

2018-05-27 Stump the Pastor

Stump the Pastor

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Pastor Scott Austin

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

It being a holiday weekend and us knowing the realities of holiday weekends, we sometimes do fun things on these weekends and just take things a little bit lighter and simpler. I'm not sure how much lighter and simpler this will actually be but we're going to do what we started last time jokingly to call "Stump the Pastor." I'm going to need this aren't I? Now I don't know if you'll actually stump me, it's not probably very difficult to do that. But really what this is supposed to be is a time for you to raise whatever questions you might be bugging you and I can't promise that I'll give you an answer that satisfies you or helps to completely overcome that but I can promise to respond to you. So I don't call Q and A, I call it Q and R, question and response, set the bar real low, yeah.

[Laughter]

So what we'll do is we have a this microphone and I'll just kind of like pass it through and any question on your mind you can ask and I will do my very best. And what I will promise is if that I if I am truly stumped and have no idea I will-I will research it because it's a chance for me to learn and then I'll talk to you during the week or something, OK? so who would like to go first who has a question. Oh child questions! These are the hardest ones! Would you run about thank you.

[Voice of a Clara]

How do you-How much different is Jesus than God?

[Laughter]

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

I love that question. I think you should ask your mom and dad on the way home. Yeah I believe the hardest question from the last stump the pastor was also from a child whose parents were

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like “your turn”. That's a great question thank you for asking. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the very representation of God, that God-that Jesus is the exact replica of God's very nature. That's some fancy words from Hebrews Chapter 1. And this is a really really important thing for us to know that Jesus when he was a person that, we weren't alive then, but there were other people who were alive when Jesus was on earth and they could see him and hear his voice and hug him and eat food with him and he was a very real person who was right there with him. And we don't have the great joy of experiencing Jesus that way but Jesus is still alive and we can know God through Jesus as well. But what the Bible tells us is that Jesus is the very best way for us to know God. And so I actually tell people sometimes when they're reading hard stuff in the Bible and they don't understand and they say “oh this this verse or this passage is really hard, it doesn't seem like God is very loving in this verse” and I always tell them to remember Jesus because Jesus even more than anything else you read in the Bible is the perfect way for us to understand who God is because Jesus is God. And there's lots of places in the Bible we could point to some of my favorite ones are John 1, Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 so if you want some reading homework you could read those chapters of the Bible and learn a lot more about how Jesus reveals who God is to us. Does that help? If at all, Is that it is an OK answer? If you would like to talk some more about that I would be happy to talk with you more.

I'm going to move on for now because there are other people who have questions. Can you bring the mike to Sara please real quick?

[Voice of Sara]

I've always wondered about the fig tree so in Matthew and Mark there's the parable or the the miracle of Jesus cursing the fig tree. Matthew has Jesus cursing the fig tree and it dies on the spot and Mark has Him cursing the fig tree and everyone hears Him and then they just like leave it at that. Why-

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Say the last part again?

[Voice of Sara]

-they just they just leave it at that.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

He curses it and doesn't describe what happened.

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[Voice of Sara]

Yeah like He's like "no fruit will ever come from you again or no one will eat from you again yeah and then it like ends but then the Matthew one has like "Truly I tell you dot dot dot". So like why why would one author leave out that part? Or I don't know, I think it's really funny that Jesus got mad enough at a fig tree to be like bah stupid fig tree.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Yes, that's a great question. I'm going to leave aside the question of the meaning of the cursing of the fig tree for now but I will love to address the question of why the two books of the Bible described in different ways. So if you don't know our New Testament, our Christian scriptures, begin with four books of the Bible that we call Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And these are four books that tell the story of Jesus's birth and life and ministry and death and resurrection and ascension and they're all told in different ways and sometimes the details don't quite line up. And you would-you would think well if-if somebody was making up a religion and wanted to convince somebody that it was true they would certainly not put together all these different books in that say things in different ways because it would be, like, easy to disprove perhaps or to dismiss. But that's actually not the way that people in that era receive information and truth and history anyway. So the reason we have different gospels is because they are written for different audiences, with different intentions in mind they all want to have the same intention broadly speaking which is to tell the good news of Jesus. But one was written for a more Jewish audience than some of the others and that kind of thing. And you can certainly tell that Matthew and Luke borrow pretty liberally from Mark's gospel but the Gospel of John is an entirely different sort of thing and you know how many parables for example are contained in the Gospel of John? Zero, right. Very interesting stuff. And so I love that the Bible is a multi-vocal thing. I always say it's not a book it's a? Library, that's right, good some people listen. I love it. And so it's not just true of the Gospels, it's true of the whole Bible and you see some of the- something even more dramatic in the Old Testament where you know you have the stories of Israel told in Chronicles in the story of Israel told in the Kings and they're-they're different and they have different conceptions of who God is. Right. And so that raises the question of contradictions, which I know is not really exactly what you're asking but I know that it's probably one or two questions away and I heard one person say it like this, I think as Pete Ends said "It's not a contradiction if I say when I'm ten years old I hate oatmeal and when I'm twenty years old I say I love oatmeal, that's just a change in my perspective." Right? Now if I say in one conversation that I hate oatmeal and I love oatmeal, that is a contradiction. But when you have one text that says that says God this way and then later a text that says God slightly differently that's not a contradiction, it's a-it's probably an evolution of thought about

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God. And that's why the concept that I just questioned-I just answered from Clara is so important because Jesus is the very representation of who God is— the exact replica of God's nature he is the image of the invisible God, what it says in Colossians. And so when you have questions about those evolutions of thought that we see in the Old Testament or even in the New Testament, probably to a lesser degree, it's a more compressed timeline, the way to solve those is to read everything through the lens of who Jesus is. So I probably answered fifteen questions and none of them were the one you actually asked but that's what I have to do for now.

Ruby did you have a question as well?

[Voice of Ruby]

I love God.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

We love God, yes, more of a statement than a question and I love that very much thank you.

I think Veera has a question.

[Voice of Veera]

OK so I have a question about Greek, it's how to pronounce a certain word that's why I'm walking up, a question about Greek and how to pronounce this.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Tzatziki. I think?

[Laughter]

That's a sauce OK. Thank you that's not coin a Greek

[Voice of Veera]

We made it at Soujourner house and we had fun and learn from each other but no one knew how to pronounce it.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

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Nobody knew how to pronounce. Thank you so much any Greek people in the room? Is it tzatziki? You know you could go down food down to East Ave. and ask them at the Greek festival they would be happy to tell you. I love that. Yes, the New Testament is written in Greek but I think it predates tzatziki or at least it wasn't mentioned as far as I know. I thought you were going to like show me the Greek letters and everything I was getting very nervous.

Other questions? I've only been stumped twice so far I guess. Joel has one. He's smiling this is going to be a good. Joel with the seminary so well.

[Voice of Joel]

So if Jesus is God and Jesus is like the best example we have of like the embodiment of love how do you recon- how do you reconcile Jesus as God is love with the whole concept of eternal damnation in the lakes of fire if you don't follow and obey my understanding of what I don't know.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

It's not the question I gave you Joel. No, I'm just kidding. I didn't give anybody any questions. We had a similar question the last time and the the most honest answer I can give about afterlife issues is that I don't know. And I said that last time and I think maybe freaks and people out because we would like to be in a place where we read the Scriptures with such certainty that we can-we can always say we know everything even stuff that hasn't happened yet. But I have-I've been humbled too many times by by my own changing perspectives to hold anything with like too much certainty other than what I've said about Jesus and I keep clinging to that. I think there is a difficult work to be done reading some of those texts just as there is to be done reading some of the violent images in the Old Testament of God through a cruciform lens, through the-through the lens of Jesus on the cross, right? But Sara didn't read John 3:17 today but it is what comes right after that most famous verse, 3:17. God didn't send Jesus to the world to condemn the world but to save it. And there is lots of imagery in the Book of Revelation with lakes of fire and that kind of thing but I don't I don't think we should take our picture of the afterlife from the Book of Revelation first of all because I think we have grossly misread that particular text of the Bible, especially lately, which I guess is it's own answer to a different question that I probably shouldn't try to go into right now. It's hard, that's the answer, it's hard. Some of us might read the Bible through the lens of Jesus and understand God through the-through the lens of Jesus on the cross and come to the conclusion that that is actually not the nature of the afterlife. It's a question about which I am still somewhat confused and don't have a very strong answer and that's that's honest that's the-that's the most honest I can be because anything else I say would kind of be like describing my process that still under-is

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still going on right and that's that's often ugly. Nobody wants to see what's happening in my brain while I'm figuring things out, I promise you. I wish I had time to give my whole sermon about the Gospel in chairs but some of you—you have heard before. But the important thing from it is to recognize that that Jesus is not our hazmat suit or our fireproof suit against the wrath of God. Jesus on the cross is not there protecting us from an angry, vindictive God who wants to smite us but rather Jesus on the cross revealing the actual truth of who God is and that this self sacrificial love in the face of all of the world's sin, individual and systematized, is what God's nature actually is and yes it's hard to reconcile that with lakes of fire. And so Jesus does appear in the Book of Revelation, by the way, where some of that imagery comes from, and he is covered in blood, apparently some people would say from a battle, but he arrives at the battle already covered in the blood. And so I think one way that people reconcile that is to look at the Book of Revelation and say that you have—here I am doing my revelation thing, are saying you have Jesus like all bloody from a battle but no, it's his own blood that he brings to it already and he's got a sword but it's not swinging it with his hand it's in his mouth. It's the word that is the weapon. Anyway, if you don't have any idea what I'm talking about right now you're probably better off because that's a very confusing part of the Bible but that's where some of that imagery comes from. So wow Joel, thank you, that's an excellent question.

I have one question that I brought with me that I know is on some people's mind that I need a couple of minutes to answer it but if there's an easy question. No I have time for one more question before I answer that one. Oh wow there's lots of hands on. I want to go to Michael here and if you want to ask ask your question and don't get a chance to just come back to church at the eleven service and.

[Laughter]

[Voice of Michael]

This is about the Lectionary passage and Nicodemus come to Jesus and I've been kind of wondering about Nicodemus. Did he come to Jesus sincerely or was he I don't know what was his motivation there I'm kind of wondering about.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Yes, the question I think if I heard you right is did Nicodemus come to Jesus sincerely to ask him that question? This is from John 3, the passage that servant of the children's moment today and the text doesn't really answer that for us. I don't think we like in some places we see like Pharisees ask the question trying to trap him, right? And you don't get that in this one exactly In fact I think it says he comes by night is that correct to my-? Right, there so my sense on that-my

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read on that is that he's he's coming they're asking Jesus a question that he doesn't want to ask in front of anybody else and that that would lead me to believe that, yes, he's asking sincerely and wants to know what Jesus is about and what Jesus is teaching. So that answer your ok?

[Voice of someone in the congregation]

All right. I'll start you off with a softball here. How do you reconcile God in The Old Testament with, particularly after Exodus, the genocide and commands against interracial marriage with the person of Jesus Christ, love your neighbor, sort of stuff.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Thank you for that excellent question. We had similar question in the first service and so I've got an answer all teed up and ready to go. It's going to be. This is not an easy thing to do it's nothing we can make light of but my starting point is Jesus and I think that that's a Biblical starting point I don't like to use the Bible as an adjective if I can help it but in the Bible we read things such as in Hebrews one that Jesus is the exact representation of Jesus of God's very nature. In Colossians 1 he is the image of the invisible God. In John the Word was made flesh the Word was with God in the beginning and the Word was God, speaking of Jesus as God's final word like capital W word. The words of scripture are the Word of God in one sense but Jesus is what God has to say on the ultimate level. And so any time you read something in another part of the Bible that seems to conflict with what Jesus taught taught teaches taught and modeled with his life and with his death then Jesus takes precedence. And you have to try to understand that through, I use this fancy term like a cruciform lens meaning based on the cross, on the cross of Jesus, God God's very nature was most fully and truthfully represented to us everything else is not as clear. So that's the first answer to the question that we start with Jesus and we end with Jesus and everything in between has Jesus there at the table, if you'll pardon the expression.

The other part of that is is we have to think about how we understand the Scriptures. And a lot of times people say well the Bible says one thing over here and it says another thing over here, that's a contradiction and that's a reasonable thing to say because there are, you know, kind of different voices that you hear from time to time. But I think it's important as always to remember what the Bible is and isn't some of you will already be able to finish the sentence for me— the Bible is not a book it is a? Library. Right. It's a collection of books and those books were written at various times by various people with their various perspectives and, yes, also various understandings of who God is and what God's nature is. Now that gets a little scary depending on your, you know, the view of the Bible that you had from growing up or from coming into this room or from whatever church background you have that kind of thing. It does

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not mean the Bible is less important or beautiful or inspired or authoritative or any those things what it means is that you see an evolution of understanding as you go from the beginning of the story closer to Jesus. I mentioned this earlier, I'll say it again, I think I think I got this from Peter Enns but he said "It's not a contradiction to say ten years ago I hate oatmeal and now I love oatmeal" because our tastes change, our understanding of things changes. Now if in one conversation I said both that I hate oatmeal and I love oatmeal that would be truly a contradiction and we would have to deal with that but what you see in the in the books of the Bible I believe in part is an evolution of understanding of God's nature. Just as you have an evolution from kind of other eastern religions that practice child sacrifice you have in the binding of Isaac the story in Genesis 22 a clear move away from that saying no, that's not how this God works, here's a animal instead. We might still say well animal sacrifice is barbaric but we have to compare it to what came before. Similarly you see in the Bible an evolution of how people understand God so you have the same story told in Chronicles and told and told in Kings and in the earlier version something that's attributed to God is later attributed to the devil. But what has happened there? People have begun to understand what God and God does and does not command and ask us to do so. That's a that's a kind of vague way of saying what might be more directly said as sometimes I think what we read in the stories is what people thought God was saying to them and we see Jesus revealing something else about God that that takes precedence over that understanding that you saw there. Means you have to read the Bible more carefully and it doesn't work quite as well as a turn key-like, no thought required answer book. I don't mean to be dismissive of anybody who who uses the Bible that way and I'm thinking more about how I used to think of it versus how I think of it now so. Does that answer your question at all? It's I know it's it's too big a question to try to give you something that's going to satisfy you like right over night and I still wrestle with that every day reading the scriptures is hard hard work but that's my-that's my framework, that's my methodology for how I do that kind of thing. That's a great question, thank you.

What else? Other side of the room, let's not make a pregnant lady carry the microphone.

[Laughter]

I mean, would you pass that back?

[Voice of someone in the congregation]

I have a Bible question or pastor question I guess why don't we get sermons out of minor prophets? It's like I don't know I've ever heard you quote Nahum.

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[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Why don't we get sermons out of minor prophets? Well because they're minor.

[Voice from someone in the congregation]

Jonah doesn't count.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

What's that?

[Voice from someone in the congregation]

Jonah doesn't count.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Jonah doesn't count? Well he does, he's one of the minor prophets, that's a great question. So, part one is I will take that to heart and I'll endeavor to preach more widely. I'm always trying to preach more widely. One of the reasons for using the Lectionary right now is to prove is to prevent me from picking my favorite stuff all the time or just what I think you might want to hear or need to hear or what I would be happy preaching about. But the truth is the way we use the Lectionary does not insist on me preaching on each of those texts each week or even because we've been, because I've been a little bit derelict my duty we don't even read all of them each week. I wish we did but I haven't gotten us to the point where the liturgy works that way yet and where there's enough people and volunteers and stuff to keep it going. So the Lectionary is supposed to point us to text that we would otherwise miss and even though we use the Lectionary I can still bob and weave a little bit and dodge that. For what it's worth the Lectionary itself bobs and weaves and dodges some of the harder stuff. We don't get every word of the Bible from the Lectionary even over the full three year cycle. But-so that's part of the answer, another part of the answer is. You know in my discernment of what which texts to focus on and preach on I haven't seen those ones coming up as the ones that seem like the congregation needs to hear, taught and preached. The the whole library of the Bible is is authoritative, inspired, beneficial for training and all those things, right? We we don't want to bury any part of it but certain parts of it tell us the higher points of the story in ways that others don't. And so it may be that there's been some focus on some of those higher points and I'm floundering little bit with this question, I've appreciate you asking it. Seem like there's

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something else I want to say about that but it's not really formulating very well in my mind right now but thank you for asking that question.

Let's move on because I want to make sure we get other questions. Would somebody hand the mike over to Del please?

[Voice of Del]

Hey Scott, I was wondering do you believe that Christians are called to embrace nonviolence? Or in what way?

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

I can answer that question one way with the word yes. Yes, I think in an absolute way actually truth be told. And this is this is a- I talk about this quite a lot but in a fairly subtle way which maybe is what's behind the question. Since I believe as I said a moment ago that that Jesus is the best representation, that Jesus on the cross is the best representation of God's nature and will and Jesus very clearly taught nonviolence and practiced it I believe that with that's the- that's the calling, a mandate for all people who would walk in the way of Jesus, all who would follow Jesus, all who would call themselves little Christs, you know, Christians and the early church believed this too for about 314 years. I did but- I did the math wrong there but the early church refused to commit any act of violence. The early Christians would not do it they went into the coliseum for sport and and made no, you know, they were sacrificed for the entertainment of the Roman people. And you can read their memoirs as they're kind of like waiting to go into the into the arena, it's quite powerful, and the religion spread like wildfire even as the Romans tried to stamp it out with violence and with executions and that kind of thing. It wasn't until the Emperor of Rome converted to Christianity and made it the state religion that you begin to see Christians doing things like entering military service and going to war on behalf of the nation and performing acts of violence in the name of Rome, which on paper was also the name of Christ. That's just the facts. So I know this is a very complicated issue when we try to think about it in the twenty first century you know and I, you know I'm not going to win any popularity contest by by extrapolating that too far. And and I don't condemn people who make different choices than I do but it's my belief that Christians should never commit violence for any reason. So I want to be clear about the last part of what I said which is that I don't exclude people from my ministry if they have a different view, I don't cast aspersions at people who have a different view. I know that there's lots of arguments to be made about just war versus true pacifism and all those things that the church has wrestled with that in many different ways since the Roman Empire fell. And I know you're not specifically asking about military service, at least I don't think you are. That's that's where it becomes less

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clear. I think it's more clear when it when it's more personal violence. But all right I'm I'm rambling now I'm so sorry I'm not doing a good job.

Let's go to Marielle and then Doug and I think that probably has to be our last two I'm so sorry to say because I have one of the questions that I know a lot of people are asking outside of Sundays that I want to answer on this Sunday so I want to leave time for that but go ahead Marielle.

[Voice of Marielle]

So I didn't want to ask this question because I thought it would be too complicated to answer but this is really set the stage so maybe this will be easy to answer. What would be your analysis of why none of the disciples were female?

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Oh wow that's a great question why were none of the disciples female? OK. The apostles, except for Junia, who was not one of the twelve but was an apostle. By the way any of these questions I'm giving insufficient answers to if you want to like talk to me more about them please understand I know they're more complicated and able to answer and I'm more than willing to to discuss them more with their time if you want to. So my short answer to that is because it would not have worked culturally for that to be the case and God is always making accommodations to our culture and at the same time trying to stretch us a little bit right? And so that's stretching happened and I think with regards to women's roles in society with how Jesus talked to and interacted with women, with the fact that women were the first evangelists and witnesses to the resurrection and who were the first to preach the guy. Well but the fact that women were intimately involved in the construction and function of the early church and including financing it in some cities. But that at the time in a Jewish culture, a rabbi and his disciples, as closest disciples, were were men and that was kind of the rule of the day and upsetting that to a you know in a in a complete and total way probably would have made it impossible for you know, understanding with God all things are possible, it would like it would have made it you know functionally impossible to try to draw humanity closer to what God's true design for the world is, which I believe that includes women involved at all levels of of Christian ministry. So that's not- it's a frustrating answer but it's it's the best short one I can give right now.

And then is the mike heading this way yet? Right this way Marielle to Doug over here. I love this by the way I could do this every week but I know that's not what you want.

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[Voice of Doug]

Maybe we start with a softball then will end with a hard ball.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

It wasn't a softball if you remember. That was ironic.

[Voice of Doug]

His words not mine. How would you make the connection between the current nation state of Israel or relation between the current nation state of Israel and the Israel of Bible because I come from a faith background that encourages almost a blind support of the nation state of Israel and how do we wrestle with that.

The east answer is don't but yeah right the conversations are much more complex than-

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Certainly yes yes and when you when you have a very large voting bloc in the U.S. that that thinks of modern day Israel as equivalent to ancient Israel. In the big picture of God's grand narrative for the universe then that that becomes something that we have to discuss and think about. So I've tipped my hand already a little bit I think with the way I described that, which is that I don't think that you can make those two things equal to each other and that I believe that that the Christ's work brought to its fruition and completion means that every tribe and tongue a nation has access to God. And that we are all heirs to the promise. One of the Lectionary text today I don't I don't have time to read it but it's from Romans, it might be eight, talks about where we are heirs were were adopted into this family right and so the specialness of that is not what it was or at least not in the same way. I think Doug if I go any further on this it's going to open up a very longer much longer answer, which frankly I'm not educated well enough to give so that's my that's my brief thumbnail sketch of what it is and I hope that that is not overly frustrating.

I'm going to invite you to take communion now the band going to come back up and lead us in a song and. I'll remind you that this is the table not of the church but of the Lord and that all who are following Jesus and seeking to make the Christ way their way are invited to come and partake of the sacrament. May be for you the real presence of the Savior, of the body and blood, a reminder of His sacrifice and an act of unity with each other. And if you like to receive

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personal prayer, the prayer team will be available for you in the back of the room. Let's continue to worship God at the table and in Song.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com