is gonna be on the piano, but as he does so I just want you to have a season of prayer. This is just between you and the Lord. Again I mentioned if you're here tonight, you need to render a decision, you can move from your seat as well as you can from standing. That being said, I want you just to, this may sound strange, just reflect back. Reflect back on that day or that time where you got saved. You may not remember the exact dates, month or hour, but that time where it happened. I want you to think back of when it happened. What did you do? You knew you were a sinner and you asked Jesus to save you. There's nobody here who got saved whenever you got saved that made this statement, "Okay God, I'm going to do everything right now. Okay God, I'm never going to violate the Ten Commandments again. Okay God, I'm going to make sure I have the right this and the right..." No. All you did is you got on your face before God and you said, "I'm a filthy sinner that needs to be saved." When you reflect on that, you know what you're reflecting on? Grace. Because God did for you what you don't deserve. He forgave you. You don't deserve that. He saved you. You don't deserve that. He seated you in the heavenlies. You don't deserve that. He's going to give you a new body one day. You don't deserve that. You're going to reign with him one day. You don't deserve that. You're going to experience everlasting life. You don't deserve that. That being said, fast forward to today. It's not about relationships today, it's about fellowship. I'm going to ask you a tough question, where are you with the Lord? I'm not questioning your salvation. That's settled. You're in the Lamb's Book of Life. You're good to go. This isn't about relationship, this is about fellowship and the question I ask is simply where are you? You know, the first time we hear that question in the Bible is in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve have fallen into sin, and they thought they could hide behind a bush. God asked them, "Where are you?" Now, God didn't have trouble locating them. God just wanted to admit where they really were. Tonight, I'm gonna ask you the same question. Where are you? Where are you in relationship to your fellowship with the Lord? Because you and I have an incredible blessing tonight. We're not worried about if the lamb qualifies for sacrifice. We're not worried making sure, do we have the resources to get to Jerusalem at the right time? We're not worried about any of that. Maybe part of the problem is we don't worry enough. So tonight, where are you because the last time I checked, when it comes to fellowship, it's not about reestablishing a relationship, it's about coming clean with how you've taken advantage, how you've violated, and how you've taken for granted the relationship that you're in. So tonight, let me ask you, believers, where are you? What do you need to do to make the fellowship right? Now, if you're lost, you need to be in relationship, but if you're saved, it's all about fellowship. And so tonight, what is it? Just like a child to their parent, an employee to an employer, what is it if there's been wrong done that would need to be done to restore the fellowship, although this is more important, it's between you and the Lord.

Heavenly Father, tonight, there is not enough gratitude in our lives for grace. Lord, personally, and hopefully I speak on behalf of all of us, I cannot thank you enough that I don't have to worry about going to Jerusalem with a lamb once a year. God, thank you that every time I fall into temptation, I'm not having to track down turtledoves and show up to a priest and have them cut the right way. God, thank you that you saw fit to forgive us and to save us through the shedding of your own blood. God, thank you. that you were

willing to go to that cross. Thank you that you overcame that grave and, God, tonight thank you that when I and when others fall into temptation and we slip up and we mess up, that we don't have to run to Jerusalem, we just have to run to your throne where you tell us to enter with boldness. So God tonight, may our fellowship be restored. May our fellowship be sweet and may we depart this place walking in the assurance and the confidence of who we are in Christ Jesus who came and lived and died and rose so that we might be his children, we might be the redeemed, we might be the reconciled, and we might be the saved. God, help us not just to believe it, but help us to live it. God, again, thank you. We are guilty, myself included, of doing a whole lot of griping about the world we live in today but when it comes to our relationship with you, there's never been a better time. So thank you for the blood, thank you for the empty tomb, and thank you for the promise of your word. May we not just preach it, may we not just amen it, may we go out tonight and may we live it. It is in the wonderful, incredible name of Jesus Christ we pray. And all God's people said, amen.