

Bible Questions and Answers, Part 58

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 70-30

Well, as you know, these days are interesting days for me, as my work on preaching through the New Testament has nearly come to an end. In fact, in terms of preparation, it has come to an end. I have already prepared the messages for next Sunday. And it was Friday that I did something that really marked a dramatic shift in the course of my life.

In my little study where I have prepared for many, many, many years, there are a couple of shelves off to my left and on those shelves for decades have been the commentaries and the study resources that I am using in any study of any book. And I'm always doing two books, usually always, if it's in the last couple of years, one on Sunday morning, one on Sunday night. So those shelves are occupied with commentaries on whatever books I'm preaching on.

For the first time in decades, those shelves are empty. That was a kind of an interesting moment when I cleared off all the resources, historical resources, commentaries, all the tools that I have used in the book of Mark and put them back in their chronological place between Matthew and Luke in the larger library, and looked at an empty shelf and wondered what the future of my life was going to look like.

What was going to be next on that shelf? And so as I think about that, I've got a lot of ideas. I am not likely to run out of them. If worse comes to worse, I'll just start in to the Psalms and you'll die and I'll die and we won't be anywhere near the end. So there are lots and lots of options. So no fear.

And I want to let you know that I'm not planning a retirement. I've told the elders, as long as I make sense, leave me alone. When I don't make sense, just try to convince me that I don't make sense. That's the problem, isn't it? So drag me out of there.

But I'm looking forward to just a few months of sort of down time to think through where we go and I'm very excited about that opportunity. But these are wonderful days for me. It really was an effort that was prompted by an early desire, on my part, to understand the New Testament. I don't want to drag this out in a personal level, but when I went away to college, I was committed as a freshman in college to understanding the New Testament. I didn't know if I'd preach it, teach it, what I would do. I didn't even think about ministry, didn't think about preaching or teaching. I just wanted to understand the New Testament. I was driven to understand it.

I'd started being frustrated as a junior higher because I would read the Bible and not understand the Bible and just reading without understanding it didn't satisfy me. And so I went away to Bible college and I just wanted to get the tools to understand the New Testament. So my first year I took five units of Greek, first semester five the second. So I had ten units of Greek my freshman year, three and three the next year, sixteen and I kept going through college so I wound up with a minor in Greek which is the language of the New Testament. It was all a sort of personal journey for me to have the necessary tools to be able to handle the wonders of the New Testament.

It wasn't long after I started preaching here at Grace that it became apparent that I was not going to be able to satisfy the desire of my heart if I didn't dig into the New Testament one book at a time, one chapter at a time, one verse at a time, and sometimes one word at a time. And I will confess to you now, if you haven't known it before, what you get on Sunday is the result of what I want to know. I am driven by my own desire to understand the Word and understand what God meant by what He said, in all its fullness and all its richness. In fact, what you get is a small portion of what's circulating in my mind.

But from the beginning, I didn't know if I would be here a long time, or a short time. Obviously we don't know that. But I had determined that I was going to keep working my way through the New Testament so that I could fully understand it.

Early in my life I began even to read the New Testament because I believed I was a minister of the New Covenant and that the mysteries that were given to Paul were then given to me which had been hidden from the generations past, and are now revealed in the New Testament. That we were New Testament ministers of the New Covenant. So that's where my focus was, there. And that the Old Testament was, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, a series of illustrations to elucidate our understanding of the glories of the New. The Old Testament was shadow, the New is substance.

So I knew that's what I wanted to do and I began to press down in the study of the New Testament. Well it wasn't very long into that effort when I was contacted by the people at Moody Press and they said, "Would you...would you do commentaries? Would you produce commentaries?" And I had no idea what I was signing up for, to be honest.

I said, "I'd love to do that because I want other people to know what I'm learning about the New Testament. I want other people to understand the deep, rich truths that are contained in these 27 books." So I said, "Sure." But I said, "Let's do this. Just let me do one at a time and see how long it takes."

And they said, "Well, okay, we'll have a ten-year project."

Well that was 1978, I think. So it's been a lot more than a ten-year project. Or maybe earlier than that, even. I don't exactly remember. But I started them to think about the way I was preaching with a view to not only preaching and teaching the Scripture, but having the material in that message to use as the basis of writing a commentary.

So, from my standpoint, I have preached my way through the New Testament and at the same time, gone back and written my way through the New Testament. I preach the sermons and when it's time to put the commentary together on any book that I've preached, I get my sermons typed up by the same lady whose done it for all the years, Arline Hampton. She has typed up every word I've ever preached. And I get it back in a kind of a paragraphed form and off that I develop a commentary. And as you know, we're coming down to the wire on that, all of Luke is done, two more volumes in Luke and then we're going to try to get Mark into one volume and it will be finished.

But the combination of my own desire and then the additional sense of responsibility to be able to produce commentaries that would explain the Bible to other people, has basically been what controls and defines the way I preach.

And as you know, there are not a lot of contemporary, current, newspaper, television illustrations through the years, because I want the interpretation of Scripture to be timeless, not to be locked in.

I tell young pastors all the time, if you can't preach your sermon out of your zip code, change your sermon. If you can't preach your sermon from the Word of God in another country and have it translated into another language, you better change it because the Word of God is not bound and you don't want to be the one who binds it. You don't want to put limits on the Word of God.

And now we live in a digital world and how amazing is it that the things that I've preached over all these years, 43-some years, go everywhere in every culture and people don't know whether I preached it in 1980 or in 2011, because it's merely explaining the Word of God.

I have so much to be thankful for because this was in my heart a desire and a goal. And I never had any notion that I would ever get there. It's really amazing to me. And it's like the old story, how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. But who would ever imagine that you actually would arrive at the end? So it's amazing that the Lord has seen fit to allow me to have the strength and the stamina to do this.

And along the way, by the way, to even teach some books more than once, like Ephesians, Romans, and Revelation. And some are prevailing on me in the future to go back to the gospel of John because I preached it so early, that would be a fun thing for me to do because now I could go back and preach through the gospel of John and use my own commentary as a resource. (Laughter) Huh?

I mean, that would be flipping my life, doing it in reverse. So, it could happen.

But anyway, it's been a wonderful adventure. That's only my side of the story. What has made this so amazing is the congregation that God placed me, you are the people who enabled me to be able to do this. You are a remarkable congregation. This church has always, always, from the very, very beginning, demonstrated a hunger for the teaching of the Word of God. You've never wanted gimmicks, you've never needed entertainment, you have always been fixed on the truth of God's precious Word. Really, this marriage was made in heaven, between you and me. This is the place where God had me, and this is the only place, I think, He ever intended me to be. Now for me, that's good. For you, that's a death sentence, or at least a life sentence.

But I cannot be thankful enough to the Lord for putting me in a place where the appetite for the Word would be at the same level that the desire of the teacher was to convey that Word. So, thank you for these wonderful years and I think we have a lot of exciting ones ahead, as well.

But this wonderful adventure, though, in a sense it's over, has only begun. It has only begun, because now all of that being digitized goes everywhere. It's...it's just beyond comprehension, unbelievable how the preaching of the Word of God from the website of Grace To You circles the earth over and over and over and over. And it...once we made it free, all the sermons are free to be downloaded on GTY.org, on mp3 files, it seemed like it woke the world up and there's just been an explosion of interest in the Word of God.

And this, of course, is my passion, that God's Word might be glorified and it might be taught and people might learn and grow and love the Lord and honor the Lord and serve the Lord and know the Lord. So, while it was a private moment for me, just a quiet moment when I cleaned that shelf off, it was a monumental moment at the same time because something was finished that I never ever imagined would be done.

So thank you for enabling me, thank you for supporting me and Patricia and our family through these years, and thank you for coming and hearing the Word of God from the same voice for nearly half a century, Sunday morning and Sunday night, and in the early years, Wednesday night, as well. I can't thank you enough. You have been and always will be my joy and crown of rejoicing, both now and in the life to come.

Well anyway, I just needed to say that cause I need to say thank you. Now it's really your time. We have about ten minutes for you to ask...(Laughter) We want you to ask some questions and we have some guys there, I think Bill is over there, and Austin is there, and Kevin is over there, so you don't need to line up but come up as you desire and just ask a question. Give me your name and the question.

CHRISTIAN: First of all, our minister is great and awesome and quite unique. However, there was a time where I visited the church down in Los Angeles, a friend of mine invited me there. And I was actually impressed about their ministry, simply because they're rich in their local community. You know, Grace Community Church, I like what you said, you've been talking about our ministry internationally and it's so great and I'm happy for that, proud about it. Should we as a church this size reach our local community in Sun Valley, Panorama, North Hollywood, to augment it more?

JOHN: Sure. Well, I'd be curious, how many of you are from five mile-ten mile radius, put your hands up. Yeah, there we are. You know, we don't determine who the church is. The Lord adds to the church daily, such as should be saved. Some people come from San Diego, some people come from...we have some people who come from San Francisco, drive five and a half hours. But basically, it radiates from here, radiates from here. The last I checked and Kevin you would probably know this better than anybody, there are about eleven different languages within the immediate vicinity in which we live here. We have extensive input into those areas, English classes and exposure of the gospel to the Buddhist people connected with the Buddhist temple down the street. You know, we've done everything we could through the years to penetrate the community, even now people go door-to-door in the community. We do all that we can. We obviously have a big footprint in the community. We encourage you to bring folks.

But I think the story of Grace Church is primarily that it is a community church. We haven't changed our name. We don't want to be Grace World Church, that's a kind of a Messiah complex, a little megalomania. We are a community church, this is our community. And I agree with that. And we have penetrated this community. My guess is...well I don't need to guess, if you were converted to Christ from a Catholic background, put your hand up...put your hand up, stand up...stand up if you were converted out of the Catholic background. Okay, that's good. Thank you.

Now you can see that that's the community of Los Angeles and that's certainly the community of the San Fernando Valley, strong influence among Hispanics, and the Lord is rescuing people out of that system in our own community. Would we want to penetrate even more intensely? Obviously that falls really to the responsibility of believers in the church to be faithful to live godly lives in their neighborhood, in their community and reach out to their neighbors and friends and schoolmates. Okay? Good.

BERNIE: Good evening, Pastor, my name is Bernie Hadda(?), before I ask you a question, I'd like to relate one of the moments where you...back to my life, I started coming to Grace in the early mid-seventies. I had gone to a Spanish department service. Then I was told by a group that I should come and listen to the pastor in the English service. So I walked in and sat right in the front and sitting next to this person, and I said, "Someone told me to come and listen to the pastor, he's good preacher. And I just want to hear him." He said, "You're welcome," this person told me that, but I think I just

gave it away, it was you who just stood up and went to preach and I didn't know.

But...and I thought it was, you know, I don't know if I should use the word simple man, but very meek man. Instead of saying, "Hey, I'm the pastor, you know, I'm glad you're hearing about me," or something. So I came out gang members and this is where I picked up most of my English, so if I'm short with my English, practicing question...personal question, have you ever thought about giving your wife a chance to preach or was it okay for the women to preach?

JOHN: I never had such a thought...never. No, it's not okay for the women to preach. "I permit not a woman to teach or take authority over a man, but to learn in silence," that's very clear in Scripture. A great force of the women who publish the Good News, God uses women, what Paul says to Timothy, "She is saved in child-bearing, living a chaste life, raising godly children." That's her legacy, that's her impact on the world. Women evangelize, women teach other women, women teach children, women give instruction and counsel, wise counsel and spiritual wisdom to their own husbands, but the order of the church is that God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of the man, the man is the head of the woman, 1 Corinthians 11, and that's the order that God has designed in the church. And that's modeled by Christ's submission to His own Father.

So there's not even any doubt in Scripture about the issue of women preaching because, you can think of it a lot of ways, one would be this, how many of the 66 books of the Bible were written by women? None...none. Wouldn't you think that if women were supposed to have equal authority to preach and teach in the church, that the Lord would have at least allowed one of them to write a book in the Bible? No, it's clearly demonstrated by the authority of the biblical writers that the man is put in that position.

How many of the Apostles were women? None of them...none of them. The Old Testament prophets, there were no women prophets with an ongoing sustained prophetic ministry. Occasionally there were women who spoke like Deborah, Huldah, the daughters of Philip in the New Testament, and they spoke. There were times when God used a woman like Esther, like Naomi, Ruth and things like that. But no...there's no evidence anywhere in all of divine revelation that women should preach. Beyond that, of course, Patricia would absolutely die at the thought of getting up here and preaching. That wouldn't be her comfort zone by any stretch of the imagination. Thank you...thank you.

MARSHALL: Good evening, my name is Marshall Allen, I'm here visiting with my brother Travis Allen, who I believe you know he serves here with you.

JOHN: Absolutely.

MARSHALL: And I have two quick questions I wanted to ask. One, I was wondering if you could share with us, you talked this morning about God's providential work in our lives and how that's a

common thing. I was wondering if you could share an example of God's providence in your own life and number two, I'm wondering if there were any insights over these decades of preaching through the New Testament that really you would say altered the trajectory of your own personal life? Or altered the trajectory of your ministry here at the church?

JOHN: All right, Marshall, let's start with the first one. My whole life is a providence of God. My whole life, I mean every single day of my life is an act of divine providence. I am...I am surprised every day of my life, I am almost totally a responder to the providences of God which unfold incessantly in my life in ways that I could never, ever comprehend. It might be meeting a person who fits a compelling need in my own life, or a compelling need in our ministry, or who is the perfect fit for a very important opportunity that we have somewhere in the ministry. It might be...it might be what would seem to be a serendipitous meeting of someone somewhere in a restaurant, or a gas station, or wherever it might be. I've even had them in elevators, in hotels in foreign countries, and my whole life is just one amazing providence of God after another.

But the whole story of coming to Grace Church, that was the providence of God. I mean, the Board just said, "Get a young pastor," they had two widows, two pastors who had died of a heart attack and I qualified because I was young. Things like that that sort of set them up to want somebody young, when other churches were saying to me in my late twenties, "We're not interested. You're too young, you have no experience."

Well Grace Church was a growing and effective church that had two very mature and very fine men as pastors, why would they take a young man? Well, in the purposes of God, in the providence of God, when those two men were snatched away into heaven and their widows were left, there was some thought about maybe we could turn to a young man. From the start, from the very beginning, my life has been an unending process of seeing the hand of God on my life.

I can recall when I had blood clots and DVT, Deep Vein Thrombosis, and the blood clots went into my lungs and I wound up in a hospital in critical condition and I was there for eight days. And the physician who finally was able to help me, as a result of that meeting, said, "I want to hear you preach when you get out of here, I haven't been to church since I was 16." And I said, "Well I have to wait a few months right before I can preach, cause you can't get on your feet and whatever. Well the first Sunday I came back after that was Luke, the beginning of Luke and he came the first Sunday and my first message was on Luke, the beloved physician. And I preached to him. And it wasn't long after that that he came to me and professed his faith in Christ.

Well, look, that's a rather circuitous way to be used to evangelize. And I might suggest to the Lord that Plan B could work just as well. I don't know why it takes me eight days in the hospital hanging on to life to get through to this guy. But my...my entire life is like that, every week is like that, virtually constantly like that. If you just dipped into the mailbag, the phone calls, and the ways that God uses

the ministry here, you would see it's one long providence.

Now the second question you asked, was...was there at some point in my teaching a significant turning point that....

MARSHALL: Just some insight that you've gleaned from your studies that was surprising enough that it altered the trajectory of your personal life or your ministry.

JOHN: Yeah, I think it was at the very beginning when I for reasons that I don't know personally, but I do understand spiritually, I began to be preoccupied with the experience of Moses in Exodus 33, seeing the glory of God. And I began to become curious about what was going on and why God revealed himself in glory and how He manifested Himself in light and what did that mean? And how God defined that as showing His loving kindness and mercy and all of that. And He describes it there. And that sent me on a trajectory to try to fully understand both the intrinsic glory of God, that glory which is true to His character, which is essential to His nature, and that glory of God which is ascribed to Him, glorify God on our part.

And very early in my ministry, I did a series on glorifying God and I started out with this whole idea of God's intrinsic glory, that which is true of Him, the sum of all His attributes which we don't embellish and we don't add to. And developed all that in my mind. That was critical to me. Some of that was the fruit of reading a book by Stephen Charnock called *The Existence and Attributes of God*. I thought I understood God. After all, I read *The Knowledge of the Holy* which is about 75 pages and then I read Charnock which is about 750 pages, talking about God. And I saw the glory of God in such grand, grand terms.

So then from there I went to that which is the ascribed glory to God and I began to follow the flow through to the Bible starting with the glory of God revealed in the Garden as light when He walked and talked with Adam, went all the way to the glory of God fully revealed in Matthew 24 and 25 when He comes in full blazing glory, Revelation when they cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them, to hide them from His face, the face that Moses couldn't see in Exodus 33 or it would have incinerated him instantly. And that study, more than anything, in those very foundational years, captured my heart and sent me in the direction of everything being to the glory of God.

How important is that? If you look at churches today, you will find that for the most part they are preoccupied with the desires of men. They want to design themselves to be attractive to men. I want to design everything I do, everything this church does to glorify God. We want to be lost in wonder, love and praise.

When a non-believer comes in here, we want the non-believer to feel he is in an alien environment, that he can't connect. That he doesn't get it, that it's not normal, that it's not comfortable, it doesn't

seem right, it's not like anything he's ever experienced. With the hope that what it says in 1 Corinthians 14 might happen, he'll fall on his face and say, "God is in this place," when he sees a true worshiping community.

So that has been a defining reality for us, that what we do is glorify God. Worship becomes elevated. Prayer becomes elevated. Preaching becomes elevated. It gets above the superficial and the shallow because everything is driving at the glory of God. And I'm so thankful that that happened early.

At that time, I wrote one of the first books I wrote called Keys to Spiritual Growth, some of you may have an old copy of that somewhere. And I honestly wrote that, and the whole front of it is all of that that I was thinking through.

The first part of that book, and it talks about how to glorify God. After talking about His intrinsic glory, how we ascribe glory to Him. And I remember saying when I met the guy to finish the book, gave him the manuscript and it was all done, I actually said, "I could be content now if I never wrote another book." That was 199 books ago. Then I said, "I could actually be content if I never wrote another book," because that's what I need to say. So if you have an old copy of The Keys to Spiritual Growth, or if you don't, you can get a new one, I think it's still around. That was definitive to me.

There's one other thing and it's a very perceptive question, Marshall. There's one other thing that was very definitive to me. I knew Christ was head of the church and that He had to rule in His church, and that I was only an under-shepherd to the Great Shepherd. And I wanted the church to be what Christ would want His church to be. I wasn't interested in studying culture.

I remember meeting with a man early in my ministry, he was pastor of a big church in Washington D.C. and he had just read a book by an IBM president and said it's revolutionized my approach to the church, I now know how to build a great church, using the techniques that were used to build IBM. And I was so shocked by that. It was the first time...I was sitting on his porch rocking back and forth listening to him say this. And the conversation dissipated fast because I really had no response. I didn't want to be ungracious to him, get thrown off his porch. So I just went away thinking, "What is he talking about?"

What does Christ want in His church?

When I was in seminary I was looking for the answer to that...what should a church be? I had grown up in a church, my Dad was a pastor, my Grandfather was a pastor, and I knew I didn't want to do church the way I had seen it done. I had courses in church polity and practical theology and I didn't hear anything that moved me. So I was...I was just digging around trying to find an answer, and I found a very obscure self-published little book published by some Plymouth Brethren publishers called, The Order for Church and Missionary. That's a really bad title. The Order for Church and

Missionaries, sounds like something out of the sixteenth century. And it was written by a man named Alexander Rattray Hay. And I felt sorry for him immediately having to deal with...but anyway, I found this obscure book and I started to read this book and all this guy did, page after page after page after page, was explain everything in the New Testament pastoral epistles and the life and ministry of the Apostles that spoke directly and scripturally to the life of the church.

And that is what shaped my ecclesiology. That's what shaped my view of the church, that book. I just was...as I said...cleaning out my shelf the other day, and guess what? There he was, old Rattray-Hay right there on the shelf. And it was a wonderful book and I especially loved it because when they manufactured the book, they completely messed up and the sections are out of place and upside down, so you have to read it and then turn it over, and then jump here. So if you can get through it, it's the signal of a great effort...just to get through the book. And I loved it for its idiosyncrasies.

So I knew when I came here that the glory of God was the compelling issue and that the church needed to be what the Word of God said a church needed to be. And that is what has set the course for us through all these years. In fact, just one thought further, I said to some other pastors, I said, "You know, we have to discipline sin in the church. We have to confront people, take two or three witnesses, confront them again if they don't repent, tell the whole church. If they still don't repent, throw them out."

I couldn't find anybody who didn't say to me, "You're crazy. You can't do that. You cannot do that?"

I said, "What do you mean? We have to do that? It's what it says in the Bible, either we do it or we don't." And Grace Church became the first and only church I ever heard of that did that in those years. So, maybe that helps a little, huh?

MARSHALL: Yeah, thank you.

JOHN: You're welcome. Yes, ma'am.

MELISSA: Hi, my name is Melissa, I'm an aerospace engineering student and...

JOHN: You're a what?

MELISSA: An aerospace engineering student.

JOHN: Oh.

MELISSA: My question is...

JOHN: Boy, I don't know anything about that stuff.

MELISSA: As Christians we're called to love our neighbors as well as our enemies. My question is, in the aerospace engineering industry some companies develop weapons and my question is, is it contradictory to try to live a Christ-centered life while working in this industry.\

JOHN: You know, what's your first name?

MELISSA: Melissa.

JOHN: Melissa, there's a man sitting right behind you, do you know that man? His name is Bill Zimmer. Bill Zimmer, come up to the microphone. I'm going to introduce you to one of the long-time elders of Grace Church, he's been an elder at Grace Church for probably 40 years and he has designed most of the weapons that America uses in its combat. Is that not true?

BILL: It's not exactly true. (Laughter)

JOHN: Okay, okay, I'll rephrase it. He has designed some of the most...some of the most lethal weapons, is that true?

BILL: True.

JOHN: Yeah. That's what I thought. Yeah...mild-mannered Bill.

BILL: We'll talk later.

JOHN: There you go. There you go. Let me tell you, Melissa, that's a great question and the answer to that is this, a war of defense that defends innocent people from evil aggressors is a just war and you have biblical evidence for that. I did a series some years ago on the Christian view of war, you can download that from the Grace To You website, several messages that lay out the biblical pattern for that.

In Romans 13, the Bible says that the powers that be are ordained of God, and listen to this part, and they bear not the sword for nothing. And the sword was a weapon of execution. You didn't spank people with a sword, you killed them with a sword. So God gave to government the sword to punish evildoers. It is wrong to use any kind of weapon for evil aggression. It is necessary to use weapons for the protection of innocent people against evil aggressors. Thank you for doing what you're doing.

Where are we? Right there in the middle.

ANDY: Pastor MacArthur, my name is Andy. Harold Camping said two weeks ago that Christ is coming and I know you are not prepared for him. My question is this, I go Sunday afternoons to share the gospel in Evangelism Outreach, every Sunday afternoon. And we get a lot of questions about doubts of people who say, "How can I believe that man? Christ said He's coming two weeks ago. It's so confusing."

Again, my question in the ministry point of view is this, where did you learn your eschatology and how can we defend our faith from this kind of thing?

JOHN: Good, Andy. Well I didn't learn it from Harold Camping (laughter), and I've known about him for a long, long time. This is the third time he's predicted Jesus is coming. And now he's just bumped it up to October 21st. Okay? It's bumped up to October 21st, he spend a hundred million dollars, that's one thing. I mean, he's obviously not playing with a full deck, let's put it that way. He's a few bricks short of a load, or however you want to say it. But the thing that amazes me is all the people around him that sell their houses, sell their cars, take their life savings and buy signs to follow him...there will always be false teachers.

Do you remember what it says in the Olivet Discourse? "They'll say, 'Here's Christ,' and 'There is Christ. Do not follow them.'"

When Christ comes, you will know it. We just went through the Olivet Discourse again, Mark's version of it, in chapter 13 of Mark. That's the same issue. Matthew, Luke, they're always going to be people who try to capture for whatever reasons of their own power and position and elevation, capture people by fear and intimidation into their bizarre eschatological schemes. And they will say, "Here is Christ," "There is Christ," "Lo, here is Christ." Do not follow them, Jesus says, do not follow them. Christ will come but not until this, and this, and this, and this, and this, and this. His eschatology is just that, his eschatology.

I'm not at all confused about what the Bible teaches. There are two things I want to say. The Bible's eschatology is clear and I remember, perhaps the most interesting experience, eschatological experience I ever had was I got on an airplane one time down at LAX and I flew to Kazakhstan and it was 35 hours of flying to get to the back side of central Asia for a pastors conference with 1600 central Asian pastors who had just been liberated from the Russian Federation, the USSR because it had broken up under Perestroika Glasnost and they had the first central Asian pastors conference, there were 1600 Christian pastors there and they asked me to come and teach.

I remember, I flew 35 hours, got off the flight at seven o'clock and I was speaking by eight and I didn't stop till six days later. ; They were so hungry for the truth and they wanted me to teach about the church.

Well they came to me and they said, "Will you teach the future? Would you teach us eschatology? Teach us what the Bible says about eschatology?"

I said, "Okay, Friday we'll do that." And from Friday morning about seven-thirty or eight, until late Friday night, I taught these 1600 people biblical eschatology. Here's the amazing part. I never knew any of these people, never met any of these people, they didn't know anybody I knew, they hadn't been exposed to any books that I knew about or any schools. When the day was over, they all came in, they sat down with me and they said, "You believe exactly what we believe."

I said, "Really?" Down to a pre-tribulational Rapture, you believe exactly what we believe. And I said, "Well, that's amazing on the one hand, but on the other hand, if all you have is the Bible, that's where you're going to end up." I think the reason people are confused about eschatology, Christian people, is because Christians with bad eschatology have made bad eschatology acceptable. But your problem is, even worse, non-believers mock Christianity because of the ridiculous and bizarre things that these false teachers do. This is satanic, I believe, this is lie and deception to discredit the simple, clear, truth of Scripture. It confuses people, there's no question about it.

If you're the guy on the street and you walk up to him, Andy, and you say, "I want to tell you about the Lord Jesus." Oh yeah... imagine what he's heard about Jesus if he just turned on TBN or any other Christian television station. What does he think? What does he think Christianity is? And then you add the fact that he loves his sin and he doesn't want to give it up, so any excuse that he can find to reject it will work for him. And, boy, he can find a lot of them.

How many times have you heard this? "I don't go to church because it's full of hypocrites." And my answer to that is, "Well that's fine, we have room for one more." But you hear people say that. "I don't want to go to church, it's full of hypocrites."

You know what? If you want to look for hypocrites in the church, you can find them and you can find false teachers all over the place and manipulators and charlatans and phonies and frauds and people doing things in the name of Jesus that are an outrage.

I thank you, Andy, for being faithful to go out there, because you're nose-to-nose in the hard place. What you have to do is let the Word of God do the work, let the Spirit of God do the work. Just show what the Bible says and let the Word of God overpower the error, okay? You're a faithful guy, thank you, Andy.

KATHY: Hi, my name is Kathy.

JOHN: Hi, Kathy.

KATHY: Have you preached a lot about heaven? I think the actual, physical heaven?

JOHN: I have.

KATHY: My neighbor and I were reading a small simple book, it's called Heaven is Real, it was written by a pastor about his four-year-old who believes saw heaven. I don't know how to quite deal with that because I know that this is a minister, and I read the book, and I do believe he's a Christian, and why would he mislead people...I don't know what to think about that. He does point to Christ.

JOHN: Well...well, I'm glad he points to Christ, I'm glad he's a minister, but if his little boy saw heaven, he'd be there. Yeah, a four-year-old saw heaven and he's here?

KATHY: He became very ill and almost...

JOHN: I've heard a lot of stories like that. You know, that goes back to the light shining at the end of the dark tunnel and all of those near-death experiences. And I saw a glimpse of heaven and, look, I've answered that. There was one guy who went to heaven in a suit and a tie, and he had the tie...the tie that he went on still smells like heaven so he wears it all time.

And, you know, you get all that kind of crazy stuff. And then you've got guys who went to hell, and they came back. And they use that to manipulate people and raise money. There's no biblical basis for anyone to die and come back. "It's appointed unto man once to die and after this, the judgment." If you saw heaven, you stayed there.

The Apostle Paul is the only one that I know of on the pages of Holy Scripture who had a glimpse of heaven, other than the Lord Jesus Himself who started from there. And Paul was taken up in the third heaven, he says in 2 Corinthians, but he couldn't even speak about it. He said, "I saw things too wonderful to speak of," and he says, "Besides, it's not helpful to speak of those things."

Why isn't it helpful? Because it can't be verified and it can't be reproduced. So what's the point of it? Any time someone says, "My little boy went to heaven and came back," you can't verify it and you can't reproduce it, so it has no valid use. It doesn't prove anything except that some people take speculation too far. And what's the point? What did the little boy say about heaven? It was pretty, or nice, or...?

KATHY: He described heaven...he's just a four-year-old, and he'd say things that his parents know he didn't know anything about.

JOHN: Were they accurate descriptions of heaven taken from Scripture?

KATHY: Yeah, I think so. And my neighbor talks to me a lot about it because she's not a believer and I don't know how to deal with that.

JOHN: The only thing that we know to be the description of heaven is that which is contained in Scripture. We have no way to verify that. You can't verify it. You can't reproduce it. And a four-year-old, why would God make a revelation that He wanted to communicate to the world through a four-year-old?

KATHY: And then there's so many books on the market like that. And I'm thinking...

JOHN: Oh sure, but that's all...that's all intuition, mysticism, fabrication, it has no place in the life of a pastor or a minister of the Word of God to use a four-year-old speculating about heaven as if there's anything authoritative there because that feeds the idea that we have to have something more than Scripture, or something more than Scripture is more important than Scripture. No, it's ridiculous.

There is a full description of heaven in the Bible. I've written a book called Heaven. You go to the bookstore, and they'll give you a free copy and they'll put it on Bill Shannon's account. You get that book on heaven, okay?

KATHY: I will.

JOHN: It's everything you need to know and you can give the book to the lady and say, "This isn't from a four-year-old, this is from God Himself. Okay?"

KATHY: Thank you.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Well first, I think I can speak for everyone, I just want to thank you for your ministry. My wife and I, Candice, have been here for about five...and I think four for me, and I just appreciate your faithfulness and just how high you hold the Word of God. My question to you as I was listening to you speak about...you know, how long you've been going through the New Testament. I mean, I just came in afterwards like four years...I don't know, that's like two books, or so. But I wanted to...I was curious to see, do you see this as a blueprint for other churches, or pastors as far as how, you know, how to...that they should go through 40 years and just start in the beginning and just preach through it? And what's your thought about that verses, you know, like some churches, you know, they go through a more topical approach, you know each week something different.

JOHN: No, it's a very good question, excellent, excellent question. The answer is yes. I not only see it as the preferred way, I see it as a mandate. In 2 Timothy chapter 4, Paul says to Timothy, "Preach the Word...Preach the Word. Be instant and immediate, preach the Word, keep doing it, in season and out of season." That means all the time, it's either in season or out of season, so it's all the time. Preach the Word, Preach the Word.

There is no other mandate. There's absolutely no other mandate. You can do a topical message drawn from the Word. But the heart of all faithful ministry is to explain the Scripture. It comes down to this. Everything God wants you to know is here, right? This is one source, one source, "The faith once for all delivered to the saints, don't add to it and don't take away from it, it's all here." So the responsibility of the faithful shepherd is to feed the flock of God what God has revealed.

How you going to do that?

You have to do that systematically and methodologically, you have to stay at it, you have to dig down. You also understand that you're commanded to divide it rightly, or to interpret it accurately. You're also told to go beyond the milk to the meat. And that doesn't...that doesn't mean that some teaching truths are milk and some are meat. It means in all teaching there's a milk level and a meat level. You can go down. I think that's what every pastor should do, that's why I've advocated it for all these years. This is what's called expository from the English verb exposit which means to explain...to explain. You explain the meaning of divine revelation.

I think that is not only the best way to preach, that is the mandated way to preach. You might not survive long enough to go through the whole New Testament, but wherever you are, whenever you're there, explain the meaning of Scripture. It's not about tear-jerking stories, it's not about clever illustrations, it's not about cultural sensitivity, it's not about hitting people where they are, scratching them where they itch, it's about explaining the meaning of Scripture because the power for salvation is in the Word, "Begotten again by the Word." The power for salvation is in the Word, we're sanctified by the Word. The comfort comes from the Scripture. And the hope of glory comes from the Scripture. Everything is contained in this immense treasure.

At the seminary graduation, Dick Mayhue did a little comparison about people who have done this and you can go back to Charles Simeon who preached in the same church for 50 years, systematically through the scriptures. You can go back to John Gill who preached systematically through the scriptures. You can even go back further to John Calvin who is known for Calvin's Institute Theological massive theological treatise. But by those of us who are expositors, he's known as the one who basically wrote commentaries on the entire Bible, everything but the book of Revelation.

So the men who have left their mark, long-term mark, have been the men who made the truth of God's Word accessible to God's people. That's what we do. I think it's the way we are mandated to preach, okay?

QUESTION: John, today a lot of people work in verse high stress jobs, even though the work may be very enjoyable, there's just a whole lot of it. Home life can be really stressful. These are very difficult times.

A few months ago you talked about, in the context of joy, you mentioned that burnout was related to pride. I was wondering if you could unwrap that for me?

JOHN: Yeah, I don't think...I don't think burnout as such, if you're talking about that psychological notion, is so much the result of hard work as it is the result of the pressure of expectations. It might be your expectations for yourself. It might be your self-imposed expectations. It might be the expectations that are imposed upon you by the people who are in authority and power over you. But when we talk about burnout, that's a popular term that's been used among preachers. "Oh, I'm worn out. Oh, I'm burned out. I've been preaching every week for the last six months. I need a break."

Come on. What are you talking about? Work is a good thing and obviously you can push too far and I understand what you're saying. You can become weary and you can neglect things that you should not neglect by overworking. But burnout is a term that was used to describe someone who reached a level of discouragement. Weariness is one thing. Messing up your priorities is another. But burnout was this idea that I'm not fulfilled. This is wearing me out and I'm not getting the results that I deserve. And that's why I say it's related to pride.

You get pastors complaining about the effort they make when it's really not that...you know, there might be 50 percent of the men in their congregation making a greater effort than they make at their jobs. I mean, pastors aren't punching a clock at seven and work until five and taking work home every day.

So when I talked about burnout, I was talking about that idea that I'm discouraged and I'm down and, you know, I'm not being appreciated. And that is related to pride. You know, burnout is tied to the fact that you think you should be treated better than the way you're being treated. When the truth is, everything we have is by grace anyway. And I'm just trying to help pastors get pass the point where they feed off their own expectations, cause churches can be pretty tough. Not this one, but most churches. Okay?

QUESTION: Thank You.

ROMAN: Hey, my name is Roman and I've got a quick question for you.

JOHN: Sure, Roman.

ROMAN: What is personally your biggest weakness? And how do you battle that biblically?

JOHN: Oh, you know, my biggest weakness is...it's a combination of all that I am, you know. I am my own biggest weakness. You know, I think patience sometimes, because I have so much to do and so aggressive. Time for prayer, I should spend much more time, give much more attention, but I'm tyrannized by the high level of demands that are placed on my time. I'm not always a good listener because I'm a professional talker. I'm a good reader because I'm desperate to know what I want to know. But I'm not nearly so desperate to know what you want to tell me. Not all the time. I mean, I'm trying to be honest, you know. I'm just telling you what my wife says. (Laughter) She should answer the question. Only you don't have enough time to hear the answer.

You know, I'm just what you are. I am a man who has been given a ministry by grace. I'm unworthy of the salvation I have. I am unworthy of the calling I have. I'm unworthy of the blessing I have. And I give God the glory for everything that He's accomplished through my life in spite of my many, many weaknesses. I have learned that by following my hero, the Apostle Paul, that if you are going to overcome your weaknesses, there are several things you must do. One is you must have a pure heart. Paul says, "My conscience is clear. I have lived with a clear conscience. My conscience is not accusing me." That means you win the spiritual battle in the heart so that you don't live with an accusing conscience, that will suck the sap right out of you, turn you into a hypocrite.

The second thing is, and there's really no alternative to this, is to live a life of discipline...of discipline. To be able to come every Sunday for all these years, Sunday morning, Sunday night, and then preach wherever else I preach during the week and around the world, and whatever else I do and all the books I write, demands an immense amount of time ordering and personal discipline.

I don't know where all that came from. I think I learned some of it in athletics when I was young, to achieve certain goals, you make certain sacrifices. I learned some of it in seminary as a student. But it's the tyranny of Sundays that has forced this discipline on me. And I think that the Lord has used that demanding discipline of studying the Word of God to get ready for every Sunday to make the Scripture the purifying agent in my life.

So the way to deal with weakness, and I say, "Look, I don't know what I'd be if I wasn't a pastor, but I'm so glad I am because exposing my life to Scripture all the time and being forced to this discipline accomplishes the two things that are most necessary in overcoming your weakness. Okay?"

I think we have time for the last few.

JOHNNY: My name is Johnny and my question is...it's two questions. The first one is, how do you filter out the ideas of the world from changing you and your ministry? And the second one is as we are surrounded and pressured by peers, co-workers, etc., what would you say to encourage us not to conform?

JOHN: Well, first of all, Johnny, I...I really am so focused on Scripture, I am so profoundly and persistently influenced by Scripture that the culture can't sneak up on me, you know? I get it. I have such a varied, refined, biblical, world view.

Look, I just wish the news stations would call me up. I could explain everything to them. I can explain why everything is the way it is. All these mumbling and musing people trying to figure out the present and the future and we all understand that. So the culture doesn't offer me anything that's even close to what I need or what I want.

But I think it's just that saturation. And what I've tried to do as a pastor, and I knew this from the go, was that I needed to have a congregation that were equally saturated in the Word because you are going to be living in the middle of it, like you just said. That's why a church like this is so important. You can find other churches where you'll laugh more. You can find other churches where you'll cry more. You can find other rock and roll experiences. You can find novelty. But you will never find another church where you will be more saturated with the Word of God than this church. And that's absolutely what a church is supposed to do. And that's the blessing for me and the blessing for you.

And all you want to do, Johnny, is think biblically and then act in response. And keep being a part of what's going on here. How long have you been here?

JOHNNY: I was actually here from junior high to my sophomore year at college, and now I go to another church out in the Bellflower area.

JOHN: Well, if you live in another area, make sure that church saturates you with the Word of God so that you are literally controlled in your thinking and your behavior by His Word. Okay? Alright.

JENNIFER: Hi, Pastor MacArthur, my name is Jennifer and I was wondering over the past few years in which you've preached the New Testament what has been maybe your favorite passage that you've studied through, or sermon that you've preached that has been most edifying to your own soul?

JOHN: Oh, Jennifer. That's like asking me which is my favorite grandchild. Aye, ye-ye. I love them all and I love the one I'm with, you know. Ministering to my own soul, just immediately coming to mind, I

can't get away from the person of Christ. Any portion of Scripture about Jesus Christ is totally captivating to me. I'm literally unrestrained in my joy when I study and preach concerning Christ. So it could be any passage related to Him.

I have a particular love on a personal level for the book of 2 Corinthians. And I know that's not kind of a high on the reading list for most Christians, because it's a book in which the Apostle Paul agonizes over his relationship to the Corinthian church.

But for a pastor, it's where I live, in the agonies of disappointment and the agonies of failure and success in the life of a church. I love that book. And I've often said, "I'm so glad I didn't try to preach it early in my ministry, or I never would have understood it." I needed to be beaten up. I needed to have 250 people leave Grace Church and mad at me. I needed to have the whole staff mutiny and walk out in protest against me. I needed to have suffered enough failure and disappointment and pain or I never would have been able to understand it.

But for my own soul, personally, 2 Corinthians is a book that I love to live in and dwell in. I can honestly say that preaching through it was a life-transforming experience because I was identifying so much with the pain of Paul. And then going back and doing the commentary on it, I've often said, "In some ways, it's my favorite commentary because it's directly ministering to what I do." Okay?

QUESTION: My question was, if you could possess one of the miraculous powers that the Apostles temporarily had during their mission, which would it be?

JOHN: Wow, wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to heal people? That was the dominant thing that Jesus did, wasn't it? I mean, He fed them on a couple of occasions. He raised the dead on a couple of occasions. Cast out demons more frequently. But wouldn't it be wonderful just to be able to go through the world and heal everybody and say in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk? And people to do that. and then to take no money for it and do it in hospitals and not on TV, that would be great...that would be great. God accomplishes His purpose through us apart from that anyway. Thank you for your questions and I think probably that's enough for tonight. As I said, next Sunday we'll wrap up Mark in the morning. And I'm going to do something next Sunday night that I think you'll find very interesting.

There is at the end of the gospel of Mark a paragraph that runs from verse 9 to 20. And if you look at your Bible, whatever Bible you have, you will note that it wasn't in the original manuscripts, it has been added. We know essentially when it was added. It was added very early in the life of the church, but it wasn't in the original manuscripts. And I'll explain that a little bit to you and why it was added and why Mark ends the way it ends. And why they scrambled to add something to it and where they got the material they added and it will be a little bit of a study in what we do in the study of manuscripts to know we get the right text. And then we'll take a look at the thematic issue of Mark

and wrap it up. Okay? Let's pray.

Father, thank You for a wonderful day, great testimonies tonight, good fellowship. And now as we end this service, we begin our personal fellowship together, make it rich. And we thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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