



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 13:13–25

“Paul at Antioch—Biblical Evangelism: Part I”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are studying, if you have forgotten, the book of Acts. Chapter 13, verse 13 through verse 25 is the Scripture reading for today and as you will tell, when we read the Scripture, this is part of the sermon that the apostle preached in Antioch in Pisidia. The last time that Acts was preached in consecutive fashion here at the Chapel, by me, I devoted just one message to Paul’s message. But today, and next Sunday, I would like to devote at least the two Sundays to this sermon because there are some rather important things within it, and this will give us a chance to emphasize them a little bit more. So we’re looking today at Acts 13, verse 13 through verse 25.

Now, Paul has just been on the island of Cyprus, having been commended by the church at Antioch in Syria, on his first missionary journey. And so, now, he is going to leave Cyprus and go over to the mainland of Asia Minor and then, ultimately, reach Antioch in Pisidia. Actually, this Antioch is in Frigia, but because there were two Antiochs, two Antiochs in Frigia, one of them was called Antioch-toward-Pisidia and that’s the one that we’re looking at here.

“Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: And John [that’s John Mark] departing from them returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, ‘Ye

men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.’ Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, ‘Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.’”

That expression “And ye that fear God,” is probably a reference to Gentiles, who are those who have been attracted to Judaism but nevertheless have not yet undergone circumcision and thus become part of the nation.

“Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.”

Now, you may remember that when Israel asked for a king, that was very displeasing to Samuel, and he went to the Lord about it and he prayed. And he asked what he should do and God said to him, “Samuel, go ahead and anoint a king, because they have not rejected you, they have rejected me.” And so it becomes evident from that account that when they ask for a king, like the other nations, they were asking for something that was very displeasing to the Lord God. For the simple reason that he said that he was their king. And so they were dissatisfied with the kingship of the Lord God and they wished a king just like the nations about them, a tendency that is characteristic of human nature. And, also, I might say, characteristic of churches, also. Verse 22:

“And when he had removed him, [that’s Saul] he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave their testimony, and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine

own heart, which shall fulfill all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus.' When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, 'Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.'”

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege that is ours today. We thank Thee for the opportunity to gather on such a beautiful day as this, and listen to the Word of God, meditate upon it, think over the things of Holy Scripture, and, Lord, by Thy grace, pray that Thou wilt minister to us from the Word of God, to bring us to the place where we are more submissive to Thy truth; for, Lord, we surely need that. We sense within us the sin principle; and there are many things that, within us, cause us to depart from the teaching of the Word of God, depart from fellowship with Thee, depart from earnestly seeking Thy face. Lord, we pray that Thou wilt deliver us and give us the experience by Thy grace of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the most practical way of submission to Thy Word and to Thy truth.

And, Lord, we shall give Thee the praise for that for we know that naturally we want to turn away from Thee. Deliver us from the attitude of the nation that desired a king, when they had the greatest of all kings, the Lord God, Jehovah, Himself. And Father, we thank Thee for this privilege of gathering as a body of believers in order that we may receive help from one another, through the experiences of fellow believers, as well as through the teaching of the Word of God. We thank Thee for the fellowship we have in Christ.

We pray for this assembly, for its elders and for its deacons and for its members and for its friends and visitors who are here today. Lord, minister richly to them from the Word of God. Supply the needs that we all have. We, especially, remember those who are in the difficulties and trials of life

and especially some who are very ill. Lord, we ask that Thou wilt minister to them and give healing in accordance with Thy will. Lord, bless the outreach of the Chapel. We thank Thee for the many who faithfully serve the Lord here in various ways and we thank Thee for the response that Thou hast given, that in far away places there are friends of the chapel through the ministry of the tapes, the things that are written, the radio programs and other forms of outreach. O God, bless richly these things, to the glory of Thy Name. And, Father, we ask that Thou wilt be with us in this meeting. May it be a time of spiritual blessing for each of us, for me and for those who listen.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for this morning is, “Biblical Evangelism,” and this will be our subject, also, for next Sunday morning as well. Sometimes we in the Christian Church are inclined to think that we have never faced such a task as faces us today, in challenging the world. After all, do we not have today the world with its humanistic philosophy, its Marxism and its related liberation theology. And we have modern science, which certainly seems to be an opponent of much of Christianity. We have the world's obsession with sex and its obsession in measure with a professing by emasculated kind of religion. What seems to be evident today is that we are attempting to deal with, as Christians, a world that has largely forgotten Christianity. The French Minister of Culture, of a few years back, Andre Malraux, argued that the contemporary crises has its origins in the demise of Christianity. And he went on to say, “In a universe without God, life becomes absurd and death makes the point.” There is an old saying of Dostoyevsky, which I'm sure many of you have heard. “If God does not exist, then everything is permitted.” And does it not seem as if today we are facing that kind of world.

A few years back, George Gallup took a poll of college students. And in the poll of college students, he discovered that a great number of college students felt that organized religion was irrelevant to their needs. He cited a number of statements by students to that effect. One young man in particular, from Western Michigan University remarked, “I believe in God, but I haven't found a

church I'm satisfied with. I can't see how church going relates to living a good life.” It's obvious that this young man, if he had a true faith in God, had not been instructed in the things that Scriptures have to say. Sometimes people criticize Christianity and just simply say that when one looks at the history of Christianity, one looks elsewhere for a faith because have not Christians persecuted other Christians and have not they been responsible for the death of other Christians. And the answer, of course, is yes. It is true.

But religious persecution while a shameful episode in Christian history, cannot compare with atheistic persecution and the kinds of things that happen as a result of the opposite faith. It's been estimated, for example, that under Joseph Stalin, as many as thirty-five million Russians were executed and what has been happening recently in Southeast Asia is, over the past few years, is a confirmation of that kind of thing. And what is happening in Afghanistan and various other places over the face of the globe, indicate that while the church is not without fault, speaking of the professing church, the church cannot be compared with the world.

So when we think about Christianity and we think about the world that we face, we are inclined to think that our day is the worst of all days to preach the gospel. But the rugged little Jewish man, whose name was Saul or Paul, almost fifty years of age at this time, so far as we can tell, that's an age when men turn to comforts of a firm base, faced the same kinds of problems that we face. In fact, while they may be under different forms and different names, he faced a contemporary thought that was just as much opposed to the doctrine that he was proclaiming. He faced philosophers, as we face atheistic philosophers. As a matter of fact, he faced better philosophers than we have today because one of the interesting things of the twentieth century is the fact that its philosophy cannot really be compared with the philosophy of the time of Paul. And then he faced other things. He faced the leading religions of his day, he faced degrading morals among the people to whom he ministered. And he faced, also, the hardest of all audiences to face, those who had a great tradition of orthodoxy but who had forgotten it and now were cold and heartless when the Word of God was

proclaimed. And, sometimes, when one thinks of the Christian professing church today, one cannot help but think of the history of Israel. We have much the same thing in our professing churches.

With what did Paul confront the world of his day? Well, when we look at the accounts, and here we have a good indication of what Paul used to confront the world for this is the only full-length report of a Pauline sermon. It's evident that what he confronted the world of his day with was the story of divine redemption in the Word of God. And, you'll notice also this, that there were no new techniques invented by the Apostle Paul or any of the other apostles, for that matter, there was no fresh terminology. He used the terminology that had been found in the Scriptures and he preached that old terminology. He did not dilute his message in any way. In fact, when most people read this, they might think this is deep theology. But this is the kind of thing with which he confronted his day. He gave them Old Testament truth and Old Testament terminology and he expected them to understand. Now, he expected them, also, to reject as well as to accept. And, he was justified in his expectations because that's exactly what happened; some rejected and a few, also, accepted.

Now, we should remember this; that in case someone should say, well, those people in those days were used to that kind of language and so it wasn't really coming to them with ancient language and ancient truths and ancient words. But, sometimes, you forget that there was a four hundred-year-interval, approximately between the last of the prophets and the coming of our Lord. And when we add, also, the term of the appearance of the apostles, and the preaching of Paul, we have an extended period of time between the completion of the Old Testament and the preaching of the apostles. And, yet, it is the same truth that the apostle proclaimed. That's a lesson to us, I think. The apostle expected and the Holy Spirit attended his words with power that men would respond to the ancient word, concerning the promises of God as contained in the inspired Word.

There is no other inspired Word than that found in the Word of God and to preach anything other than this is surely not to have the result that God intends that the preaching of the Word should have. I love this sermon of Paul's because it is a survey of the history of Israel with the

Messianic promises in the background and, particularly, the promises that God gave to David, concerning the Davidic covenant and the fact there would be a kingdom and a king who would come from the Davidic line to sit upon the throne and rule and reign upon the face of this earth. So what we’re going to look at is a historical survey that culminates in an appeal not to repeat the error that the citizens of Jerusalem are responsible for, when they rejected the Lord Jesus, nailed him to a cross and crucified him.

Now, Luke begins his account of the ministry in Antioch in Pisidia by saying in verse 13, “Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos.” That’s a very interesting expression, “Paul and his company,” because this is the first time that this language appears and it’s evident that at this point the apostle has become something of the leader of this group of people who are preaching the Word on this first missionary journey.

Now, Barnabas was with him and John Mark was with him, also. John Mark was Barnabas’ cousin, and so there are some important men with him. But it’s evident that the apostle has now outstripped others, at least in the purpose of God in the preaching of the Word. There’s one way in which Paul has not outstripped Barnabas, and that is in dignity. In chapter 14, in the description of the ministry in Lystra and Derbe, it is said, “And they called Barnabas Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.” Well, Jupiter, of course, was the head of the panathea of heathen gods, and so, it’s obvious that Barnabas had a great dignity.

One thing that is remarkable about Barnabas is this; that he was a man who could accept the secondary position and, evidently, not be disturbed by it, reminding us of the couplet, “It takes more grace, and I can tell, to play the second fiddle well.” So Barnabas was that kind of individual and he should be admired for it.

We read here, also, that John Mark departed from them when they came to Perga in Pamphylia, and later on we learn that the apostle was not happy over that. In fact, when Barnabas suggested that Mark rejoin them at a particular time, he refused because Mark had left them at this point.

Students of the book of Acts had wondered why John Mark left because Luke doesn't tell us why. Some have suggested that he may have been distressed because the Gospel is now going out to the Gentiles; and he being a Jewish man growing up in that environment was a little disturbed by the fact, now that the truth was being preached to Gentiles. Also others have said that trip from Perga north to Antioch in Pisidia took them up into the mountains, which were noted as places where brigands and robbers were hanging out. And perhaps he had, as we say, chickened out because of the dangers and perils of the trip. And then, one of the German commentators has said that, “John Mark evidently was a mother's boy and he had just run home skulking,” *seins an mutter*, which means in German, “to his mother.” Well, we don't really know. We do know that the apostle faced some dangers. It may well have been that. At any rate, Paul thought it was blamable and culpable, because later he said some sharp words concerning John Mark to Mark's cousin Barnabas. Well, John Mark left him and now we read in verse 14, that they came to Antioch in Pisidia, “And went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down.”

Now, in the synagogue, the service was something like this. The people gathered on the Sabbath day; the elders of the synagogue, the chief rulers, were individuals who had control of the affairs of the synagogue. They regulated all of the affairs of the synagogue. They were responsible for the buildings. They were responsible for the conduct of the meetings and for other things that had to do with the administration of the synagogue. They were not, however, necessarily teachers of the Word. Those who were teachers of the Word were individuals who have what we would call in Christian language, men with spiritual gifts; men with spiritual gifts of utterance. And in the services they went something like this; they would begin with certain prayers that were recited and then they would have the reading of the Law, a passage from the Old Testament Law of Moses, then a passage from the prophets would be read. And then, if there was someone present who was gifted in expounding Scripture then he would have an opportunity at that point to expound the Scripture. You may remember, the Lord Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth, after the reading of the Law and the prophets, there he having read the Scripture, having closed the book, sat down and began to teach

them because he obviously had come to be recognized as a person who had something worthwhile to say.

Now, in Palestine they sat down to teach, but in the Hellenistic synagogues, they stood up in order to teach; so, this is a Hellenistic synagogue, in case you are wondering what kind of synagogue this is. So we read, and notice the words because it's reflective of the custom verse 15, that, “After the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, ‘Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.’”

Now, I think, this is very interesting because, you see, this very practice of having freedom of ministry is one of the things that characterized the early church. The elders in the early church were men who exercised the oversight in the assembly. Some of them, also, had the gift of the ministry of the Word of God but not all. Paul said, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the Word and doctrine,” which shows us that the elder is not the pastor of the church, as sometimes claimed in certain parts of Christendom. But elders were individuals who exercised oversight, some of them may have a spiritual gift but then others may not have but, nevertheless, be apt to teach; they had to be able to instruct someone in the great facts of the faith. Ministry was by gifted men and so there was a freedom for different individuals to minister the Word of God.

Now, in the Christian church, that carried over into the early churches, and so the elders were those who had responsibility of shepherding the flock; but ministry was by gifted men. And so the early church met in an open meeting, similar I believe to the meeting we have here Sunday night, and the men, if they had spiritual gifts, were able to stand and minister those gifts. In fact, in the earliest days, there were prophets who would stand up in the midst of the congregation and give prefaces. That's why the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians not to quench the manifestation of the Spirit, in the context of prophecy. “Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.” So the principle of an open meeting, the principle of freedom, the principle of ministry by gifted men, was characteristic of the synagogue carried over into the Christian church. Just like the principle of elders, for the elders

in the New Testament, no indication is given in the New Testament of the beginning of the office of elder. It was carried over from the synagogue. So, you see, we are indebted to this principle of free ministry of the Word of God, ministry by gifted men, as the spiritual lead. We are indebted to this principle for this great sermon by the apostle in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia. And I mention that because it's very important, I think, to remember, there are certain principles that are desirable in the Christian church. And one of them is that we should, it seems to me, if at all possible, follow the principles that were manifested in the early church.

Now, let's notice what happens when Paul stands, because he's going to give us now a picture of salvation ministry from his vantage point and he begins, as you might expect, with God's choice of the nation. In the 17th verse of the 13th chapter, we read, as Paul said, “Give audience, men and women, the God of this people of Israel chose our fathers.” Why does he begin with the doctrine of election? Well, so Dr. Johnson of two thousand, nineteen hundred years later, can preach on the subject, some people would think. But, no, that's not it because the reason he begins with it is because this is the way we ought to begin when we are talking about spiritual blessings, because the sovereign act of divine election is the source of all our benefits and all our happinesses as believers in Christ. “According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him, in love,” the apostle will later write to the Ephesians' church. It's the beginning of all of the blessings of God that great act of divine election.

Last night, as I was reading in some of the old Puritans and reading, particularly, in Robert Trail. And he said, “He plainly layeth the sovereign will and pleasure of God as the fixed foundation of the councils of God about man's eternal state.” Mr. Trail went on, also, to say, “Election is always in love and from it or with it, and this love hath no cause but in the heart of the lover. He loves because he loves,” Deuteronomy 7: 7 and 8. It had no beginning, it hath no intermission, and it shall have no ending. That's the kind of love with which God loves the people of God.” And so, Paul begins, “The God of Israel chose our fathers.”

John Gerstner, who has appeared here, and given messages to us from time past, told his theology class some years ago a story about an experience that he had in a Presbyterian church, I think, in the state of Pennsylvania. Incidentally, I walked into the office here and there was a note to me from a man in Birmingham, Alabama. The Chapel has gone back on the radio in Birmingham, Alabama at WYDE and, I think, this broadcast is on Saturday morning but this is a letter addressed to me. “Dear Dr. Johnson, please send me your tape catalog. I also need a list of books or other material you might have on predestination, election, and free will. Most members in my Sunday school class believe in free will and I don’t know how to explain that there is no free will. I’m a member of the seventy-sixth street Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, and I enjoy your program very much. I listen on radio station WYDE.” That’s very interesting because, of course, that’s Presbyterian doctrine, in the Westminster Confession of Faith. And here he is teaching a Sunday school class and no one in the class believes the doctrine of the church. It’s an amazing thing. And, in fact, I have a sneaking suspicion there are people in Believers Chapel that don’t understand our doctrine either but, nevertheless, attend, Sunday after Sunday and perhaps haven’t embraced some of the things that I’ve just mentioned. It’s characteristic of us human beings, isn’t it? Well, I want you to know, I’m going to have a wonderful time wrapping up a couple of free books to this man, that’ll explain this. And I’d love to be sitting in that class, in the seventy-sixth street in Birmingham, when he begins to talk about it.

At any rate, Mr. Gerstner was talking to a particular church on predestination, and he had been asked by the pastor and the elders to come and deliver five lectures on predestination. Evidently, they were having something of the same problem that that church in Birmingham has. And so John Gerstner came and a lady came up to him just before he began and said to him, “Dr. Gerstner, I just want you to know before you begin, I don’t believe the Bible teaches predestination, and I don’t believe it.” And so Dr. Gerstner said he sort of quieted her down and suggested only that she listen to what he had to say during the week. And at the conclusion of the fifth night on the subject, which he had taught rather cogently, as only Dr. Gerstner can, the lady

came up to him, he said, just a little flushed in the face and said, “Dr. Gerstner, I want you to know that I now believe the Bible teaches predestination and that Jesus taught predestination. But I still don’t believe it.” [Laughter] Well, there is an honest woman.

Now, John Calvin has some words about people who say, “You shouldn’t preach on things like this.” I read this again last night. I wanted to put it in my notes, specifically, what he had to say. He said, “For those of you who are so cautious or fearful that they desire to bury predestination in order not to disturb weak souls, with what color will they cloak their arrogance when they accuse God of stupid thoughtlessness, as if he had not foreseen the peril that they feel they have wisely met. Whoever then heaps odium upon the doctrine of predestination openly reproaches God as if he had unadvisedly let slip something hurtful to the church.”

Now, notice that Paul begins, “The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers.” In fact, in the Greek text, this is the precise form, *exelexato*, that is found in Ephesians chapter 1, where he says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, according as he has *exelexato* has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” So the same activity of God that was engaged in the selection of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob is the activity that he has exercised in the choice of the Ephesian believers. And, my dear Christian friends, in you if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. And even if you should think there is not such a thing, but yet you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he has *exelexatoed* you too. And one of these days you will discover it and you will say, “Praise the Lord for *exelexato*. It may come after you leave this present environment, but nevertheless, it will come if you are a believer in Christ.

Now, the second thing he says is that he has exalted this people in the land of Egypt. Now, that’s Paul’s exposition of Exodus chapter 1, where when the children of Israel went down into Egypt, he strengthened them by causing them to swarm in the land and so the few that came down, the seventy-five, suddenly became a couple of million, over a period of a number of hundreds of years. So he exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt.

And then, thirdly, “With an high arm brought He them out of it.” And again, he’s still expounding the book of Exodus, those very phrases are used in Exodus chapter 6, as God tells Moses what he’s going to do when he brings the nation out of the land of Egypt. And in Exodus chapter 6, he gives those marvelous seven-fold promises of deliverance, that he will accomplish through the miracles and through his mighty power in bringing them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea on out into the land.

Now, Paul is in a hurry, you can tell. He’s not going to labor these points very much and so beginning at verse 18, he continues the salvation history, laying stress on Israel’s preparation for what is to come. “And, about the time of forty years, suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot.” That is, he brought them into the land. “And after that He gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king.”

Now, the apostle centers attention upon this, you see, because in this is the tendency that will, ultimately, reach its climax in the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ by the nation when he was crucified in Jerusalem. And so Paul is pointing to those tendencies that are characteristic of the nation to turn against the revelation of God. It might seem strange to say desiring a king is bad but remember as I mentioned earlier, God is the king of Israel, and he as they said, “We want a king like the other nations,” he describes in 1 Samuel chapter 8, how that is an attack upon him personally. He said, “Samuel, go ahead and permit them to do it. They are not rejecting you. They are rejecting me, when they say, ‘We want a king.’” We have a lot of that in the Christian Church. People who are not willing to follow the principles of the Word of God, because a number of people have abandoned them and so, therefore, we want to be like the others. And so, we say in effect the same thing that Israel did when they came to the Lord, “Samuel, give us a king so that we might be like the Gentile nations.”

Now, that has some very, very practical application to a local church. As you know in Believers Chapel, we do not recognize any man who is “the” pastor of the church. I am not the

pastor of the church; I’m just one of the men that the elders asked to minister the Word. We do not have a number of other things that churches have. We do not have a pledge system, for example. We don’t have a membership roll. And the reason the elders do not have these things is because they do not believe that Scripture teaches such things. And there are some other principles, as well, which of course you know of.

Now, if we are going to say, “Let’s have a pastor because the other churches have pastors,” or, “Let’s have a membership roll because the other churches have membership rolls.” Or, “Let’s have a pledge system because others have found that very fruitful in raising money.” There are some freedoms that the church has; I’m not suggesting that the way we do things is the only way to do them. But one principle we need to keep in mind is this: that we should never do anything in our freedom that violates a principle of the Word of God. And to have “the” pastor of the church violates a principle of the Word of God. And when we do, we are not rebelling against the elders; we’re rebelling against the Lord God, as things are taught in the Word of God. So, they wanted a king, but God regarded that as an attack on him.

Last week, I was in Edmonton, as I mentioned. There was a celebration for a man who had been an elder for many years. He was ninety years of age. His birthday celebration. This man is still active. And I was staying with a man who was an elder in one of the churches of the city, and he had a conversation with an elder of a church in another city. And in this church, it was organized something like Believers Chapel, and this church had just recently called a pastor, for the first time in its history, for several generations. And so the man with whom I was staying feels, very strongly, you should follow biblical principles; so he went to his friend, he was a very good friend of his, and he said, “How you can you do what you men have done? You have called a pastor of the church, which has never had such a thing as a pastor of the church. How could you possibly do that?” And the other elder said to him, “It relieves the elders.” Well, there was a whole lot that could be said about that. It relieves the elders. In other words, the elders are abandoning their responsibility for someone else. Now, elders are supposed to shepherd the flock of God. They’re not supposed to give their

responsibilities to others. And our elders shepherd the flock at Believers Chapel. So, in order to relieve them, they have departed from the Word of God, no other explanation was given to my friend. I hope that they will rethink, perhaps, what they have done.

Well, Paul goes on to talk about the fact that when he had removed Saul, God raised up unto them David to be their king, “To whom also He gave their testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will.” David’s divine credentials are cited by Paul here; he’s Israel’s type of the ideal king who is to come, according to the Davidic covenant; for the king who rules and reigns shall be from the line of the tribe of Judah and from the family of David. That’s so beautifully set out in the 89th Psalm, that I’m going to read just a few verses of it to you, because this is the lyrical account of the Davidic covenant. And God through the writer of the hymn says, concerning this king who is to come.

“I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. [This is verse 25, of Psalm 89.] He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, God says with reference to this king and the nation; my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever as the moon. [Now, David, of course, is the type of the one who is to come, the son of David, the greater than David. And then, the psalmist, giving the words of God ends with] and the witness in the sky is faithful.”

In other words, God is going to keep his promises. Well, that’s what Paul is talking about here, when he says in verse 23, “Of this man’s seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus.” In other words, the witness in the sky is faithful. The Lord Jesus, the son of David, did, ultimately, come on the scene and as a result of him, Israel has the savior that God had promised.

Now, remember, after the breakup, after David, there came a breakup, captivity, disaster, but the witness in the sky is faithful and so the Lord Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, comes at the appointed time, carries out his ministry, dies upon the cross, in order through his saving work to become Israel’s magnificent savior and also, since the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants encompass Gentiles as well, Gentiles, too, may come to him for salvation.

Now, it seems striking, doesn’t it, that right at this point he talks about John the Baptist. “When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.” And John said, “I am not he. There comes one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.” I think, perhaps, the reason that he stops and mentions John is because there were some people that perhaps thought that John was the one who was expected. And so Paul is simply saying, “No, John wasn’t the one. John was a voice crying in the wilderness and a mighty forerunner.” But John said, “I must decrease; he must increase.” The one who really is to come is the one who the latchet of whose shoes John is not even worthy to unloose. So you can see, Paul has moved very rapidly through the history of Israel from the divine election to the one who makes Israel’s calling and election sure, by the fulfillment of the promises made to them, the Lord Jesus Christ.

If there is one thing that stands out here to me, it’s this: Paul urgently preaches Christ from the Old Testament. And, in this, he follows some marvelous example. The Lord Jesus, Himself, who on the Emmaus road, with those Emmaus disciples, went back to the Old Testament and spoke through the Old Testament of the things that concerned him. As someone has said, “He was the text, He was the sermon, and He was the preacher. He preached Himself.” And then, Philip, who ran

up alongside the eunuch’s chariot, heard him reading and pondering Isaiah chapter 53, began at the very place where he was and preached unto him Jesus. And, now, the apostle does the same thing and it reminds me of what Mr. Spurgeon said once, when he said, “Wherever I begin preaching, I always head straight across country to Jesus Christ.” [Laughter] That’s what Paul has done. He has taken the history of Israel, he has given it very quickly, touching the high points, but he’s headed straight across country to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, if you’ll notice, he concludes his sermon with an appeal, which we will talk about next week in verse 38 and verse 39, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”

Don’t you know that that audience was so silent you could have heard a pin drop when the apostle, after giving that magnificent appeal, warns them that they might be the despisers who wonder and perish, in the light of the great work that God has done in the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Last night, late, I guess it was about twelve o’clock. Well, it wasn’t so late for me because I don’t usually go to bed until about two. I was reading a book, it’s a new book, it’s on the Supremacy of Jesus Christ. And in this book, Stephen Neill, who is a Bishop at Oxford, I’m not sure if Stephen Neill is still living but he may be still living because it’s a recent book and he was living, at least, recently. In this book, this man, Bishop Neill, has had a wide experience and in it he has some words to say about Adolph Hitler that were interesting, because I grew up in the days in which Hitler had come to power and I can still remember on the radio, hearing Adolph Hitler give his political speeches. And, you know, in those days, I didn’t understand any German, but it was the kind of speaking that gripped you. We used to see these old newsreels and we’d see pictures of Hitler and see him preaching and your eyes would be riveted to him.

And Bishop Neill, as he was talking about this, he said, “If every direct record of Adolph Hitler had been destroyed, it would still be possible to draw a convincing picture of him, by working backwards from what the Nazi movement became, to its origins in a person. Circumstances were favorable. There was the gross inflation of 1923, which was the German weapon against French aggression. That inflation destroyed the savings and hopes of the middle class. A myth began to circulate in German that Germany had not really lost the war, on the field of combat, they had lost the war because of treachery at home. “And that had kindled a great deal of resentment and bitterness and then the mass unemployment of those early years of the twenties made a perfect situation for one man to arise and do something with a people. It’s still a strange thing that so gifted and cultured a people as the Germans fell for Adolph Hitler and the things that he was saying. But if you can think about the background in the light of that, perhaps, you can at least understand. This man had a genius for turning dreams into realities.”

Well, Mr. Neill goes on to say, “I spent a most interesting evening of my life on the banks of the Rhine in nineteen forty-nine. There was with me a Dutchman and two Germans. And one of the Germans had risen high in the diplomatic service of his country. And he said the diplomat began to reminisce. And he said, “You know, I knew Mussolini well and Mussolini was a much better man than Hitler. And I knew Hitler, also.” He said, “Our great mistake was in underestimating him.” He said, “You know, you could lead me by blindfold, I would tell you without error in which one the Fuhrer was standing. That man had such an electric power that you felt it when you went into the room with him.” He said, “If you have to deal with a man like that, there are only three choices before you.” And the German diplomat said, “First choice is to retire from politics and to go to your estates and live there. The second choice is to sell yourself to him, body and soul. And your third choice is to bump him off.” And then, Bishop Neill, he’s an evangelical man, he said, “If you’re confronted with Jesus Christ, there are only two choices. There are no estates to which you can retire from the claims of Christ. You either must yield to him or you must as the nation did, reject him.”

And so I put the question to you today? The Lord Jesus Christ has come as God’s promised deliverer, the seed of David, from the tribe of Judah, he has offered the atoning sacrifice on the cross. There are only two alternatives for us. There are no estates to which you can retire and escape him. It is either submit or reject.

May God, in his wonderful grace, so move in your heart that you submit; submit out of love in response to the wooing of God the Holy Spirit, as he presents the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are here today and you have never believed in him, come to Christ! Believe in him! Trust in him! Sell yourself to him, truly. Become his servant and serve him in the joy of a perfect salvation. May God in his grace move you to that decision.

Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous words spoken by the Apostle Paul, so relevant to us today, so relevant to Believers Chapel, so relevant to me. O God, may I truly serve Him acceptably. And if there are some here, Lord, who have never come to Christ, may they at this moment recognize that He has offered the atoning sacrifice. He has shed the blood that saves. And may they respond to the gracious invitation. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved. At this very moment, Lord, work in the hearts of any who are here without Christ. May they say to Thee, I thank Thee, Father, for the gift of Christ. I acknowledge my lost condition. And I receive as a free gift, which Thou hast offered, the forgiveness of sins, through Him. For those of us, Lord, who know Him, help us to recognize our priorities and serve Him wholeheartedly.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.