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We resume now in our look at the biblical teaching related to the firstborn. As we noticed in the first session in Genesis chapter 4, obviously when you have the first two children being born in the human race, one of them is first and one of them is not. Cain is the firstborn.

And yet when it is time to bring the minkah, or when the opportunity arises to bring a gift to God, it is Abel, the younger son, who understands and observes the principle of the firstborn. He brings the firstborn from his flock. And among the firstborn, you can imagine that with a lot of sheep, you might have many firstborn lambs.

But of those lambs, he brings the fat. He brings the choice, the crem de la crem of his flock to the Lord. And this speaks volumes about the attitude of heart, which is explicitly stated over in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 4, that it was by faith that Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain.

As I pointed out in the first session also, our recognition that this is the distinguishing feature, this is what distinguishes God's response. It is not whether one was a bloody and the other was a bloodless sacrifice. I read you from Kyle and Dalich, which is a commentary well over 100 years old, or about 100 years old now, I guess, that makes that very same point.

So this is not one of those occasions where we're striking out into strange and foreign territory. It is recognizable, especially from Scripture itself, that God is interested in the attitude of heart. A Scripture reading this morning from Matthew 23, the seven woes that Jesus pronounces on religious life in Jerusalem, on the scribes and Pharisees in particular, is an indictment of their attitude.

He doesn't say you don't observe the details of the law properly. In fact, he points out that they are very particular. They even tithe their spices.

They are so attentive to the details of the law, but they have neglected the greater things of the law, justice and mercy. Attitude of heart, a genuine contrition, genuine love for God, genuine desire to please God above all things is what they lack. This is what Cain lacked.

And Cain, in this sense, is the seed of the serpent. We either have a desire to please God or we don't. We either put God first or we don't.

And I find it a constant source of interest in my own mind when I read Scripture. We generally characterize, when we think about the Christian life, when we think about spiritual things, our first criteria, the first determination that we tend to make is, well, is this a believer or an unbeliever? Is someone saved or are they lost? But isn't it

interesting, it is to me, that Scripture very seldom makes that distinction. How often do you have in the pages of Scripture, so-and-so was a believer or so-and-so was lost? In our Christian culture and in our conversation and our thinking, this is our first question.

When we're talking about somebody, here's a situation, here's someone who's having problems, well, are they a believer or are they an unbeliever? Are they saved or are they lost? It's our first question. It's the first distinction we make in our minds. And it is absent from Scripture.

How often do you find that distinction in terms of eternal destination being made in Scripture? What is the distinction that Scripture makes? You're a man of faith or you're not. You're righteous or you're not. And righteous is not righteous in the sense of being pronounced righteous at the point of salvation.

It's righteous in the sense of practice. We're going to see very shortly in the genealogy that when you get to Enoch, Enoch walked with God. It doesn't say Enoch was a believer and Lamech was not.

It characterizes people in terms of their lifestyle. And it appears to be much more important in God's estimation, not whether or not someone has avoided eternal destruction in the lake of fire, but whether or not they are an individual characterized by faith, by obedience, by pursuit of the things of God. And it continually strikes me that in any place you want to go in Scripture, we often find ourselves wrestling, well, is this passage talking about believers or unbelievers? And the whole reason we have to ask that question is that that's not really the point.

And we think, well, what other point could there be? I mean, you're either going to heaven or you're going to hell. You're either saved or condemned. But that's not the emphasis of Scripture.

The emphasis of Scripture is don't stop and think, well, I'm saved and so I'm all done. The Word of God, the truth from God, the exhortations and the encouragements and the preaching passages of the Word of God are not get saved. They are be righteous, be faithful, be obedient, become transformed by the renewing of your mind.

And very seldom does Scripture even attempt to draw the line between believer and unbeliever. It draws the line between faithful and faithless, between obedient and disobedient. And we often try to figure out and have discussions about, well, was this particular individual in the Bible saved or unsaved? Was he a believer or an unbeliever? Was Cain a believer or an unbeliever? In God's estimation, from our vantage point in the Scriptures, the judgment of God is clear.

Whether or not Cain was a believer, Cain was faithless. He was disobedient. His heart did not incline itself toward God.

And this can be just as true of quote-unquote believers who have salvation and have an eternal future with God. It can be just as true of them as it is of the worst hell-bound sinners, so to speak, that you want to name. And God's interest is far more on what do you do with the issue of God in your heart on a day-by-day basis than He is with sorting people into the sheep and goats in terms of eternal judgment.

The emphasis of Scripture, now why is that? Obviously, God knows who is saved and who is lost. And it is one of the things that we tend to preoccupy ourselves with, both historically in the pages of Scripture and around us in the world today. And one of the reasons that we are so occupied with that is that Christianity has obsessed on evangelism to the exclusion of other things.

It's like Jesus says to the Pharisees, it isn't that these are not important, but you need to observe the more important things without leaving these off. Evangelism is a wonderful thing, and the opportunity to engage in it and so forth, we don't take anything away from that when we say that evangelism is not our reason for being. It's not the measure.

It's not the criteria by which we decide whether or not we're living the Christian life. It is a happy opportunity. It is a happy fruit that may or may not be born in any individual's life.

And yet we often say, and have it said, that it is the measure. I have mentioned before, I will say again, I think it is tragic that several questionnaires that I have completed for schools of theology and for churches who are candidating pastors and so forth, specifically ask the question, when is the last time you led someone to the Lord? As though that has some significance for a Christian. And if it's been a long time, then brows furrow, and we begin to wonder, well, you must not be a healthy Christian if you're not reproducing, if you're not engaging in active witnessing.

This raises a question in our minds about your spiritual health and well-being. And it's a terrible thing to have taken what is a real issue, which is are you saved or are you lost, and have made it the center and the focus of all of our attention. Look at the Scriptures.

The Scriptures don't do that. The Scripture doesn't come out and say, behold, Cain is condemned to the eternal lake of fire because he had no belief in God. It does tell us that Cain, in his bringing of a gift to God, and in his conversation with God, betrays a lack of interest in the things of God.

He's not interested in pleasing God. He's interested in pleasing himself. Jesus points that very same thing out with the Pharisees.

Were these Pharisees saved? Are they Old Testament saints? I think in many cases the answer to that question is yes, probably in most cases, if not all cases. They are, in fact, going to be resurrected on day one of the millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But that's not the point.

That's not the issue that Jesus raises. He says, your lifestyle, your choices, your thinking is faithless. It is self-centered, self-seeking.

It is measured by the measure of man. And in their measure, both of themselves and of each other, they come out very well. They're very religious, very righteous.

And yet, when the Son of God gives his estimation, they are at the very bottom of the ruler. They come up with a big fat zero in terms of the things that please God. And this needs to be our focus.

Why is it that the Bible makes much more of an issue out of our day-to-day thinking and our day-to-day lifestyle? Who is the Bible addressed to? To whom is it given as a communication? Believers or unbelievers? It's given to believers. What does God give unbelievers to convict them of sin and righteousness and judgment and the possibility of eternal destruction in the lake of fire, eternal separation from God? Does God give them the Bible to evangelize them? He does not. The Bible is not God's tool for evangelism.

And most of the verses that we pull out and construe when we give the Roman road and when we pull out verses, most of those verses don't even apply to salvation. The only ones that really apply are those that are in the category of Acts 16.31, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. But without the shedding of blood is no remission.

And a lot of these others may talk about soteriology, but they are not verses that God has said, go take this verse and quote it to the lost to get them saved. These are teaching passages for believers. The word of God is the word of God to believers about life as a believer.

And we mistake God's purposes when we think that, well, the thing I need to do is get out there and give the scriptures to the lost so that they will get saved. We need to take in the scriptures ourselves. It is our meat and drink, spiritually speaking.

And that's why the Bible doesn't address itself to, are you saved and are you lost? Because it addresses itself to believers for whom that's not a question. The question is, as a child of God, how will you live? How will you think? What is going to motivate your behavior? We need warning. We need rebuke, correction and instruction.

That's what the word of God says about itself. It pierces to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow. Why does it say the soul and the spirit? Who is it that's spiritually alive? It's believers.

You don't divide the soul and the spirit of an unbeliever. It's believers who need their thoughts and intents laid bare. Every scripture is God-breathed, inspired by God.

What is it profitable for? Evangelism is not in that list. Doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness so that the man of God may become mature and thoroughly equipped for every good work. That's why we have the word of God.

It's helpful for us to remember this when we think about our opportunities for evangelism. Conviction of sin is not our job. We don't bring the scriptures to bear to try to convict someone of sin.

Scripture tells us how that process takes place in the heart of an unbeliever. That is accomplished by God the Holy Spirit. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.

And He does it all by Himself. He doesn't need any help from us. The Holy Spirit doesn't sit there and say, You know, I'd love to convict this person of sin, but I really need a believer to come along and quote some scripture at them and explain just how sinful they really are.

God the Holy Spirit does this in the privacy of people's hearts all by Himself. We share the good news of Jesus Christ as the means, motive and opportunity to present themselves. But scripture is addressed to believers.

And scripture occupies itself with the issues of life. We have illustrations. We have narrative.

We have stories like this story of Cain and Abel that tell us what the range of possibilities are for our thinking and our lives. And we have the possibility as believers of failing in a big way. We can fail like the Pharisees failed.

We can fail like Esau failed. We can fail like Cain failed. We can fail like Balaam failed.

To insulate ourselves and to fool ourselves and say, Well, those must have been unbelievers. That could never happen to a believer. Anybody that sins in that way or fails in that way must not have ever been truly saved.

We deceive ourselves. And we rob ourselves of the benefit of the rebuke, the correction, and the instruction in righteousness that those passages of scripture bring to us. So it may not be a question that we can answer with certainty until we are face-to-face with Christ, whether or not some of these people are going to be resurrected and live with God into the eternal future.

It is safe to say that most of the characters in scripture will be there. I think that that includes a lot that some people do not, like Cain and Balaam and Esau and Ishmael and several others. There are clues in scripture that indicate that they had a relationship with God, perhaps not a happy relationship, a relationship nevertheless.

And if God engages in conversation with someone, if someone gives a human being a prophetic gift and reveals insight and gives them the ability to see into the future like he did with Balaam, I find it difficult to imagine that this is a, quote, hell-bound unbeliever. I think Balaam was a believer. He was not an Israelite, but the land of his origin was the same place that Abraham came from.

There are many Gentiles in the Old Testament scriptures who are believers, some of whom even make prophetic statements. So I say all that to say this. We are looking at the doctrine of the firstborn.

We are looking at the lives briefly sketched of Cain and Abel in Genesis chapter 4. And these principles apply to us. All of these things have been written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. And it is a dangerous thing to say, well, that person was an unbeliever, so I don't really need to spend much time thinking about their decisions, their pattern of life, or the outcome of their dealings with God, because they're an unbeliever.

That doesn't apply to me. Yes, it does. Everything in the scripture applies to us.

And in particular, we need to be aware of the range of possibilities that God has granted us by giving us free will. And as believers, and as people who will be resurrected and live with God throughout eternity, we can fail greatly in this life. And we have the record of people who have failed greatly to warn us, to correct and instruct us.

And this is one of those cases. So again, the choice that Abel makes when he approaches God with a gift reflects the attitude in his heart. And it is an attitude that recognizes that everything he has comes from God.

He is a shepherd. He loves his sheep. There is probably nothing as cute and cuddly as a newborn lamb staggering around on its little wobbly legs with its little woolly fleece nursing from its mother and so forth.

And yet Abel takes the best, the most promising, the choice, perfect lambs in his flock and brings them before the Lord and offers them as a sacrifice. Why? Among other things, it's an act of faith. Any time an Israelite took of the best of his flock, every year at Passover, the choicest lamb.

Anybody that's ever raised livestock, you know how hard it is to get started sometimes. You scrimp and save and you get some money together and you buy some cattle or you get some goats or sheep or whatever it might be. They've made movies about this where people go to Australia or they're out in the West and the barren land and they're scraping along trying to get started in this particular way of living.

And when you first start to get the calves, you first get the colts or you first get the new lambs, that's your future. That's the promise. You want to find the best breeding stock.

You want to weed out the ones that are weaker and less choice. And you want to save the best ones and use those to found your flock or your herd with. The very best ones are the ones you want to keep and breed and reproduce their strong bloodline in your flock.

So every time an Israelite took the firstborn, the choicest of the flock, and slaughtered them before the Lord, we're talking about an act of faith. I'm taking the very best and the choicest, the promise, the hope of the future here, and I am extinguishing it before the Lord. I'm spilling its blood out on the ground as an offering and a sacrifice to God.

It implies faith. You trust that God is going to bless, that God is going to provide, that your flock and your herd is going to continue in spite of the fact that you've taken the choicest and the best and sacrificed them. This flies in the face of Darwinian evolutionary theory, doesn't it? Survival of the fittest, the strong survive and the weak die out.

Here you've got a pagan living over across the ridge, and he's saving all the choice of his flock, and if he offers any sacrifices to his pagan god, he takes the weak and the puny and the blemished and offers them, and he breeds and builds his flock out of the choice. And here's an Israelite on the other side of the ridge, and every time he gets a really choice lamb, he's sacrificing it to his god. Well, what kind of future is he going to have? Who's going to win out here and have the healthy flocks and herds? It's an act of faith to bring your future before God and sacrifice it on the altar.

But that's what it means to bring the firstborn. The firstborn is your hope. It's your promise of blessing.

It is everything that's going to extend your life and your house, your standing in the nation, and the faithful Israelite would bring that and sacrifice it before the Lord. It's a strong act of trust in God. That's what Abel does.

Cain brings, apparently, a bag of grain. It doesn't say it was the first fruits. It doesn't say it was the choice.

It just says he also brought his offering. And the lack of description here and the contrast between his sacrifice and the sacrifice of Abel is not that one was bloody and one was bloodless, although that has its own level of significance in terms of redemption and in terms of expiation by the shedding of blood. But that's not the reason God honored Abel and his gift and did not honor Cain and his gift.

It's attitude of heart. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. God is looking for faith.

God is looking for those who trust him. Anytime you engage in an act of mercy, an act of love, self-sacrificial love that is sacrificial to self and beneficial toward others, it involves faith. If you deny yourself something on behalf of someone else, in the best and truest sense, you are offering a sacrifice to God.

You are setting aside your self-interest. It may appear that the best thing to do would be to keep all of the money that you have, perhaps the little money that you have, and you can rationalize and make all kinds of arguments that, well, I need to be responsible, I need to husband this, I don't have very much and what little I have I need to keep. And when an opportunity arises and someone else is obviously in need, you can justify and rationalize and say, well, I barely have enough for myself.

I certainly can't make a sacrifice here and help someone else financially. It can be the same thing with time. Well, I don't have time to put myself out on behalf of this person.

I don't have the energy. I don't have the resources. I don't have the wherewithal to, you know, obviously this person is in need.

I have the opportunity here, but it's going to require a sacrifice on my part. I'm going to lose something. It's the same idea as sacrificing the firstborn.

To go ahead and avail ourselves of that opportunity, to love someone, to put ourselves out on behalf of someone, in the best sense is an act of faith, because we're trusting that God will not let us fail, that God will not let us fall, that God will not let us suffer because we have served him in that way. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another. Jesus Christ put himself out.

To understate it greatly, his love was a self-sacrificial love. It doesn't mean that we should go around with a martyr complex or with some sort of a hair shirt mentality that we're going to deny ourselves and sacrifice ourselves and be irresponsible in doing this, deny our things that should be by rights to our family. We have common sense.

There are opportunities that are there and that are of God and that we can avail ourselves of without being irresponsible, without being nutty, without being strange. They are simple opportunities to perform acts of kindness, acts of love that often involve some degree of sacrifice, and they are not extraordinary, and for that reason many times we miss them and we overlook them. They may be in the realm of the commonplace.

It doesn't take that much extra to be kind or to be loving, to benefit someone at some cost to ourselves. But all of these things are characteristic of a spirit of mercy. I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

It isn't the overt ritual obeisance or worship to God that God is looking for. God is looking for those who serve him with a whole heart, who serve him because they trust him, because they love him. That's the distinguishing feature between Cain and Abel.

And in fact, all of these reversed situations where the firstborn does not inherit, whether you want to talk about Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, the children of Jacob who have the distribution of those firstborn rights that should have gone to Reuben in the normal course of things, but Judah receives the rulership, Levi receives

the priesthood, Joseph receives the double portion, even though by right of birth Reuben should have inherited these things, but Reuben loses out. Why? Reuben is living a life of self-gratification. Reuben winds up sleeping with one of his father's wives, and he forfeits his rights as the firstborn because he dishonors his father.

In an act of self-gratification, he dishonors his father. And that is the danger that all of us face. We can dishonor our father by gratifying ourselves.

David, as the youngest of the sons of Jesse, is nevertheless honored because he's the one man of faith in that household. Solomon, with all of his faults, is a man of faith, a man who desires to know God and to understand the wisdom of God beyond all things, more so than Adonijah or any of the other sons of David. Israel is said to be God's firstborn son.

This is the point that we left off with in the first session, Exodus 4.22. You find this by way of principle in Exodus 13. You might take a look at Exodus 13 because God makes quite a point of redemption of the firstborn. The Lord spoke to Moses in Exodus 13 saying, Consecrate to me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast, it is mine.

Moses said to the people, Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place. Remember what Jacob said about his firstborn son, Reuben. He is my strength.

The mighty hand of God in delivering Israel is symbolized and pictured when God says, Israel is my firstborn. Israel is the picture of God's strength. God's delivering Israel out of Egypt, out of bondage, under the blood of the Passover lamb is significant because who is it that is actually redeemed by that blood? Who is it that is protected by the blood on the doorpost during the night when the angel of death passes through Egypt? Who is it that the blood protects? Is it everyone in the household? Who is in danger? It's only the firstborn.

The entire nation is pictured as being redeemed at Passover, but it's the firstborn who are literally redeemed by the blood of the lamb. And it is a reminder, this idea of the firstborn is important in God's purpose. It's a theme that weaves itself all the way through scripture.

Look at verse 11. It shall be when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites as he swore to you and your fathers and gives it to you, that you shall set apart to the Lord, sanctify all that open the womb. Every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have, the males, shall be the lords.

But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. You either redeem it or you kill it.

And it doesn't say that you sacrifice it. It doesn't say that you slit its throat and spill its blood on the ground like a sacrifice. You break its neck.

What does that imply? Breaking the neck? This is symbolic of what happens to a lot of these firstborn sons who deny their birthright. Their power is broken. Their privilege is broken.

They're not given the honorable death of a sacrifice. It's a broken neck. It's a dishonorable death.

All the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. So it shall be when your son asks you in time to come saying, What is this? That you shall say to him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt. The firstborn symbolizes the strength of the father.

He's the first expression of the father's virility, the father's strength. He's the bright hope of that household. By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

It came to pass when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go that the Lord killed all the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all males that open the womb, but all firstborn of my sons I redeem. It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt.

That word sign, by the way, is ot. The same word we saw when Eve named Cain. I have come to possess a man, the ot of Yahweh, the sign of Yahweh.

Look at Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 9. Jeremiah is a fascinating book. We don't spend near enough time in it. Jeremiah 31 verse 7, Thus says the Lord, Sing with gladness for Jacob and shout among the chief of the nations.

Proclaim, give praise and say, O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them, the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child together, a great throng shall return there.

They shall come with weeping and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way in which they shall not stumble. For I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn.

God uses the picture or the title of firstborn for Israel to indicate His desire to favor them, to honor them, to have them be the expression of His strength. And you'll notice here as elsewhere that God's deliverance of Israel as an expression of His strength is in view. You see that in verse 7. Proclaim, give praise and say, O Lord, deliver your people, the

remnant of Israel.

And it is again that idea of strength linked to the firstborn. Over in Psalm 89 verse 27, the Davidic king, David as king of Israel is said to be God's firstborn. Psalm 89 in verse 19, you spoke in a vision to your holy one and said, I have given help to one who is mighty.

I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found my servant David. With my holy oil I have anointed him.

With whom my hand shall be established. Also my arm shall strengthen him. Once again the idea of strength is associated here as it was with Israel, here with the king of Israel, with the Davidic king.

The enemy shall not outwit him, nor the sons of wickedness afflict him. I will beat down his foes before his face and plague those who hate him. But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him.

And in my name his horn shall be exalted. Also I will set his hand over the sea and his right hand over the rivers. The sea is often symbolic in the Old Testament Scriptures of the chaotic forces of evil.

The fact that God establishes his throne upon the sea indicates his dominance and his ultimate victory over those unruly forces of darkness. Here God grants that victory to David. I will set his hand over the sea and his right hand over the rivers.

He shall cry to me, You are my father, my God and the rock of my salvation, my deliverance. Also I will make him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Of course this is a promise made in the days of David.

To David and by extension to David's descendants, the messianic king, the Lord Jesus Christ himself is the ultimate fulfillment of these prophetic promises. And of course these words resonate when you think about the Lord Jesus Christ. He shall cry to me, You are my father, my God and the rock of my salvation.

Those words were never spoken in a truer sense than when the Lord Jesus Christ spoke them. And he is, of course, the firstborn. And that leads us to our next point.

Christ is the firstborn son of God. In Colossians 1, verse 15, Christ is said to be the firstborn of all creation. Now what does that mean? Is he the first product of creation? Obviously not.

He is not only prior to creation in time, but he is also above it in power and authority. And that's what is implied in the idea of being the firstborn. Paul says in Colossians 1, verse 15, talking about Jesus Christ, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn

over all creation.

If you look a few verses down, verse 18, He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. And of course, preeminence in all things is the privilege of the firstborn. Hebrews chapter 1, verses 2 through 6, God, who at various times and in various ways has spoken times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by a Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things.

Which Son is the heir of all things? It's the firstborn Son, through whom also He made the worlds, who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, You are my Son, today I have begotten you? And again, I will be to Him a father, and He shall be to me a son. And then look at verse 6. But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, Let all the angels of God worship Him.

This is another instance of that idea of reversal in creation. When you think about the angels and you think about man, who came first? The angels. They are, in one sense, the firstborn in creation.

But, consistent with that theme of reversal that we see throughout the scriptures, man, who has been made a little lower than the angels, is crowned with glory and honor. And Jesus Christ did not become incarnate as an angel. He is incarnate as a human being.

He is God's firstborn. And that status elevates the entire human race above the angels. And God brings His firstborn into the world as a human being.

We occupy the position, especially in this age, of union with Christ. And as human beings, we enjoy the blessings that come to us because Christ is the firstborn of all creation. He is God's firstborn Son.

And He is a man as well as God. And He has elevated us with Him to that place of preeminence in God's plan. We are joint heirs with Christ.

Remember Romans 8.29? Everybody remembers Romans 8.28? All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. But remember 29? For whom He foreknew, He also predestined, predesignated, to be conformed to the image of His Son for what purpose? In order that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. So the idea of Christ as firstborn is prominent in Scripture.

He is God's firstborn. He is the firstborn of all creation. He is the firstborn from the dead.

You find this again in Revelation 1.5. John, to the seven churches which are in Asia, grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come. It says in Revelation 1.4. And from the seven spirits who are before His throne. And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead.

We tend to gloss over it. We've heard some of these phrases so many times. Why is Jesus Christ called the firstborn? Could have said that He's the firstfruits.

It does say He's the firstfruits in another place. But He's the firstborn from the dead because the firstborn inherits. The firstborn has the double portion.

The firstborn has the rulership. The firstborn has the priesthood. The firstborn receives the significant things from the Father.

And He, Jesus Christ, is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. It reminds us of Psalm 89 where David's kingship is described in terms of being the firstborn of all the kings of the earth. We are united with Christ.

We have the responsibility to fulfill that life of faithfulness that has caused God to reverse the natural order all the way through Scripture. Abel, who perishes, is replaced by Seth. And it is Seth who carries forward what should have been fulfilled by Cain, the firstborn.

Jacob, the younger, fulfills promise. Isaac fulfills promise. The church, as the latecomer, as the younger entity in terms of the people of God versus Israel, the firstborn son.

We have an opportunity in this age to fulfill God's purpose and to inherit the blessings from God and the opportunity to reflect the glory of God in a way that Israel could have and should have, but yet failed to do. And we'll have another opportunity to do in the Millennial Kingdom. But it is not Israel that has the privilege of being united with Christ, of being the body of Christ and the bride of Christ.

It's us. And so the idea of the privileges and the opportunities of the firstborn have come to us. Christ is the firstborn among many brethren and we are those brethren.

So it's a wonderful reminder as we see this concept of the firstborn and the firstfruits and the offering of the first things to God to realize that Christ, who was the firstborn and the firstfruits, has offered Himself to God on our behalf. We have been redeemed under the concept of the redemption of the firstborn. And that is significant because the firstborn are redeemed because they belong to God.

We have been redeemed and we belong to God. And everything that we do in life ought to reflect that knowledge. We are not our own.

We have been bought with a price. Therefore, we are encouraged to glorify God in our body, in our earthly life. And it's a privilege.

It's a wonderful standing that has been conferred on us through Christ. And it's one that ought to motivate us. It ought to encourage us and be a reminder to us on a daily basis that our life is special.

Our time is special. Our stewardship is special. We are devoted to God.

We have been purchased for God. We, in a sense, have been doubly redeemed. Christ as the firstborn belongs to God and Christ Himself has been sacrificed on our behalf to redeem us to God.

And in history, in personal life, any way you want to slice it, we occupy a unique and special place in God's plan. Each one of us has value. Each one of us has the opportunity to fulfill that calling and that stewardship, that place of opportunity that belongs to the firstborn, to the redeemed.

When we pick up the story next time, we're going to see the consequences of failing to recognize that we are the firstborn.