



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 19:21-40

“Christianity and the Special Interests”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading this morning is found in Acts chapter 19, and we are reading verse 21 through verse 40, which is a continuation of Luke’s description of the ministry of the Apostle Paul in the city of Ephesus. Acts chapter 19, in verse 21.

“After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’ So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen, whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, ‘Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands. So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom of all Asia and the world worshippeth.’ And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out,

saying, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians.’ And the whole city was filled with confusion and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some, therefore cried, one thing, and some another: For the assembly was confused.”

Incidentally, the word “assembly” rendered here as assembly and then in verse also as assembly is the common New Testament word for church, and one senses that Luke is writing something here with tongue-in-cheek. But when you think of the church in the twentieth century, there may a double tongue-in-cheek thinking about it, because this is descriptive of many of our local churches.

“Some, therefore, cried one thing, and some another, for the assembly was confused. And the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. [Do you know why you are here this morning?] And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians.’ And when the town clerk had appeased the people he said, ‘Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?’ Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.”

Now, that's an interesting clause, and I'd like for you to pay a special attention to it. The last one of verse 37, because it is a clue to the kind of ministry that the apostle engaged in when he was in Ephesus.

“Nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore, if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: Let them implead or accuse one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse or tumult. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.”

May God bless this reading of his word.

It might seem strange to you, why Luke included this incident in the description of the ministry of the early church. Or, to put it from the divine standpoint, the ministry of the Lord God in the Spirit to the generation of the apostles. Obviously, some things are more important for the divine author than they might seem to us as we read it. I hope that when we finish today, we will at least understand why Luke considered this incident rather important in the treatise that he has written for us.

Now, let's bow together for a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege that is ours. We thank Thee for the word of God, we thank Thee for these accounts that the historian of the early church, Luke, has given us because we sense as we read them some of the reasons why Christianity took hold and spread in the Roman Empire. We know that, ultimately, all of the fruit that comes from the preaching of the word of God is traceable to the Holy Spirit, who uses His own word through the instruments of divine purpose. But we give Thee thanks for the things that we learn, as we reflect upon the way in which the Spirit did use

the word then. We thank Thee for the faithfulness of men of God, who motivated by the Holy Spirit and enabled by Him boldly preached the Lord Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. We ask, Lord, that in the twentieth century we may learn also from them and may preach with the same boldness and the same truthfulness the things that Thou hast given to us as believers to proclaim. We give Thee thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank Thee for eternal life through Him and only through Him. Thou hast been good to us, Lord, and we give Thee thanks today. We thank Thee for this beautiful day about us. We pray that our lives today may be pleasing to Thee. We give Thee thanks for the whole church of Jesus Christ and pray, Lord, that wherever that body exists today, over the face of this globe, there may be a conscious realization of the presence of God in our lives. Help us to be faithful and give fruit.

We thank Thee for this local church, for its leadership, for its elders and for its deacons and for its members and friends and the visitors today. And, Lord, we ask Thy blessing upon each of them. We bring before Thee those whose names are listed in our calendar of concern, with their trials and the problems and their needs. And, O God, we pray that Thou wilt glorify Thy name in the answer to our prayers. We pray for our country, for the President, for our government. Enable us, Lord, to stand for that which is right. And now, we pray that in this meeting as we sing, as we reflect upon divine things, may the Lord Jesus be honored and glorified.

For we pray in His name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today in the exposition of the Acts of the Holy Spirit is “Christianity and the Special Interests.” The passage that we have just read in our Scripture reading is a strange and intriguing one because it almost entirely concerns an ancient public uproar at Ephesus. And so today’s message will be a riot but a literal one.

[Laughter] In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 in verse 26, the apostle mentions among the perils that he faced as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, perils in the city. And he may

have been thinking of just such an event as this when he wrote those phrases. And in chapter 15 of the first letter to the Corinthians, he mentions the fact that he had been opposed by wild beasts at Ephesus. And, speaking figuratively that, too, is what we find in Acts chapter 19, wild beasts at Ephesus in the form of Demetrius and others who were stirred up by him over the fact that Christianity was causing a reduction in their income.

It seems odd, as I mentioned in the Scripture reading, that Luke would devote so much space in his account of the history of the early church in the first century to this event and so little to the actual preaching that the apostle was engaging in. Now, later on, in the next chapter, Paul will go back and he will go over the ministry that he had among the Ephesians as he speaks to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. But in chapter 19, only general statements are made about his preaching. He preached the kingdom of God, and he preached the Name of the Lord but no detail is given. And, yet, Luke devotes a great deal of time to this riot that occurred in the city of Ephesus.

One of the reasons for this, I think, I suggest to you at least, is that Luke has as one of his primary purposes in the construction of the Book of Acts, the tracing of the history of the Christian church and the message of the Gospel, from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the outermost parts of the earth. And since the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter concludes with Paul reaching Rome, the head of the Empire, and largely the population to the West, one can see that one of the aims that Luke had was simply the tracing of the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Well, it so happened that what happened in Ephesus, here, is the occasion of the departure of the Apostle Paul from this settled ministry that he was engaging in in the city of Ephesus. And, so far as we know, he stayed here longer than he stayed at any other place. He may have stayed a lengthier period of time, but the uproar in Ephesus is the occasion for the apostle's leaving. And so Luke evidently sees in this divine purpose. In other words, it's God's purpose for him to go on to Rome, ultimately, and preach Christ there. And the uproar is the occasion for the accomplishment of the plan of God.

We do note, in verse 21, “After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” And then in chapter 23, verse 11, Paul will have a vision in the midst of further ministry, and the Lord will say to him, “Paul, you have ministered to me and given testimony to me in the city of Jerusalem. You shall also do this in Rome.” So I suggest to you then that this is important from Luke’s standpoint because it’s the occasion for the further accomplishment of the divine purpose that Paul also preach in Rome.

Now, you might have thought if you had been talking to the apostle that he might have been a little surprised by the way in which God worked in his life and forced him out of Ephesus. And, I think, that that’s a fair guess, a speculation. Paul would have been a bit surprised, too. He was human, just as we are, and often the guidance of God is a bit strange. We do not understand sometimes the reasons for the ways in which God deals with us.

There is a story about a man who was shipwrecked and, finally, he managed to reach a small island, found out as he went over the island that nobody was there, and then decided that it was obvious he was going to be there for a lengthy period of time. So he built himself a little hut and he put inside the hut everything that he had managed to save from the shipwreck. And then one morning, he came over the top of the hill, having sought for days to rouse some interest in himself, but getting nothing, seeing no boats coming by or anything like that, as he came over the top of the hill he was astonished and terrified and upset, to see his little hut in flames. And it wasn’t long after that that a boat arrived at the island, and the man who came said, “We saw your signal and so we decided to come and see if you need help.” Well, there are, as we look at our lives, unusual things that happen to all of us, and we never realize the steps that transpire in our life frequently until afterwards.

There are some lessons other than this that we learn from this chapter. For example, we notice the method of the victories of the apostle and of our Lord is through the preaching of the word. That's evident from the things that Demetrius says. He says that “This Paul has persuaded and turned away much people.” And in the midst of it, he said that the message that there be “no gods, which are made with hands.”

We also learn the nature of the opposition; vested interests, vested interests also often, in our particular day, are opposed to the truths of Christianity because Christianity often cuts across the materialistic aims of our society. For example, it's not surprising that gambling interests should be upset over Christianity because Christianity in its purest form, obviously, leads to the fact that there will be very few people who will be engaged in gambling. The tobacco industry is also one of the natural opponents of Christianity because the general practice of Christianity and the recognition that the body is something given us by God, which we are to preserve from the obvious evils, well, it seems quite clear that the tobacco industry is not going to be Evangelical in its general approach to things. And if you will look at the other types of things that characterize our society, drugs and so on, you will see that Christianity represents a threat to many of the vested interests that form part of our society.

So one learns then, the nature of the opposition. You notice often that these vested interests call in religious things, occasionally. And Demetrius stood up and he reminded his fellow members of his guild that by the craft of making these little silver shrines they had their money; but, also, he said this is a religious matter. “Not only is this our craft in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess of Diana,” why it's going to be despised, and the magnificence of it shall be destroyed, and all Asia and the world worships Diana. And, after all, you wouldn't want anything like this preaching of Paul to destroy the religion of Diana, would you? You can see what really is of interest to Demetrius. But when you can call in a religious aim for support of a particular thing, well, that seems very good to a lot of people.

I think, one of the lessons that we learn from this is the peril of patronage. Patronage often leads to the paralysis of the church. And at the end of this chapter, we find the town clerk in Ephesus speaking up for the apostle and for the doctrine that he is proclaiming. Now, there are some people who would say, “That’s good, if we can get the world to support Christianity then we have really made some real progress in the preaching of the Gospel,” little realizing that the Scriptures teach that man is naturally rebellious against God. And if man is not fighting the church, the church is usually not doing anything worthwhile because when the church is at peace with the world, well, the Scriptures make very plain, the church has become an enemy of the Lord God.

So there are some interesting lessons that appear in this incident. You can tell as you read through these verses that I’ve read through in the Scripture reading that everything gathers around three men. One man is Demetrius the silversmith. The second man is Alexander the Jewish man who is put forward by the Jewish interests in the city of Ephesus in order to plead their case and to be sure that the people make no mistake about who the real enemy is; it’s Paul and his followers and not the Jewish people. Because, after all, Paul and his friends were largely Jewish people and the Ephesians might think it’s really the Jewish people as a whole that they are to fight. And then the anti-Semitism, we’ll talk about that later in just a moment. The anti-Semitism which is characteristic of human nature because of one whose great historic fact in the past might lead the people of Ephesus to persecute Jews in general and not these Jewish Christians. And, finally, the town clerk, who stands up, says a few good words about Paul and calms the people in Ephesus.

Now, Luke begins by mentioning the fact that Paul has formed a deep and far-reaching purpose, encouraged by God, to go and see Rome. “I must also see Rome.” Now, we must not think that the apostle is talking like a tourist, who would say, “Some day I must see Moscow.” I hope I’m in Moscow someday. That’s one of my deep desires. I’d like to be able to walk by the Kremlin. And then, I want to go to China, too.

Now, I don't have any desire to go south, but I really would like to go to China. And I really would like to go to Moscow. And I might say, “I must see Moscow.” Or “I must see Shanghai.” I was going to Shanghai as a missionary when I was in theological seminary, right at the end of my seminary career. That's where I was headed to teach in the China Bible Seminary in the city of Shanghai. And so I've always wanted to go to china. So “I must see Shanghai.” But, when Paul says, “I must see Rome,” he's really thinking about something different. He's thinking in the same way that the Lord spoke when he said, “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring.” And so the “must” or the necessity of our Lord and the necessity of Paul is the necessity of the preaching of the gospel.

Now, Paul is in Ephesus, a great city, one of the important cities of his day, perhaps, the greatest city of Asia Minor. It was the city of the worship of Artemis, not the Diana of Roman mythology, but the Artemis of Asian mythology. She was not the huntress, chaste, and pure, of Roman mythology; but she was the goddess of fruit and is largely pictured as a many-breasted woman. And so the Diana of the Ephesians is not the Diana that you may have studied when you studied Roman mythology. This is the simile of ancient mythology.

The temple, a magnificent temple, we've spoken about that previously so I won't repeat that. The theatre not far from the temple was a theater large enough to hold, some have suggested as many as forty-six thousand people and then others only twenty-five thousand, but you can see it was a very large place. Those of you that have been to Ephesus have stood no doubt in the theatre and have noticed that it was a vast structure and could have held just that many people. There were many crowds in Ephesus. Some of the greatest of the ruins of the ancient world are found in the city of Ephesus. So it was a city to which one would naturally come in the proclamation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so as the Gospel came there the natural result was that those who had buying those little shrines, which were little silver replicas of the temple of Diana and in them was a very small image of the goddess Diana. When Paul came and began to preach that those things that those things that you make with your hands are not really gods, well, business began to fall off for Demetrius and the guild of silver workers. We know, incidentally, from archaeology that they also made them out of clay as well.

But the silver smiths are particularly upset. Their business is declining. There are economic problems. And so Demetrius decides there's time to do something about it. So he gathers together his men, those who work for him. And he's a very intelligent man because he's organized all of these people. And so he thinks to himself, “Now, we have an economic problem but we can tie this in to religion. And we'll tie it in to religion and we will say that what Paul is doing is not simply attacking our craft, but he's attacking the religion of our people. And Diana is worshipped all over Asia, and so this man is really anti-our religion.” He gathers them together and he says, “By this craft we have our wealth.” So the noise of the hammers of the silversmiths has been lost, and the songs of praise of those who have turned to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and are now praying in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Moreover, he says, “Paul is saying there be no gods which are made with hands, so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised.” Self interest masquerading in the garb of piety. Piety for greenbacks, more than piety for God is really on the heart of Demetrius, it would seem.

I'm reminded of an incident that occurred in the ministry of our Lord. It's described in Matthew chapter 8, among other places. And there when the Lord came into the country of the Gergesenes, two men met him who were possessed with demons. They came out of the tombs. They were exceeding fierce. No man could pass by that way. But when they came in the presence of the Lord Jesus, they said, “What have we to

do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” And a long way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding and so the demons recognizing the inevitable said to him, “If you’re going to cast us out, then let us go away into the heard of swine.” And so the Lord Jesus said to them, “Go.” And when they were come out of the two men, they went into the herd of swine and the whole herd of swine “ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.”

That was an unusual event. And so when the report came into the town, this is the way it came, “And they that kept them,” that is the shepherds of this particular flock, “Went their ways into the city,” and they told everything. And then Matthew adds these words, “And what was befallen to the possessed of the demons.” In other words, the important thing for those who told this incident was that the herd of swine is lost. Oh, and incidentally, two fellows were delivered of demons. In other words, the spiritual side of the thing is the really unimportant thing. The fact that all of those hogs and pigs ran down into the water and perished; that’s the important thing. And when they heard these things, these silversmiths “were full of wrath, and they cried out saying, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians.’ And the whole city was filled with confusion.” And they caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, who happened to be walking up and down the streets of Ephesus. And some people recognized they belonged to Paul and his company of men. So they took them and they rushed them down the street into the place of the theatre. And when Paul heard of this uproar, he wanted to go and do something about it. But the people who were near him realized that it might be dangerous for him. And even though Paul wanted to do it, they wouldn’t let him do it.

Someone has said, “The worst thing about good people is that they are often such cowards.” I’m not sure whether Paul should have gone in or not. But it is true that when things become a bit perilous, then we yield to such things as common opinion, convention, custom, precedent. All of these type of things, which are really excuses that keep us from trusting in the name of the Lord God and in the midst of our trials. All of

these things are just scarecrows. We know how often we do this. We think, why, how is it possible for us to make a living in our business if we don't do the things that other people do? Or how is it possible for us to have a normal school life if we do not do the things that our fellow schoolmates do? Not realizing that it's the individual who has the courage to follow the Lord, who is, ultimately, the one who is the most fruitful and useful in his life. So at any rate, they wouldn't let Paul go in and Luke then describes the assembly. And, surely, there must be some touch of Luken humor when he says, “Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the whole church was confused and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.”

I wonder sometimes if that's not a beautiful description of what is true of our church life. Do we really realize why we come together? Do we really realize why we stand for the things of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? I love that old story, you've heard it before but I'll repeat it again in case there's someone who hasn't, about the fellow who was a member of the church, and he was asked by a friend, “What do you believe?” He said, “I believe what my church believes.” And he said, “Well, what does your church believe?” And he said, “Well, the church believes what I believe.” And, finally, exasperated, the fellow said, “Well, what do you and your church believe?” He said, “The same thing.” [Laughter] So that's very much the way cowardly Christians act when they are faced with the world. We somehow or another feel that we ought to be afraid of them. We shouldn't be afraid of them. We have the Lord God on our side and when we are faithful to the word of God you can be sure that God is going to work in such a way that his truth is going to be honored and we are going to be protected.

Well, there was evidently a Jewish man by the name of Alexander there who became a bit disturbed over the fact that all of this uproar was taking place in the city of Ephesus and, after all, he was a Jewish man and these fellows were Jewish people. And while he was not a Christian man, he recognized that the Ephesians here are going to link him up with them because Paul and his company are Jewish people, and he was afraid

that this uproar and this opposition that was directed toward Paul and his companions might include them as well. And so “They drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people. But when the people knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians.’” So for two hours that must have been a memorable occasion, great enlightenment. “Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” And over and over again it went on. And one can understand why someone has said, “One lie multiplied by ten thousand voices never becomes truth.”

And so, incidentally, in connection with this, it’s rather interesting, I think, that Alexander realizes that this might turn to persecution of the Jews, might turn to some anti-Semitic act. Have you ever wondered why anti-Semitism exists? Well, I’ve often thought about that. I don’t think that I have the ultimate answer to why it exists. I do know that some people have written large tomes in connection with it.

There was a man by the name of Hillberg, not long ago, wrote a large seven hundred page treatment of anti-Semitism. He was a Jewish man and a professor in the United States and one of his aims in writing the book was to show that anti-Semitism is really traced to Constantine’s decision-making Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire. And that out of that arose ideas that, ultimately, led to the kind of anti-Semitism that is reflected in the Holocaust in the World War II. But, actually, the anti-Semitism existed before the time of the Lord Jesus Christ and before the time of the Christian church, as we know this. In fact, some of those who exercised anti-Semitism were also Semites themselves, as you well know.

Anti-Semitism is something, I think, that goes all the way back to the choice of Abraham and the confirmation of that choice in Isaac and Jacob. What anti-Semitism is, ultimately, is the rebellion of the natural man against the sovereign grace of a choosing or electing God. That’s what it really comes down to, in my opinion. And what we find, of

course, are very poor imitations of that, and very poor realizations of this but, ultimately, it's an objection to the way in which God has arranged human matters and in electing Abraham and confirming that with Isaac and Jacob, and in the development and plan of God, we find the rebellion of man expressed in the most direct and vicious way. And the Holocaust was really the outgrowth, ultimately, of that same objection and rebellion against what the Lord God has done.

Well, I can understand how this happened. This is certainly true to the events of human nature. But, now, after Alexander is squelched by two hours of “Great is Diana of the Ephesians,” then the town clerk, evidently, hearing about what has happened and making his way down to the theatre, comes in and in a candid judicious speech causes quietness to come. Now, the town clerk was the secretary. He was the chief magistrate of this free society. He drafted the decrees of the city of Ephesus. He controlled the money, he controlled the assembly, under the proconsuls, which were Roman. And so the town clerk comes and he says, “What man is there among you that knoweth not how the city of Ephesians is the worshipper of the great goddess Diana.” Now, if we were looking at this today, we would say, “What man knows that this.” But that shows the difference between the things that were important then and the things that are important now. He soothed their vanity with appeal to fame and legend and it illustrates for us, I think, the important fact that what really is lasting is the truth of God. No one knows today, except those who attend a Christian church, that Ephesus, ancient Ephesus, was the city where Artemis, the Asian goddess, the Asian goddess known as the many-breasted goddess of fructifying powers was worshipped, but people know about Jesus Christ and people know about Christianity.

He goes on to say in verse 38 and verse 39, if you want to make complaints, the proper way to make complaints is to the courts. And we have laws, we have lawful assemblies, we do not live under lynch law in the city of Ephesus. You work within the

system. And so, finally, he dismisses the assembly and Demetrius has gained nothing but a bit of chagrin by his opposition to the Christianity that Paul was preaching.

Now, in the few moments that remain, I would like to make a few comments concerning some of the lessons that stand out here. And, I think, one of them is this: We have here a striking testimony to the power of the word of God. Notice the 9<sup>th</sup> verse. The apostle was ministering the word in the synagogue, finally, he separated the disciples, and he disputed daily in the school of one Tyrannus. In verse 26, we have Demetrius testifying to the fruitfulness of that ministry, “This Paul has persuaded and turned away much people.” In verse 31, we read, “And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.” He’s become that significant as a person. And in verse 11, “And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul.” And then, further, we have individuals who are copying his ministry, by using the little phrase, “The Name of the Lord.” And so the seven sons of Sceva were seeking to cast out spirits by saying, “We adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preacheth.” It’s obvious that the apostle has in the preaching of the word of God exercised striking power in the city of Ephesus and its environs. What did Paul preach? Well, he preached man’s sin. This is one of the great emphases of his message.

If one reads for example in Romans, chapter 3, and reads verse 10, 11, and 12, it’s clear that the apostle did not regard man as having any ability whatsoever of himself to come to the knowledge of the Lord God. “There is no fear of God before their eyes,” Paul said. There is none that doeth good, no, not one. There is none righteous, no, not one. And, in fact, in other places, the apostle goes on to say not only that all men are sinners, but that there is total inability of ourselves to come to the Lord God. That was not anything new. The apostle learned this from others. He learned it from our Lord who said, “No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me draw him.” And this teaching is found in the Old Testament and throughout the whole of the

Scriptures it is taught, no man can of himself come to the Lord God. He is totally unable to respond.

Now, if you were to say, well, men do respond. Yes, they do, of course, they respond but why do they respond? They respond because it is God who works in them and brings them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul preached the preeminence of the Lord. The very fact that the sons of Sceva want to use the name of Jesus is evidence that Paul preached the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of the whole creation, as he wrote to the Colossians. Goethe said, "Jesus is the saint, the type and model of all men." But no Christian can be content with that.

Reynaud, the Frenchman, said, "He stood in the first rank of the family of the true Sons of God." No Christian can rest content with that. Unless we acknowledge that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, we are not preaching the things that are found in Holy Scripture. When Thomas fell down before the Lord and said, "My Lord, and My God," he was saying precisely what the Scriptures say concerning Jesus Christ and anything less than that is not preaching Christ. We can say a lot of nice things about him. We can even call him Son of God and give that term Son of God different significances, but if we do we are not preaching Christ. Mormons often say that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but when you examine their theology, it is very evident they do not regard Jesus as the Son of God in the sense in which the Christian church has historically understood Jesus to be the Son of God. So it's possible to even use terms that are found in Scripture and give them false senses. Paul presented the preeminence of the Lord Jesus as the eternal Son of God, Very God of Very God, just as much God as the Father is God, for there is One God who subsists in three person; co-equal, co-authoritative, co-essential.

Paul also preached the redemption that is in Christ. He tells us in the next chapter, as he describes his ministry in Ephesus, in the 28<sup>th</sup> verse, speaking to the elders,

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” And so he preached redemption in Christ, amazing love, how can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me. So Paul preached and so he exhorted and so he proclaimed the Lord Jesus Christ. And he preached, also, that this was available for men upon the simple condition, I don’t even like to use the term condition, but I’ll use it because, I think, it’s probably the only way in which we can understand the instrumentality by which we receive the knowledge of the Lord. We’ll use the term condition in that sense, that it’s an instrumental means or cause of faith.

The Anglican Bishop O’Brien, many years ago, said, “They know what is meant by faith in a promise. They who know what is meant by faith in a promise, know what is meant by faith in the Gospel. Those who know what is meant by faith in a remedy, know what is meant by faith in the blood of the redeemer. They who know what is meant by faith in a physician, faith in an advocate, faith in a friend, know what is meant by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Do you know what faith in a promise is? Then you know what faith in the promise of salvation is. Do you know what faith in a remedy is, the kind of medicine that you rely upon? Then you know what is meant by faith in Christ. Do you know what it is to have faith in a physician, who ministers to you, trust him? Yes, I know you do because some of you have the strangest kind of faith. You go into the drug store. What do you do? You take a little slip of paper and it has on it some information, and you hand it to the man who is to fill your prescription and what does he do? He takes that little slip of paper and he walks in the back. Why do they always walk in the back? [Laughter] Have you ever wondered about that? They walk in the back and they fool around a little bit, and then finally they bring it out to you and what do you do? You don’t examine it. You have faith in him. And so you take the medicine, you go home, and you put it in your mouth. That’s faith. Faith in a remedy. Faith in a promise. Faith in a remedy. Faith in a physician. That’s what it is to have faith in Christ.

To hear the message that the Lord Jesus has died for sinners and I am a sinner. And that he offers eternal life to men who give themselves to him in grace. And they receive eternal life, as they believe in him. That’s the simplicity of the Gospel. That’s the message that the apostle was proclaiming. In effect, he was saying, “Trusting Diana won’t help you. Trusting your culture won’t help you. Trusting your education will not help you. Trusting your religious good works, whatever they may be, will not help you. It will not help you to be baptized in water, apart from faith in Christ. It will not help you to be sitting at the Lord’s Table apart from faith in Christ.”

And so all of your good works, all of your culture, all of your education, all of those things are worthless. The only instrumentality of salvation is the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who by his death on Calvary’s Cross, and the merits of that death, has made it possible for men to possess the assurance of everlasting life. That’s what Paul preached. So he preached the sin of man, he preached the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of sinners. He preached the redemption that is in Christ and he preached that that redemption is available through faith, because it’s only through faith that we may be delivered from a salvation by works.

Now, this is also a singular illustration of the method of Paul’s ministry, too, because as I mentioned in the Scripture reading in verse 37 of this 19<sup>th</sup> chapter, the town clerk said, “For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.” Isn’t that striking? You might have thought that Paul would have been a blasphemer of the goddess Diana. But instead of coming with a negative approach, the apostle, evidently, came with a positive one. He didn’t say, “Tomorrow we will denounce Artemis, and day after day denounced Artemis as his message. He introduced them to the positive side of the Christian faith, which was not the shrine of Diana, which those people carried as amulets on their arms or hanging about their necks. But he introduced them to the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation in him, which leads to the presence of God, himself, within the heart of men. And so as

Paul says elsewhere, “We are, ourselves, temples of the Holy Spirit.” And when an individual is a shrine of the true deity, he doesn’t need any shrines of Artemis hanging around his neck or on his arms. The apostle majored on the positive and he minored on the negative. He, to use the famous expression of Thomas Chalmers, “He knew that in Christ there was the expulsive power of a new affection.” And to my mind, that is really what we Christians need. We need the sense of the possession of the reality in Christ, and we also need the full experience of the joy that comes from realizing that we, ourselves, are shrines of the eternal God.

Why is it that Christianity must seem so somber and lugubrious to so many people? I’ve heard stories of individuals who told other individuals things like, “My son has decided that he’s going to go into the ministry.” And a friend will say, “Into the ministry? Why, he seemed such a happy fellow?” [Laughter] Why are Bibles bound in black? I have one in black, too. It’s perfectly all right for a Bible to be bound in blue. Blue is a heavenly color. Red. I don’t know whether it’s proper for yellow, but, nevertheless, why should we think of Christianity as something that is somber and sad?

Well, I’ll tell you another thing, when you have the reality within, there are transformations that take place in the Christian life that make an entirely different kind of person out of an individual, when Christ comes.

And, one final thing: notice the peril of patronage. Here the town clerk speaks a word for the Christians in Ephesus. I’m not sure that was good. It may have been bad. Less than forty years after this, in Ephesus, a Christian church has a word from the Lord Jesus, it’s this, “I have against you, you’ve left your first love.” And, as I’ve mentioned several times, if you go to Ephesus today, you see ruins, you see marsh, you don’t see any Christians, unless they are tourists wandering up and down the streets. There’s a little village nearby, a Mohammedan village, so far as I know there’s not a single Christian there; a perished city, a perished church.

Campbell Morgan once wrote this, “The church persecuted has always been the church pure; and, therefore, the church powerful. The church patronized has always been the church in peril, and very often, the church paralyzed.” May God deliver us from that kind of destiny. May God help us to realize that the reality of the salvation in Christ truly experienced leads to joy, fruitfulness and to a ministry that will be a saving ministry. May God help us in Believers Chapel to learn these important lessons. May the expulsive power of a new affection characterize believers who attend the chapel.

May we stand for the Benediction.

If you are here today, and you have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, there is no possible way in which you can be a shrine of the Lord Jesus Christ until you trust in him. But we preach Christ, and him crucified, and you may at this very moment come to him, receive as a free gift eternal salvation, if God has brought home to you your peril, you're in danger of eternal hell-fire. May the Holy Spirit work to bring you to him, whom to know is life eternal. The blood has been shed for sinners. Come and believe and receive life.

Let's bow for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these ancient accounts that are so appropriate for us. Delivers us, Lord, from the vested interests that so often cloud the message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May we be true shrines, true temples, of the presence of the Holy Spirit, in the society of which we are a part. O God, enable us to be effective witnesses of Him, whom to know is life eternal.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

“Christianity and the Special Interests” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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