

The Woman of Truth - Lesson 16 of 21 - Landmarks of Prophecy

Welcome once again, friends, to Landmarks of Prophecy. I want to welcome those who are watching online or via one of these television networks. We're very glad that you've tuned in. We're studying some very important themes of prophecy and our study this evening is, in particular, going to be dealing with a very important prophecy you find in Revelation chapter 12. But as is our custom, I'd like to begin with a little amazing fact.

Back in 1875, a ship called 'The Hudson' was sailing in the North Atlantic - the far North Atlantic - and there they found, drifting among the icebergs, a derelict ship. When they came closer they had a boarding party that boarded this ship that was floating - it was called 'The Octavius.' And they were amazed - they thought they'd just take possession of the ship to find out that this ship was still manned by a crew that were all frozen in position. Some people were still standing in position, others were frozen in their hammocks. The captain was at his desk with the pen in hand, making his last entry in the log book. On examining the log book, they were able to piece together the story.

They had tried, after a successful trip to the Orient - before the summer ended, to make what was then a very precarious northwest passage. They were trapped in the ice and they survived as well as they could until, finally, they were overcome by a blast of very cold weather that came through and just kind of froze them in position. And then the ship had drifted thirteen years with the flow of the ice, across the Arctic, until it was expelled on the east in the Atlantic. And the men were still in that same position. I heard someone referring to this story one time saying, 'Everybody was strangely at their posts, but no one had any life.' Kind of like a lot of churches in the world today. People are, sort of, in position - they're on the boat - they all look like they're doing their jobs but nobody really has much life and nobody's moving very fast.

Let's face it, I think we've all wondered sometime, what happened to the power and the life of the early church? And will we see that - will we experience that again among God's people before Christ comes? That genuine authentic power that God gave to His people where everyone is just motivated and thrilled by the energy of love to share the Gospel. There's an urgency. There's a vitality.

You know, our story tonight is going to deal with that. Now, some of you remember - the lesson title, by the way, our lesson is called 'The Woman of Truth' and it's based on a story in 1 Kings 3, verses 16 through 28. You remember, Solomon was given supernatural wisdom. And a big test he had early on in his reign that the court scribes put down because it was such an amazing story, there were two women. They lived alone - single women - they both had babies about the same time. And then, while the children were still in young infancy, during the night, one of the mothers accidentally overlaid her child and smothered it. She woke up early and saw her, her baby was cold. Her roommate - she saw her baby there - she was so ashamed and overwhelmed with grief that her baby had died - they were both small little babies and, you know, when they're little like that, they all kind of look like raisins. So she thought, 'I'm going to swap babies.' And she took her dead son, laid it where the living child was, took the living child and put it to her breast and went to sleep. When the other lady woke up to nurse her child she said, 'This isn't my baby, this is your baby! What are you doing with my baby?' She said, 'This is my baby. That's your baby!' No witnesses. No DNA tests.

So now they stood before Solomon. He's got to figure out who the real mother is. So he ponders the situation for a moment. Understanding something about human nature, he says to the two mothers, 'Well, you both say that the living son is yours and the dead son belongs to the other. Since there's only one living son - there's two of you - the only just thing to do is to divide it.' Calls for his soldiers, he says, 'Draw your sword. Divide the baby. Give them each a half.' And probably his guard was thinking twice as he pulled his sword from his scabbard and he raised it overhead and then the real mother fell down before the King. She said, 'Please do not slay the child. Let her have it.' The other one said, 'No, the only

fair thing to do is divide the baby.' Right away Solomon knew which one was the real mother. When they drew the sword, they knew the truth.

Now what does a woman represent in Bible analogies? Here you've got two women fighting over a baby boy. One is the true mother. She's the woman of truth. And the other one is a counterfeit, claiming the Son, but it's not really hers. Doesn't really care about the Son - willing to have Him die. She's more interested in her reputation than the baby. And it was when the sword was pulled out - what does a sword represent? Word of God. Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.

There are so many different churches in the world today that all claim to have the truth. I think everybody here will agree that there are many churches that have many good things to offer. But I think we'd also agree that they can't all be doctrinally right and yet so different. There is a certain absolute truth. Don't miss that. In our world today they're making it sound like everything's relative. They'll say, 'Well, yeah, you've got your truth and I've got my truth. And your truth is true for you and my truth is true for me and it's all good for everybody. You just believe what you want and I'll believe what I want.' Have you heard that before? That is absolutely wrong. It's toxic. It's deadly. How would you like to get on an airplane and hear the captain come over the loudspeaker and say, 'You know, I went to aviation school and there are certain laws of aerodynamics, but I've got another theory I'd like to try today and I want you to all know, I'm very sincere.' Would you say, 'No, there is - there are laws of aviation and your believing differently is not going to change those laws and I want to stay with the absolute truths, right? We believe that about airplanes, why don't we believe it about biblical truth?

Does God have a truth? Does He have a people? Now, I believe He does. And when He comes back, while there are many Christians in many churches today, we've already learned - you can have the Seal of God, you can have the Mark of the Beast and we need to know what that truth is. So we're going to talk about that very important issue. Based on the Bible, how do you pick a church? How do you know the difference? And the way we're going to figure it all out is we're going to use the Bible.

Ephesians 6, verse 17, "And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" - so the Bible's going to be our foundation. Alright, now just to set the stage, take your Bibles and let's go to Revelation 12 - I'm going to read a few verses - and this will be - we're going to look at it and then we're going to break it down. This will be the foundation of our study. Revelation 12, verse 1, and it says, "Now a great sign appeared in Heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in Heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems" - or crowns - "on his heads." - Now, before I go any farther, this woman is clothed with the sun, moon, and stars. Who made the sun, moon, and stars? You know what the natural light is in our world? Sun, moon, and stars - it's the light God made. This woman is clothed with the light of God.

Go to Revelation 17 - we'll talk about that next study - you've got a woman clothed completely differently. It's all an earthly clothing. She has a heavenly clothing - and the dragon, who does he represent? He hates this woman and he wants to destroy the man-child. She's great with child - about to bring forth. And if you look in verse 4 it says, "his tail" - the tail of the dragon - "drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon" - those stars are the demons that followed Satan - the fallen angels that followed him became demons - "and the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born."

Alright, one more thing I forgot to mention. What is this woman standing on? The moon. Clothed with the sun. Twelve stars - what does the number twelve represent? It's a symbol for the church. Above her head, leadership - talking twelve apostles in the New Testament. Some argue there were twelve Judges in the Old Testament as well. Twelve apostles in the New Testament - twelve is a symbol for the leadership of the church.

Clothed with the sun? That's the reality of Christ, the Son of righteousness who arises with healing in His wings - Malachi 4 - standing on the moon - the moon is the Old Testament. See, you might see the moon at night. It has no light of its own. It's reflecting the light of the sun that will rise. And the Old Testament had all the promises of Jesus who was coming.

So she's standing on that foundation and so these all represent the truth and the Word of God. So this dragon stands before the woman who's ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it is born. You remember when Jesus was born? Herod, using the Roman army, didn't want to compete with another king of the Jews. The official title for King Herod was 'The King of the Jews.' And when the wise men came and said, 'We're looking for the King of the Jews, he wasn't going to stand for that and he sent his soldiers into Bethlehem when he found out when they first saw the star, and he had all those little baby boys executed. There may have been between twenty and thirty, based on the size of the village back then.

And there's a prophecy that talks about that in Jeremiah - Rachel weeping for her children - Rachel died, by the way, at Bethlehem, giving birth. You know, there are several stories in the Bible about women that had miracle baby boys - seven actually. You might have to help me - I'm doing this from memory now. Sarah was barren - matter of fact, the three patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - do you know all three of their wives were originally barren? And through a miracle they had babies - boys - first ones. You had Isaac - type of Christ - miracle birth. Remember, Abraham took him up the mountain and he was like the sacrifice of the Son? You have Jacob, son of Rebekkah - became the patriarch of the twelve. You had Joseph - no, he wasn't the miracle birth I'm thinking about. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob...no, no, no. Oh yeah, Joseph - Rachel was barren. And - this happens more and more as I get older. I have these brain freezes. It's bad when it's on live T.V., isn't it? Then you have the Shunammite woman - it doesn't tell her name, it just says she's a Shunammite woman - Elisha prays for her, she has a baby boy. That boy dies in the field and he's resurrected. Is he a type of Christ? Sampson was a miracle birth. You have Hannah, who had Samuel. She was barren - had a miracle baby boy. He became a priest and a judge. Jesus is our priest, judge, and our prophet. And then Jesus - and, of course, John the Baptist - forerunner of Christ - and Jesus. That's seven of them, I think, if you add them all up. Isn't that interesting? Seven miracle births. They're all boys. They're all types of Christ.

And then you've got these women that are fighting over baby boys. Rachel and Leah were fighting over their boys. Did you ever read that history? Story of Judges: there's a famine. Two women are fighting over baby boys. And so you've got these stories in the Bible and then you go to Revelation and it's interesting. You've got this woman who's ready to bring forth this child of promise and there's a dragon, also called a serpent. Now, in Genesis, did God say to Eve and Adam that there'd be enmity - Genesis 3:15 - "between your seed" - your descendants - "and the seed of the dragon." And now you get to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, and you find this continuing battle between the woman and the seed of the woman and the dragon. And so, that seed of the woman is Jesus. And he wants "to devour her child as soon as it was born." - Verse 5 - "she bore a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron." - Who is that? It's Christ - "and her child was caught up to God and his throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days." So this is the main passage we're going to consider in our lesson tonight.

And so, without further delay, why don't we go to question #1 in our study? How does Revelation picture God's true church? We're going to look at some of the criteria about how do you pick a church? How do you identify, in the last days, God's people? It says in Revelation 12, verses 1, 2, and 5, "there I saw a" - what? - "A woman clothed with the sun...moon under her feet...upon her head a crown of twelve stars." So John has this vision. This is a pure woman clothed with light. Jesus said to the church, 'You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.' It's through letting our light shine - the deeds of Christ in us - that others are drawn. And then it goes on and says

she's not just standing on the moon and clothed with the sun, she's expecting.

Interesting because it doesn't say anything about her husband. Was there a virgin birth connected with Christ? Now, some say this woman is Mary. No, Mary is a type of this woman. But, as you read on, you'll find that this woman represents God's people. And as you read on, you realize it can't be Mary - it doesn't ever say Mary fled into the wilderness, chased by a dragon who tried to swallow her with a flood for 1,260 years. So it's not Mary, but Mary is a type of the church and she was a pure woman that was chosen to be - to bring forth - or introduce - Christ to the world. And the purpose of the church in the Old Testament - the Old Testament had a church too, you know, it just means - the church means 'gathering' - was to introduce Christ to the world. And it says, 'And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.' That was considered a sign of strength, of disciple, of power, his scepter. And then, "...her child was caught up" - He ascended - "unto God, and to His throne." And so this is speaking about the ascension of Christ.

Question #2: Who is the 'Great Red Dragon,' and what does he next try to do in the Scriptures we just read? Revelation 12:9 - do we have to guess who the dragon is? It tells us later in the same chapter. "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan." Now, you've got four titles - you can't miss it - dragon, devil, serpent, Satan - we know who it is. It's the arch fiend, the chief villain, the devil, prince of darkness. He goes by many names. He is the source of all evil. What he hates most is that Christ would come into the world. Not only did the devil try to destroy Jesus when He came, through the Roman power, the devil thought the Messiah was coming in Egypt. When Moses was born he tried to destroy all the baby boys again - just the baby boys. And you'll notice that during the time of King David or after King David, when Athaliah became queen. She tried to destroy all the royal seed and executed all the king's sons.

Again, another - the devil knew that the Messiah was coming through the descendants of David. He tried to destroy - the devil did not want Jesus to come and save man. And, furthermore, the devil knew that if Christ was truly incarnated as a weak human, He would be vulnerable. And if the devil could destroy Jesus, he somehow thought he could take His place - that He wouldn't rise again. So, I know, you and I, right now, looking back, think 'How can the devil be so stupid?' But sin makes you stupid, doesn't it. They've got some websites called 'Dumb Criminals' - sin makes you really do some stupid things. Revelation 12, verse 4, "The dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born." Before Jesus grew up and got His wits, while He was as weak and vulnerable as He could be, he wanted to destroy Christ and stop His ministry.

Question #3: What happens after Satan fails to destroy Jesus? Of course, an angel warns Joseph, he flees into Egypt, Christ is prepared. It's also interesting that it says, 'Out of Egypt I've called my son.' Jesus came out of Egypt to become the Savior. The children of Israel came out of Egypt to become a nation of God's people - the first church, you might say, in the Old Testament. Revelation 12:5, "and her child was caught up unto God and to his throne." You can read about that in acts chapter 1. It's also at the end of the Gospels. It tells us that Christ ascended up to heaven while they watched. It's called the ascension - left on the mount of olives - we learned he's coming back on the mount of olives, right? Question #4: after Jesus was caught up to heaven, what did Satan do to the church? Alright, now, during the life of Jesus, the devil especially hated Jesus. He focused his attention, his artillery, on trying to get Jesus to sin, on persecuting Jesus - and if you've ever wondered about how the devil feels about Jesus, look at the scenes of the cross.

There at the cross you see that the devil - the mob is just shouting, 'crucify him!' 'Torture him!' They're mocking him - trying to get him to despair and to sin. And Jesus is saying, 'father, forgive them.' He's still thinking words and thoughts of love. Well, once Jesus died victorious without having sinned, he set the example for us of living a holy life. He ascended to heaven. Now the devil can't reach Jesus anymore, can he? He's barred from heaven. He's been cast out. Christ is at the right hand of the Father. You think the

devil's going in there? Can't touch Christ now. So if the devil wants to hurt Jesus, what does he do now? Hurt what Jesus loves the most. When Christ looks down from heaven on earth - God is love - God loves butterflies and God loves puppy dogs but, you know, He doesn't love them as much as He loves people.

And among the people, the object upon earth on which God, in a special sense, bestows his supreme regard, is his church because it contains the apple of His eye. It contains the people that He died to save that have said, 'We will love You in return.' So what the devil wants to do is to hurt Jesus by hurting those He loves the most that love Him. If you want to hurt a parent, don't just hurt them, hurt their child, right? They said, like, better to encounter a bear robbed of its cubs - you know about the love of a mother for its child. And the devil wants to hurt the church so he goes after the woman - the bride of Christ - the children, the people of God. Revelation 12:13, "When the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child."

Now look at what happened during the early ages of the church. When the devil saw how, after Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out, they were filled with the Spirit, the disciples went everywhere preaching, they did not love their lives. I mean, the early church - every now and then people write me a question about 'Pastor Doug, are New Testament Christians still required to pay tithe?' And I say, well, if you want to be a New Testament Christian it's going to be a lot more than tithe. In the Old Testament it was ten percent of your increase. In the New Testament, you know what it says, after the Holy Spirit was poured out? 'No man said that ought that he had was his own, that every man sold his possessions and had all things in common.' The disciples took their houses and lands and sold them and laid the price of it down at the apostles' feet. Read Acts chapter 4 and Acts chapter 5. I mean, they were just liquidating. They wanted to spread the Gospel to the whole world. They were making incredible sacrifices back then. And so, wow, if you saw the Spirit of the early church, they were totally sold out to the gospel and that's why it spread so fast, because no one could question - and they were dying for it.

So the devil, he thought, I'm just going to make laws. First he tried to exterminate them. He did it through the Jews. Remember Paul was out killing Christians and arresting them? Then he did it through the Romans - Nero killed Peter - first great persecution from Rome was under Nero.

Claudius told them to leave Rome, but they weren't being killed. Nero, after Rome burned, he blamed the Christians. He killed Paul. He killed Peter and many others. And then you had a series of Caesars until about 313 A.D. - Hundreds of thousands - they don't even know. It may have even reached into a million Christians died. And we've heard the stories where they were brought, you know, before the idols and they'd say, 'You need to make an offering to our idol or you're going to die.' Christians said, 'I can't do that.' And they would be executed. Or they would bring them to the colosseum and say, 'All you've got to do is renounce Christ, worship our Gods, and we'll let you go.' They wouldn't do it. And they were fed to the lions. And all the pagans would go there for entertainment and they'd watch these Christians die - they'd kneel and they'd pray and they'd sing. Some of them were - Nero would smear them with pitch and set them on fire to light his gardens. And - he was a really - you read about him - he was a pretty brutal leader, as was Caligula and some of the others.

But the pagans who were watching these Christians die with such calm and peace, they thought, 'Wow, what do they have? We don't have that kind of peace. We don't have that kind of belief.' And they would find Christians, you know, they built virtual underground cities in Rome. I've been to the Catacombs in Europe and you just think 'there must have been millions of them because they - just hundreds and hundreds of miles of tunnels under Malta and Rome and Turkey and all these different places. They went underground. And the pagans would say, 'Tell me, what is it you believe? You're so passionate. You're so joyful.' They'd send the Christians off to the mines in North Africa to work them to death and on the walls inside the mines they can still find the ancient inscriptions from the Christians - they would say, 'Life, life, I have life.' Or 'I'll see Jesus in the morning.' And they seemed to be so positive. And the pagans, their inscriptions would say, 'Goodbye forever.' I mean, it was so fatalistic and sad.

So the church exploded because the Christians had hope. It's like Tertullian, the early Christian father, he said, 'The blood of the martyrs is seed for the Gospel.' The more they tried to kill them, the more it spread. So the devil said, 'Look this isn't working.' Plan A for the devil was get rid of Christianity through annihilation. But the more he mowed them down, the more they came up. It's like trying to get rid of your weeds by mowing them. That just spreads the seed. And so the devil, he said, 'I'm going to plan B.' Plan B was so good there has never been a plan C. Plan B was 'I'll legalize it. I'll make it easy to be a Christian and I'll join the church and I'll have all my representatives join the church and we'll just dilute it and water it down with paganistic teachings so they lose their power.' And that's what he did and he's still doing it today. He comes in, he waters down the power of the Word, compromises with the world - and the devil doesn't mind people, matter of fact, he'd just as soon see people go to church when they don't really have the truth and they're not totally sold out for Christ. They get just enough Christianity to inoculate them against catching the real thing.

And so, there's all these people in the world, that when Jesus comes - this is what Jesus said - they're going to say, 'Lord, Lord, I went to church. I love you. I sang.' He's going to say, 'I don't know you. Depart from me you who work iniquity.' They only had half of it. Jesus said, 'it's not everyone that says, 'Lord, Lord' that's going to enter the kingdom, but he that does the will of my Father in Heaven.' By the way, the will of God is certainly, at least, the law of God, right? So there's a lot of counterfeit Christianity. And the devil loves that. The best way to hide a diamond is surround it with broken glass. And there is - let's face it, are there a lot of hypocrites out there saying they're Christians? And now, that just turns people off - and so, persecution.

And then, along came Constantine. He's the one - he said, 'Let's make it legal.' And all these pagans began to pour into the church. And the church, now, instead of being a religion that was led by the heart, it became the state religion and they started forcing people to believe. And then came a great time of persecution. Some of the persecution now came from the official church, against real Bible Christians that did not want to compromise with paganism. You see, after Christianity became legal and it became the state religion - I think I've shared with you - they're all over Rome - the whole Roman Empire - they had all these both Roman and Greco gods - Pluto and Mercury and Apollo and Neptune and you name 'em. They - just a whole pantheon of gods - men and women - and when all these people came in they said, 'What do we do with our gods?' 'What do we do with our temples?' And some of the church fathers compromised. They said, 'Well, the Lord'll understand if we make a little compromise and let them, you know - if it's going to bring them into Christianity - let them just rename their idols. And look at all the pagans we'll bring in.' But is that how the Lord works? Pretty soon you lose the vitality. Little compromises were made and the more pagan - it didn't happen overnight. The more paganism they adopted, pretty soon it lost its distinctive power.

Doesn't Paul say that they would have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof? And wolves entered in and the church compromised. Next thing you know, Christians who said, 'We can't do this' - the loyal, biblical Christians that stood up to the state religion, they now were persecuted and had to flee into the wilderness. They couldn't go out in public.

Question #5: Where did the woman go during this terrifying period of persecution? How long did it last? Revelation 12, verse 16, here you go, "The woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore" - one thousand two hundred and sixty is what that means - "days." And we've learned what the starting period was. With the official movement of Justinian taking the capital to Constantinople, he made the bishop of Rome, later known as the pope, the head of the church. He basically legalized - he - that was Constantine - legalized Christianity, Justinian gave the pope an army and it became sort of the state religion. And that started in 538. From then until 1798, when Napoleon's general arrested the Pope and they sort of lost their uninterrupted power, there was exactly 1,260 years where the church was doing a lot of persecuting of anybody that went against their teachings.

By the way, the Bibles were largely removed from people. Do you know it was illegal, for over a thousand years, for people to have the Bible in the vernacular of the people? It was in Latin. Most of the people couldn't read Latin. It was, sort of, the dead Roman religion. And so if you wanted to know what the Bible said, you had to ask the priest, which made it very convenient for the priests to say, 'If you want me to forgive your sins, it's going to cost this much today.' Now, I'm not being - I'm not understating that - I'm not overstating that, I should say. It was - they had price lists of how many - I've got some, I think, in my room in a book - actual price list for indulgences you could buy for sins. You could pay for sins, not only after you commit them, you could pay in advance and buy a license for sin.

And people didn't know that was wrong because they didn't have Bibles. Do you know why they call this period 'The Dark Ages?' Because 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' Do those words sound familiar? And you take away the Bible, you take away the light and the people were in great darkness. They thought you died, you went right to Heaven or Hell or Purgatory or limbo and you burned forever and ever - before there was a judgment, before the resurrection - there was so much confusion, the church has never fully recovered from all of that. 1,260 Years. There was this church/state union that persecuted the people.

You know, just to show you how beautiful and perfect the Bible is, notice this: during this age of the church, you had two women - true woman - false woman - false woman, she's called Babylon, mystery, mother of harlots. She commits fornication with the kings of the earth. That's what it says in Revelation 17 - Revelation 17 - and it talks about 1,260 days - that's three and a half prophetic years. And in the Old Testament there was this pagan queen, her name was Jezebel, who, during a period of 1,260 literal days, married a Jewish king, manipulated him to make laws to persecute the prophets - Elijah and all the prophets were killed or they had to flee into the wilderness. You find the exact same thing in Revelation is happening in the Old Testament. It's to help us see that these things are not an accident. God knows what's going on.

Question #6: What are two other identifying marks of God's true church? Revelation 12:17, it says, "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant" - the remainder - here we are, down at the end of time, it's the remainder - "of her seed." - Her descendants. Two outstanding characteristics of God's people in the last days, which do what? Keep the commandments of God - would that be fifty percent? Eighty percent? Or all ten? - And have the testimony of Jesus. The Bible says the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy, telling us that they have the law and the prophets - that's the Word of God.

You can read in Malachi, chapter 4, last prophecy in the Old Testament, "Remember the law of Moses" - that's the law - "...behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Then, there in the New Testament, Moses and Elijah appear to Jesus endorsing - Moses and Elijah represent the law - the Word of God - they endorse that Jesus is the Messiah that they were pointing to, like the Word of God points to Christ. And so, God's church, in the last days, is going to return to the faith that was once delivered to the saints, of the law and the prophets.

So, if God has a church out there, how are you going to find it? What's our tool? You know, any pastor is going to probably tell you, 'I believe my church is the church you should belong to.' And, again, I want to reiterate before I go on my next little spiel, there are good Christians in many different churches. Matter of fact, one reason I joined the church I'm in now - I'm a Seventh-day Adventist as I've told you - one reason is because I got tired of studying with different groups that said, 'unless you're a member of our church, you're lost.' That's not - you're telling me that everyone through history, unless they were part of your denomination, is lost? And I appreciated reading where Seventh-day Adventists freely admit the greatest part of Christ's true followers are not in our church. Before we get to the end of time we're going to be one people though. There's going to be a message where everyone's going to come together based on a movement of Scripture. That message is going to the world today.

So how do you pick a church? You know how most people pick a church? Let's see if I can remember some of the main - I wrote a book a few years ago called 'How to Survive in Church' and I studied 'What are the reasons people pick a church?' Some people pick a church - a lot of people - because it's the church their family went to - they grew up in it. Why do you go to your church? 'Well, it's where grandma went. It's where mom and dad went. It's where I go.' 'What do they believe?' 'Not sure, but we've got a long history in this church.' 'Why do you go to your church?' 'It's close to the house. It's in our neighborhood. It's convenient.' That's how a lot of people pick their church. 'That's not far. Let's go there. It's close. It looks nice.' Some people, they like the look of the building. 'Why do you go to that church?' 'It's the most beautiful church in town. Stained glass - I just feel the presence of God. When the light comes through the windows and the architecture - the symmetry - I love the building.' 'Why do you go to your church?' 'The music. No church has music like our church. The choir, oh, it's like singing with the angels - and I'm part of the choir, so that's where I go. And if they kick me out of the choir, I'm changing denominations to wherever they'll put me back in the choir.'

Come on, have you all met people like that? The music. 'Why do you go to your church?' 'They've got child care and I get to sit and listen to the sermon without worrying about the kids. They've got a great children's program. They come back - they do all these crafts and it's so much fun. It's great for families. They've got all these special programs. They've got divorce recovery. They've got a twelve-step program, they've got a baking program - they've got all these - that's why.' That's all nice - 'What do they believe?' 'I'm not sure but boy can they have a bake sale.' 'Why do you go to your church?' 'Pot luck every week.' 'What do they believe?' 'Doesn't matter - good potato salad.' 'So why do you go to your church?' 'Well, it happens to be the church where all of the 'Who's Who' in this town go. If you want to get anywhere in higher places in this community - if you want to get your permits and if you want to get ahead and you want to get elected, this is where you go to church. It's where the people of influence go.' 'Why do you go to that church?' 'Because the pastor is charismatic.' 'What do they believe?' 'Not sure, but it's exciting every week. Wow, do they put on a show.' Some actually go because the pastor's good looking, which is, I'm sure, why you're all here right now. Why are you laughing? I haven't even touched all the reasons. You'd be surprised at the reasons that people pick a church. 'So,' - you ask a man - 'why do you go to your church?' 'Well, because I agree with the pastor.' 'What does he believe?' 'He believes like I do.' 'Well, what do you and the pastor believe?' 'Same thing.' 'What exactly is that?' 'Not sure.'

Now, I'm teasing a little bit, but you'd be - really, when people examine the reasons they go to a church, it is amazing how many people don't know what their church stands for. And when they dig a little bit they say, 'Oh, is that what we believe? I didn't know that.' Because, you know, some of you miss it from week to week and you just get a little sprinkling of what they actually believe. But, you know, biblically, there's only one reason to join a church. The only biblical reason to join a church is what are the foundational teachings of that church?

I remember hearing about a Russian immigrant. Shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain he immigrated to America and he wanted to integrate and become a good American and he asked a friend - he said, 'You guys are very different. What do you guys do for breakfast in the morning?' He said, 'Well, we eat cold cereal, typically.' So he goes to the supermarket and he says to the man, 'Where is your cereal?' He said, 'Well, you go to that aisle over there.' He walks into the aisle and there it's longer than an airport terminal - cereal on both sides - all different kinds. You've got some that's health cereal, some that's for athletes and some's for old folks - some for kids, some have got a prize inside, some is just candy, really. They call it cereal - the first ingredient's sugar. And you - you can just get bewildered going down the aisle of the cereal section. And you know why there's so many different kinds of cereal? Because the cereal makers - even just companies like Kellogg's or Post, they want to capture all different branches of the human market so they make different cereals to meet everybody's wants.

You can't market Jesus that way. You know what some pastors are doing? They're saying, 'find out what your community wants and just preach according to what they want. If they want donuts, give them

donuts. Just give everybody what they want.' But is that how you pick a church? You know how I pick cereal? I don't pay any attention to whether or not there's a prize in the box or I don't care about if there's an athlete on the cover. I don't care about how bright or ugly the box might be. The first thing I do is I spin it around. I look at the fine print and I say, 'What are the ingredients?' I'm putting this in my body, I want to know what it is.' I care. And if the first ingredient's sugar, I keep looking. I like, actually, lots of different grains.

When you're picking a church, what you're talking about is 'This is the vehicle of my faith that I believe is going to help me reach eternal life in Christ.' You need to read the ingredients. You need to know what your church stands for because you are, to some extent, responsible - at least by your attendance and your offerings - of underwriting that teaching. Do you know what they believe? There's a lot of really strange beliefs out there and some people just really haven't thought it through. Now, what if the building isn't very nice and they don't sing very well? Their potlucks aren't the best and you have to drive a little farther? If the foundational teachings in that church are the teachings of Christ, that's where you should go. God's people in the Old Testament were the Jews.

With all of their flaws and warts - you read about the many backslidings and failures of the Jewish nation - it's like a roller coaster. But you know why they were His people? Because He had committed to them the oracles of truth. I'm quoting Paul, 'Unto Israel the oracles of truth were committed.' Paul said, 'Salvation to all: the Jew first, then to the Gentile.' Why? Because He gave them the Word.

So in the last days, how do we find the church? What do they believe? Is it the teachings of Jesus? Amen? That's the only right reason. So I just kind of - basically, the sermon's over, but I've got to finish the lesson.

Question #7 - I wanted you to know what it's really all about. It's the Bible! Amen? Question #7: how did Jesus say that we demonstrate our love for Him? He said, 'If you love Me, honk your horn.' Right? John 14:15 - you've seen that bumper sticker before? The only problem is the wife puts the bumper sticker on the car and then the husband drives the car and wonders why people are honking and he may not have the same faith. John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." That's very simple. And again it says, 1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we" - talk about His commandments - keeping is different than talking about - that we read - no, it's not just reading them - that we hear - not just hearing them. In Revelation it says there's a blessing on those who hear, read, and keep the things that are written therein. A blessing is promised on you.

Question #8: What three angelic messages will God's end-time church be preaching? Now, this is review - we've talked about the three angels in Revelation 14, but they're a characteristic of the church in the last days. They'll be sharing this message of Revelation 14, "Fear God and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come." We are living near the end. There's an age of judgment going on. We need to prepare. And it goes on to say, "and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the foundation of waters." And we've learned that language is actually drawn right from the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments dealing with the Sabbath. It's talking about returning to the worship - biblical worship - of God. Answer B: second angel's message - a message that says - and this is Revelation 14:8, "and there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

So there's a message of being aware that Babylon has fallen and it's not talking about ancient Babylon because the prophecies in Isaiah 13 said that that fell. Third angel's message - Revelation - this is Revelation, verses 9 and 10, "And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, if any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God." So these messages - messages you're hearing during this series - of preparation for the second coming - right after these messages are given, Jesus comes in the clouds - in Revelation 14. These messages are coming from Heaven. God wants a message to go to the world, of

revival - of returning to His Word - of being aware of the counterfeit that's out there.

Question #9: To whom will God's church preach these messages in the last days? Revelation chapter 14, verse 6, "Having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." That tells us it's going to be a global movement. I've just got a picture here I threw in - one of the thrills for me - a few years ago I was in the largest Muslim nation in the world, which is Indonesia. And I had the opportunity to preach in the largest Christian church in the largest Muslim nation. And oh, that was a thrill - and to see the gospel going out there among the people and be able to preach with relative peace. And the message is going all over the world. You know, what Amazing Facts does is just one small aspect of what's happening.

Question #10: What specifications has God given in His Word to help us positively identify His end-time church? Now there's several things I'm going to give you here and so we'll go from like A through E in the answers - and you've got that in your lesson. Answer A: it tells us that this church power is going to appear and do its visible work after it emerges from this wilderness experience. Remember, there's 538 to 1798 so there's this new country that rises up after 1798 - two horns like a lamb. Do you know what country that is? Speaks like a lamb - no, sorry - two horns like a lamb, speaks like a dragon. Do you know why America was founded? It wasn't largely pioneers, it was pilgrims that were fleeing religious persecution in Europe, looking for a place where they could practice and preach the Word of God with freedom. That's what happened.

Answer B: And a movement is going to be spotted about the same time. Answer b: it will teach the same truths the apostles taught and all of its teachings will agree with the Bible. It must be a biblically-based church - not a few of them, but consistently.

Answer C: It will keep the Ten Commandments including the Bible Sabbath. And, you know, it's amazing how many pastors and churches say now, 'We don't need to keep the Ten Commandments because we're not under the law, we're under grace.' And you go, 'What in the world does that mean? Does it mean we're now free to break the Ten Commandments?' They usually have no problem with the Ten Commandments except for one commandment. Have you noticed that? That always sounds odd.

Answer D: It will have the Spirit of prophecy. We have a lesson coming on that, but that means that they have all the gifts of the Spirit, including the Spirit of prophecy, that are guiding the church in the last days.

Answer E: It will proclaim God's three end-time messages with a loud voice. That means it's going to be going with strength around the world. And I might add, right now, if you don't mind my saying so, our church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it probably has more media ministries than any denomination that I know of, that are going by satellite and internet around the world and it is certainly a loud voice. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is really not a denomination - it's more of a movement because it was formed - you see, back in 1844, when they thought Jesus was coming and he didn't come - that wasn't Seventh-day Adventists. They didn't exist back then. It was called the advent movement - the word 'advent' just means 'the coming' or 'adventure.' When He didn't come, Christians from many different churches put aside their differences. They were Methodists, they were Baptists, they were Presbyterians, Congregationalists - they said, 'Why are there so many churches? Let's find out what the Bible teaches. Let's set aside our denominational differences and go back to the Bible.' And this movement rose up out of that experiment and it's going around the world with primitive Christianity - the kind of Christianity and faith that was delivered to the saints. It tells us that this movement is not going to be a local community congregation. It is going to be a world-wide movement. Out of the 218 countries in the world, the Seventh-day Adventists are in more countries than any other denomination. There's only - matter of fact, when it comes to educational systems and hospitals, the only ones - the only denomination that has more is the Catholics. The Catholics - number one schools and hospitals. Seventh-day Adventists - number two in the world - Protestant movement.

Answer G: It will teach the everlasting Gospel, which is salvation through Christ alone. Salvation by faith in Christ. So it's teaching the foundational truths of Christ in the Bible.

Question #11: Jesus gives us these seven prophetic identification points and He says, 'Go find My church.' What does He promise will happen when we search? Jesus says in Luke 11, verse 9, "Seek and you will find." So where do you do your searching? In the Word.

Question #12: How many church organizations in the world will fit these seven points? Ephesians - Jesus says in Ephesians 4, verse 5, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." Did Christ ever plan that His church would be so scattered - so many - so fragmented? This was not God's plan. Who was it that wanted to fragment and scatter and divide the church? It's the devil. United we stand, divided we fall. So let's just say forget about the Bible, let's find out which church is the biggest and let's all join that church. Unite on what? Unite based on size? Let's find out which one's closest to the house and let's all join that one. Which church has the best looking pastor, the most charismatic preacher? Let's all join that church. What is the criteria that is to unite us? One thing: truth - absolute truth. And the Word of God is that sword that is going to help us know. You know, Jesus said, 'Seek and you'll find.'

There are many denominations that call themselves Christians. Does that make them God's church? No, that's Question #13: you can read in Isaiah 4, verse 1, "In that day seven women will take hold of one man saying, we'll eat our own bread. We'll wear our own apparel. Only let us be called by your name to take away our reproach." But there's only one name, friends, it's the name of Christ. So what do you do? When you do this search, once a person discovers what God's end-time church is, is it necessary to be part of that? This is a big question - Acts 2, verse 47, "And the Lord" - did what? - "He added to the church daily such as should be saved." You know, Jesus tells us 'Many sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also I must call' - John chapter 10 - 'and there will be one fold and one shepherd. How many folds when Christ comes back? One.

You know, we're going to give you an opportunity to ask us to pray for you and to even make a decision and we have ushers that are prepared to bring cards and hand them out to you and I'd like to invite them to do that right now, if they would, please. And on that card you're going to find four questions. You know, I don't believe in just preaching to entertain people. I believe in inviting people to act on what they're hearing. You've heard a lot of interesting things from the Bible and we're doing all that we can to make the truth clear to you - that God is wanting His people to be part of one movement - that's based on the Bible - before Jesus comes back. He is calling you and speaking to you because He wants you to respond to that. And I'd like to invite the ushers to hand these cards - you're going to find there are four questions on the cards - of course put your name, please, on there. If you don't mind, contact information - nobody will harass you. And it asks four important questions: 1) I choose to follow the teachings of Jesus as found in the Bible. Now, we put the easy question first.

I hope everyone says 'yes' to that.) - Some of you are still praying about being baptized. We've shown the connection between being baptized and being part of the church. You at home, this card is also found at the Landmarks of Prophecy site. You can fill it out with us online and send that in.

Third question: I choose to become part of the remnant church of Bible prophecy and to worship God in spirit and in truth. You want to be part of that movement. You're not going to decide based on the music and the children's program or the potluck. You're going to say, 'Lord, I want to go by Your Word. I want to be set free by the truth.'

And the fourth: maybe you'd like to know more about this. You might want to ask some questions of myself or some of our Landmark team that are here, then put that down. And as you're filling out your card, I'd like to invite Chuck to come out and he's going to sing a verse of a familiar song and I'll be praying for you as you make your decisions and fill out your cards. When you're done, pass them to the aisles and the ushers will pick them up.

The Savior is waiting to enter your heart,
Why don't you let him come in?
There's nothing in this world to keep you apart,
What is your answer to him?
Time after time he has waited before
And now He is waiting again
To see if you're willing to open the door,
Oh how He wants to come in.

Amen. I love that song. Thank you so much, Chuck. You know, back in April 1912 - Titanic struck an iceberg - you all know the story. And they launched the lifeboats eventually, but many of the lifeboats pulled away empty because everybody wanted to stay with the crowd and people were afraid to get off in that little boat out there in the ocean. And many perished because they just looked around and said, 'What's everyone else going to do?' As we near the end of time, friends, you cannot follow the crowd. You've got to follow Jesus. Back in the days of Noah there was one way of escape. There was one ark. Jesus said, 'As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be when the Son of man comes.'

Friends, there's only going to be one ark when Jesus comes - Seal of God - Mark of the Beast - there's only two roads - life and death. Jesus said, 'If you're not with Me, you're against Me.' And I pray you'll make your decision tonight, friends, to say 'I want to be with Christ. I want to be in His body - part of His people.' Is that your desire? Let's ask Him then. Father in Heaven, I just pray that Your people, those watching, those here, that they'll hear Your voice, make their decision tonight to be part of Your people, to surrender themselves regardless of the opposition or the challenges they may face - to be determined to get on that ark of safety You provided with Your own blood. We pray in Jesus' Name, amen.

Thank you, friends, God bless you. Next meeting - Tuesday night - we're going to be talking about Revelation 17. Please don't miss it.