



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 12:20-26

“The Coming of the Greeks: A Dispensational Signal”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well let's turn to John chapter 12, and verse 20 through verse 26 for our Scripture reading today. John 12, verse 20 through verse 26. And just by way of reminder and review we have just had the Johannine account of the triumphal entry of our Lord. And shortly after, the passage we read, John will tell us in general the response that our Lord obtained in his ministry to the Jews. In between is this rather unusual and significant event of the Greeks who want to see our Lord. Verse 20,

“And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast, (by the way, when the Bible says “Greeks” it does not always mean they were citizens of Greece or of some protectorate of Greece, for example. The term “Greek” is a term that often means simply a Gentile. Now it [is] true that there were Greeks in the land in Decapolis, for example, one of the cities of the land, there were a number of Greeks and there were Greeks about. And it's possible that these were truly Greeks but it is likely that they were simply Gentiles and this is the term for them. You remember Paul says that in Christ there's neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, and by that he means when he says “Greek”, Gentile. These, evidently were what were called in those days God-fearers. They appreciated Judaism, they appreciated its monotheism, they appreciated the purity of its teaching but they themselves were not convinced enough to become proselytes by circumcision.

So these are, evidently, the ones referred to when there were certain Greeks that came up to worship at the feast.) The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. And Jesus answered them, (notice that he doesn't really answer them at all, but he does give a little message, very significant,) he answered them saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the word of God and for the privilege of gathering again on the Lord's day to open the Scriptures and to hear the voice of God through them. We thank Thee for the Holy Spirit who inspired the word and who also gives illumination and we pray Lord that he may give us illumination. And as we reflect on the ministry of Christ and all of its significances, may he teach us the things that will glorify him and spiritually benefit us. We thank Thee for each one present. We pray Thy blessing upon them and with all of their concerns and aspirations and desires and the things that are particularly important to them. Lord, we pray that Thou ought minister to them. We thank Thee and praise Thee for this land of which we are a part. We pray for our country and for our president and for those who govern us. O God, if it should please Thee may there be in this land spiritual revival and return to the word of God. We pray, Lord, for the whole church of Jesus Christ and wherever that church exists we ask Lord that Thou ought through the word of God strengthen the body today.

Enable us to be pleasing to Thee as representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the sick and for the troubled, for the ill, for the depressed, for the weak and failing, Lord we bring them

before Thee. We pray that Thou ought minister to them and give healing where healing is desired. We thank Thee especially for the fact that Thou hast brought us to this place and Thou hast preserved us to this point in our lives and we know that therefore there is purpose, divine purpose, in the fact that we are still breathing, that we are still alive. O God, enable us to use the time that we have for Thy glory. And especially Lord do we pray for these who are in this auditorium today. Give us Lord the motivation and the ability to arrange our priorities in a way that will be most satisfying to Thee and to us for time and for eternity. Be with us through this service to that end. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] One of the important lessons of the passage that we are looking at this morning is the lesson that is found in that hymn that we just sung. And the idea of putting our Lord first in our lives is really the fundamental lesson concerning which the Lord Jesus speaks. Our topic is “The Coming of the Greeks: A Dispensational Signal.” Very significant is this event, it is the only event that John describes between the triumphal entry and the Last Supper or the last Passover and the first Lord's Supper.

From the standpoint of the spiritual life, the lesson that is taught is the lesson of self-renunciation. That self-renunciation is the way to life and fruitfulness. It is true of the Lord as he himself confesses and it is true also of his disciples. One of the characteristic things of the Old Testament was the priestly ministry of the priest and the high priest. And when priest were inducted into their office there was a little ceremony through which they went. Sacrifices were made and those who were to become part of the priesthood and serve in the office of the priest did what the Hebrew text calls fill their hands. That is, they brought representative gifts to the Lord through the sacrifices of animals. They brought the shoulder of the animal, they brought the fat of the animal. They also gave the bread from bread offerings or the meal offerings and then they took them in to the temple and the waved them before the Lord in a token of presentation of these things to the Lord.

Now the shoulder of the animal and the fat of the animal and the bread were designed to be illustrative of personal consecration and as one thinks about this from the standpoint of the Old Testament, the shoulder, the place of strength, the power of the body, the fat, that part of the animal that was most appreciated, the affections of the heart, the possessions of the offerer, they were put symbolically in the hands of the priests and they were brought to the Lord and they were waved before him in token of the fact that they were giving themselves wholeheartedly to the service of the Lord.

They were acknowledging the fact that everything really belongs to the Lord. And in this sense the Hebrew text speaks of it as the filling of the hands. So they filled their hands and in that sense they were consecrated into the office of priest. They were giving themselves to the Lord. The world has its war cries also. The world's war cries are, “Get as much as you can, enjoy life as much as you can.” Jesus Christ has his war cry too, it is, “Renounce, deny oneself, put me first, follow me.” And furthermore he accompanies it with a sure promise of blessing, “The one who serves me, the Father will honor.” Now we'll see that come out in this particular incident in which our Lord answers we would see Jesus.

There is another thing that I want to stress too and that is that this is something of a dispensational signal. Remember the Lord Jesus had come at the end of a long line of prophets and priests and others who pointed forward to the Messiah and Jesus came as the Messiah. Now in the Old Testament the Lord had spoke to Israel the nation, he had given Israel the nation this marvelous opportunity of being the elect nation. That all designed to be ultimately for the blessing of the world because Israel was given the word of God and the revelation of God, truth concerning God. Not only to bring to themselves but to bring to others as well. Of course, they failed. But they were a nation into whose hands was committed the Kingdom of God. Remember the Lord told a parable in which the point at the end of it was put plainly, “The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof.”

Israel's place in the nation was to be the means of the conversion of nations. But she failed because she tended to turn into herself and forget the Lord God and depart from him and the result was that the program of God ultimately halted. Remember the Lord Jesus himself said he was not sent unto the Gentiles, he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He sent out men in a preaching tour and he said, “Don't go to the Gentiles, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Now the reason for that was that Israel was the divinely selected, elected means by which the world could be reached. That is God's program. Israel is to be reached by the world. Now I've never bowled much, a few times, didn't distinguish myself particularly. I learned what the alley was and I however learned this much about bowling that is very important that you put the bowling ball in one particular spot. And if you can manage to get that ball to come between that opening pin and the next one behind it I think you will knock them all down. But if you put it somewhere else you'll only knock down certain ones of them. To knock them all down that ball generally speaking has to be in that one spot. It's amazing how skillful people can get in putting the ball in the one spot.

Well, if you want to reach the world for the gospel, Israel is the important nation. It's through the conversion of Israel that the world will be reached. Now Paul tells us in Romans 11 that the time is coming when Israel shall be saved and as a result of that the whole world shall be saved. So Israel is the clue. Israel is the important entity. And when Israel reaches her place of salvation then the world shall be saved. Now Israel failed in the first coming of the Lord Jesus and the generation that was there rejected him and as a result of that, well Israel has gone and has gone into divine discipline scattered to the four corners of the earth. And in the meantime through the remnant that was faithful the gospel has gone to the Gentiles and vast numbers of Gentiles have come into the body of Christ. What Paul calls in Romans 11 also the fullness of the Gentiles coming in.

Now the Lord Jesus, of course, being the Son of God knew from the beginning the plans of God. In fact, he was one of the partners in the determination of them. And so sensing now Israel's failure to respond to him, at this precise moment later in this very chapter John will say, “That

though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him. Knowing the way the ministry is going suddenly there come to him the Greeks desiring to see him. And he sees in this an anticipation of what God is doing in his worldwide program. Israel is rejecting him and now the gospel for a time will go out to the Gentiles. That is the other lesson that we'll look at but let's very briefly look at the incident itself. It happened some time between Palm Sunday and the first Lord's Supper and the last Passover. Probably while our Lord was in the temple.

Some Greeks, we know only that they were unsaved Gentiles, they were friendly with Israel, they had come up to worship with them in the feast of the Passover, they were what were called generally God-fearers. But it's obvious that they do not yet have an understanding of the gospel of the Lord Jesus but they are interested. By the Holy Spirit there is a creation now of interest among the Gentiles. And so they have come to the feast and hearing about the Lord Jesus Christ and no doubt seeing him also, they go to Philip. Evidently Philip and Andrew were the accessible apostles. Back in the 6th chapter when we have the feeding of the five thousand it is again Philip and Andrew to whom the crowd comes or they are the ones too who know what's going on in the crowd. So they must have been the accessible, outgoing apostles. And they come to Philip and they say, “Philip, we want to see Jesus.”

Now they could have easily seen him visibly so it's likely that what they meant, “We want to have an interview with him.” And since, of course, they wanted to have an interview with him, they undoubtedly had in mind an interview for purposes of salvation. “So they say to Philip, We would see Jesus, sir. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again the two of them together and they go to the Lord Jesus Christ.” I'd like to suggest to you before we go on that the fact that the Greeks or the Gentiles came to the apostles and said, “We want to see Jesus,” and let's assume that it is for spiritual instruction, that that suggests to us the failure of everything that is Gentile apart from Christ. I would suggest to you that it suggests the failure of intellect. If these were really Greeks they were, of course, the thinkers of the ancient age and it would suggest the failure of intellect but at least it would suggest the failure of the intellect of the Gentiles and finding truth. It would suggest the failure of

culture, the failure of refinement, the failure of beauty, the failure of wisdom. In fact, the failure of man, the failure of Gentile man, to find the answers to the questions of life.

And they come to the Lord Jesus. They come to men, Philip and Andrew, incidentally who have Greek names. I imagine that Philip was a little puzzled over this and that's why he went to Andrew. He said, “Andrew, a strange thing is happening. The Greeks, the Gentiles, want to see Jesus.” Now remember the master said to us, that he doesn't send us to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And in fact he says that he is himself sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But here people are not the lost sheep of the house of Israel and they want to see Jesus. A group of them. Together, puzzled no doubt, they take the matter to our Lord. And they say, “Lord, there are some Greeks here and they want to see you, they want to talk with you.

Now you might think that the Lord would say, “Well, go over and get them a supply of the four spiritual laws and give them to them.” [Laughter] Or you might think that he would say, “Yes, bring them in, I'll have an appointment with them at 9:00, 10:00, 11:00, 12:00, as the case may be.” Well, strictly speaking, there is no conversation at all that takes place. Suddenly the Lord breaks out into, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.”

So his reply reflects a profound impression made upon him by this request from the Greeks. Now if we'll remember that his ministry as he conceived it was a ministry to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and if we remember that being the divine Son and that he understood that this ministry to Israel was Israel might respond and be the means for the reaching of the world for the Abrahamic promises encompassed the world as well as the nation, you can see that our Lord senses that a decisive moment in the ministry is fast approaching. The Gentiles are desirous to hear him, to interview him, to talk about salvation, but the nation to whom he has been sent is largely unresponsive. It's a decisive moment. That's why he replies, “The hour has come, that the Son of man should be glorified.”

Now he's been saying all along, “The hour has not yet come.” Remember in the 2nd chapter of the Gospel of John he said with reference to the things that were asked of him by Mary,

“My hour has not yet come.” The brethren say to him in the 7th chapter, “Come on up to Jerusalem.” He said, “The hour has not yet come.” But now in the request of the Greeks the hour has come. So the desire of the Gentiles signals the change in the program. The kingdom is now going to be given to Gentiles to administer in the next age. So when Jesus said in one of his parables, “The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof,” this is John’s way of saying the same thing. The kingdom is going to be given to Gentiles and there shall be fruit. Or as he said back in chapter 10, in verse 16, “Other sheep I have which are not of this foal, them also I must bring.” But Jesus senses now that the critical moment has come. The Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of Gentile men and stirring up within them a desire to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

May I stop for the moment and make an application? Is there the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart, the desire to know Jesus Christ? Individually is there deep down within some stirring within? I’d like to be sure of the way of salvation, sure of the forgiveness of sins. Well this is on a national scale but it’s the same principle that operates in the heart of an individual when he comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Now let’s notice what follows. He says, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, (or unto you,) Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit”

Now you can see that first of all he illustrates by giving the figure of the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying and then he explains with some teaching concerning the significance of it. To sum it all up it’s simply this: death is the prelude to blessing. Death is the prelude to blessing so far as the nation Israel and the Gentiles are concerned. And death is the prelude to blessing so far as salvation is concerned. And death is the prelude to blessing so far as Christian life is concerned. That principle is the divine principle that is of the greatest significance.

Now of course I don’t claim to know anything about horticulture and what I’m going to give you is something that Neil Sparret can correct in the hour that follows [Laughter] but at least I have tried and what I would like to suggest to you sit hat our Lord’s illustration is very, very significant,

“Except a corn of wheat, (or a grain of wheat,) fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” It’s a beautiful, natural simile. No doubt everyone who heard him would understand what he was talking about because they had those fields of grain in the land, they knew what it was like.

Now, this is a figure of speech that you can understand if you live in any country where they have the cornfields or the grain fields, where all the ears of the wheat are swayed by the motion of the wind as it blows upon them and there the grain fields abide and all the corns of wheat or grains of wheat abide on the stalk. Now of course, if you were to take one of those little grains and take it and wrap it in a mummy case as the Egyptians did, it might remain for hundreds of years, I suppose, alive. Now, I read the garden section of the paper on Saturday morning in *The Dallas Morning News* and yesterday I found something that pertained precisely to this because there is an article that reads, “Old Seed Germinates Abundantly in Tests.” Some scientists have discovered that red pine tree seeds stored for a record fifty years when brought out and put out in the ground germinate just as abundantly as new seeds. Did you read the article? It’s an interesting article. The fellow who performed the experiment said he’d like to live twenty-five more years to try it again twenty-five years from now. But as long as those seeds were preserved in a certain environment at a certain temperature with a certain amount of moisture, they lived. The seeds are living fifty years, may live seventy-five, may live a hundred. And that is the in the background of our Lord’s comment when he says, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and died, abideth alone, but if it die bring it forth much fruit.”

Now let’s imagine this field and it’s filled with grains of wheat. As long as those grains stay on the stalk, they’re alive, but they’re alone. They live and they live for themselves. Alive, but alone. The dew falls, the rains distill, the sun shines, the harvest wave, the hungry need food, but the little grain is alone. But there is another method of existence. Now we’ll take it and throw it on the ground or let it fall on the ground. Now let’s suppose that we have grains that can talk to one another. We have that in the funny papers, cats talk, children talk, children talk like adults, frogs talk.

One doesn't have to read the funny papers long to know that everybody does some talking. Now let's imagine that some grains are talking and one has fallen on the ground and the others stand around and say, “Poor Robert, he just fell on the ground, he'll soon be buried. He's going to a watery grave when the rain comes.”

Yesterday some of the golfing fellows shot balls into the lakes at Augusta and that famous old golfing cliché that we all used to say when I was playing in golf tournaments in which everybody used to say of us, “He knocked it into the lake; the ball has gone to a watery grave.” I commented on it to Martha, I said, “There is that old cliché again, it's gone to a watery grave.” And really, some of the fellas that hit them into the lake looked rather bereaved too. [Laughter] I notice particularly the British golfer, Nick Faldo. He had one little hole, I'm sure if I put it down there I could have put it closer to the green than he did but he just did what golfers do, you know. He drew back and he hit it and he went over like this and you knew it was a hook and he looked up with this woeful look on his face. He had lost a close friend. His ball had gone to a watery grave.

Well anyway, they stand around and they talk, oh it's too bad. He's gone to, well, a watery grave or he's gone to a windy grave or what, pretty soon he'll be on the ground and he'll be dead. We'll have to have a funeral service for him. Well that's another way in which you can abide, of course. But every stalk of wheat stands in a grave. Every beautiful flower that you have is from the grave because the seed had been implanted in the ground as the result of the fact when it has been covered by the dark mold of its burial place then things happen. And those things that happen are rather wonderful things, of course. People may say, well, he committed suicide but the Lord says if you have good courage I'll show thee the path of life. In fact that little grain, two things happen immediately. First of all, a tiny bag of white flower that surrounds the principle of life becomes the food of the principle of life. And so the principle of life feeds on the grain that's in the seed in the corn of wheat.

Now of course you cannot see the principle of life, it's indistinguishable by a microscope but just as a chick lives on the white of the egg, so that little principle of life lives on the contents of that

grave. And finally, of course, the time comes when the capsule is broken and suddenly a little rootlet goes downward and upward shoots a little green shoot as well and now the life is not only the life of one seed but soon it will flower and instead of one seed, as long as it did not die, it was alone and ultimately must die, but now instead it is fruitful and fulfills itself in much fruit. How do you like that Neil Faldo?

Well you see, that principle is what our Lord is talking about. He is saying, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.” Now of course, he’s the corn of wheat but the principle is a principle that he’s expounding and he will explain it further in a moment. It abideth alone. In the Greek text there’s a great deal of emphasis on that alone. It, itself, alone abides, (*heautous monos meno*, itself alone abides,) but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

Now he explains, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” What does he mean by that? Why, you know he means that it is possible for us to be so desirous of life as we want to live it that we actually are unfruitful in our lives. We may desire the kind of existence that we desire, we want the world’s wealth, we want the world’s power, we want the world’s pleasure, we want the world’s glory, we want to live our lives as we wish to live them and that’s right, you may live for a time but you abide alone. The way to fruitfulness is through death. Listen to the Apostle Paul. Speaking to the Ephesian elders he says, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” I don’t count my life dear unto myself. I want to be a corn of wheat that falls into the ground and dies in order to bring forth much fruit.

Later on in the very next chapter in the 13th verse, Paul says, “What mean you to weep and to break mine heart, for I am ready not be bound only but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Now to explain, he says, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep unto life eternal.” In other words, if you want to keep your life you can keep it, but you’ll lose it. And if you’re willing to lose your life, if you are willing to have your set of

priorities such that Jesus Christ is first in your life, then you'll gain it. And furthermore, you will gain it unto life eternal and fruitfulness. This is our Lord's way of life, it's the way of life for the Christian. He that loveth his life shall lose it and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. He uses two different words for life here. One is a word that has to do with soul, really and it suggests all of the interests that we have that we put in opposition to the claims of Christ. The things we want, the things we want to do, all of those things that prevent us from giving Jesus Christ first place in our lives.

There's nothing wrong with being a success in business but some men are so desirous of success in business that Jesus Christ is second. There's nothing wrong with so ministering to your family that they may grow up to be credits to you and to your family that it's possible to be so concerned with our children and their wellbeing that Jesus Christ is second. It's even possible to be a Christian and put Christ second. Our Lord is talking about renunciation. He's talking about self-abnegation. He's talking about hating our life. Now that doesn't mean to have antipathy toward life but it means to hate it so far as the interests of our Lord is concerned. Some men are so concerned about their portfolios and their possessions that Jesus Christ's interests take second or third place. What is really important? What's the important thing in life? If we love our lives we'll lose them. “He that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” Eternal life, that principle of life given by God forever.

Now, he extends the principle further in the final verse and says, “If any man serve me, let him follow me.” Men tell us to follow nature, some tell us to follow duty, some say to follow this principle, or follow that principle. Jesus Christ says simply, “Follow me.” Imagine a man saying that he's the ideal of human conduct. Can you imagine anyone saying that? How can anyone be more conceited than our Lord Jesus Christ in saying, “If any man would serve me, let him follow me.” And further, “If any man serve me, him will my Father honor.” To think, “Everybody should follow me,” and further, “Everyone who follows me shall be honored by the God of heaven.” A man would have to be a fool to say something like that, or else the Son of God. Isn't it striking that the

world never attacks Jesus Christ for making outlandish statements or they raise questions about the truthfulness of the gospels and certain problems they find in the gospels and certain contradictions they find. But there is never a fertile attack on the Lord Jesus Christ in our society as a rule, but here is a man who made the most outlandish statements taken by themselves. But even the world seems to say, “No one else can say anything like that, but Jesus Christ can because he really is truly meek, and lowly in heart.” But how can a man be meek and lowly in heart when he says, “The answer to all life is to follow me,” and further, “The one who follows me will be honored by God.”

So what does life come down to? Following our Lord. Witnessing, no. Praying, no. Teaching, no. Singing, no. Preaching, no. Giving, no. Working, no. Following him. All of these things flow out of following him. Following the church, no. Following him. It's very simple isn't it? Follow him. What kind of path did he take? He fell into the ground and died. That was the path. He fell into the ground and died. In other words, what God the Father wished him to do was his determining principle. And I suggest to you, you are Christians in this audience, that the determining principle of your fruitfulness as a Christian and your ultimate happiness as a Christian will be the extent of which you follow him and follow him in death. Death to your pleasures, death to your ambitions, death to your goals. Those things that are peculiarly yours, in which you put other things before the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now as a magnificent prospect he says, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.” One well-known professor of the New Testament has rather aptly commented. It has been said that follow me is the whole of a Christian's duty as to be where Christ is, is the whole of his reward.” Follow him and you shall be where he is. The knowledge of that life is small, the eye of faith is dim, but tis enough that Christ knows all and I shall be with him.” And I love that last expression, “If any man serve me, him will my Father honor.” I've never known that to fail. The man who serves Christ will be honored by the Father. It's remarkable. They're always honored by the Father. We are told it's not good to be a fanatic. Who told you that? We're told it's not really well balanced to be mad for Christ. Who told you that? Not the apostles, not our

Lord; they were fanatics. They were mad for spiritual things. They all were accused of that. The apostle was called mad more than once. The Lord Jesus was said to have taken leave of his senses. When one follows in the step of our Lord it is inevitable that someone is going to say, “He’s mad, he’s unbalanced.”

What we need in the Christian life is a balanced life so that nobody criticizes you. Some people think that’s good. That’s not good. That’s contrary to the Bible. The prophets, the apostles, the priests who serve the Lord, Moses, all the rest, down through the line of the great men of God have been thought to be mad by the world. In fact, now it’s possible to be thought mad when you really are mad. Don’t misunderstand me. It’s possible to be so unbalanced that you really are unbalanced. But you cannot escape receiving the same criticism that Jesus Christ received because you’re his disciple. If the world hated me, they will hate you. “The servant’s not above his master,” Jesus said. Now if people call you mad it may be an ultimate compliment. In fact, you may then be eligible for being honored by the Father, what could be better?

Well, one can see the cry of the human race in the Greeks’ desire, “We would see Jesus.” Like Job, “Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even unto his thrown.” Stirred by the work of the Holy Spirit in effectual grace, perhaps they are brought now to question the way of salvation. Let’s go seek out Philip and Andrew and see if we can make contact with Jesus of Nazareth. They sense there’s something unusual about him. And the answer is in the principle of self-renunciation. That, by the way, works in three spheres. We don’t have time to develop them. The sphere of justification; no man is justified by what he does, he’s only justified by what Christ has done for him. And in order to truly be saved there must be some form of denial of our own thinking in order to be saved.

In fact, Paul calls the cross an offense to the natural man. Salvation’s not by sacrifice, salvation is in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in the renunciation of any merit on our part. The cross is an offense to morality because it says that works cannot justify. The cross is an offense to philosophy because it’s an appeal to faith. The cross is an offense to culture because it says truth is

revealed to the simple. The cross is an offense to our sense of cast because it says God chooses the poor. The cross is an offense to our will because it calls for the surrender of our wills by the grace of God. The cross is an offense to human pride because it shows us the sin of the human heart in that we crucified him. And the cross is an offense to ourselves because it says you must be born again.

Of course, this principle operates in the realm of sanctification too. When we become Christians we grow not by our efforts. We don't become like Christ through the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit by the things we do. Paul says, “For even Christ pleased not himself.” Isn't it wonderful to know that the Holy Spirit works in every believer to conform us to Christ sovereignly in that he will accomplish his task. Every true believer shall ultimately be like Christ. And of course, in the sphere of Christian service, “If any man serve me, him will my Father honor.”

You know, there was a wonderful Christian man by the name of Thomas Bilney, a well-known British theologian. He was converted through 1 Timothy 1:15. It's an interesting text because it's a text in which the apostle speaks of himself and I'm sure you're acquainted with it, “This is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” He made his confessions to Hugh Latimer and as a result of his confessions to Latimer in which he confessed how he had come to faith in Christ, Latimer was saved too. Now these are men who were very prominent in the church of Rome and in the English Reformation both of them had a rather unhealthy end. They were both put to death. In fact, Latimer was burned at the stake. Who hasn't heard of Ridley and Latimer? Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, gave their testimony to the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and they lost their lives. Do you know what people said about them? They're fanatics. They're mad. They're crazy. And I have no doubt that some of the Christians too were saying, “They carried it a bit too far.” They stood for justification by faith and not by the works of the law. They stood for justification by faith and not through the church. You can read what Bilney said, you can read what Latimer said, it's the same thing that I say in Believers Chapel identically. But they put them to death. Now I'm going to ask you a question, what were the names of the fellows who burned those two men or put them to death? Latimer was

burned, I forget if Bilney was burned or not. It doesn't make much difference. Who did it? You don't know? I don't know. But I remember Ridley and I remember Latimer. In fact, you'll find that many Christians name their children after Ridley and Latimer. I've had students at theological seminary who were named after Latimer and named after Ridley because when it comes to the service of Jesus Christ, “If any man serves me, him will my Father honor.” And that is a principle that God carries out.

And if you put Jesus Christ first and serve him, God will honor you. If you're here this morning and you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, I remind you of the principle of the word of God, that Jesus Christ has offered the sacrifice. The corn of wheat has fallen into the ground and has died. Much fruit has resulted down through the centuries, the saints of God, born again through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of them in turn given their lives in order that more fruit might flow. If you've never believed in Christ, renounce trust in your own good works, flee to him, receive as a gift everlasting life. For you who are Christians, that same principle continues to operate. Renounce those priorities in your life that stand before the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Give him first place. Be a true spiritual fanatic. With the balance of the word of God serve him, put him first. God will honor you.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord, for this magnificent word of exhortation from the Lord Jesus Christ. Enable us to look at our lives. Look at them under the counsel of the Son of God and enable us Lord to truly serve him. In self-renunciation and self-abnegation, as the case may be, that there may be fruit for the glory of his name...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]