



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 22:15–40; Mark 12:32–34

Gospel of Matthew

“Christ’s Answers to Carping Questions”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading is in Matthew chapter 22 verse 15 through 40, and then I want to conclude with three verses from Mark chapter 12. We are in the section of the Gospel of Matthew in which our Lord has reached Jerusalem in his last days and now is carrying on a ministry to the nation primarily and to the sects within it, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Herodians. And we read in verse 15 of Matthew chapter 22:

“Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, ‘Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, nor not?’ (Incidentally the tribute is a kind of poll tax.) But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, ‘Why test ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a denarius. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore

unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.’ When they heard these words, they marveled, and left him, and went their way. The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him. Saying, ‘Master, Moses said, if a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, died, and having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her.’ Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.’ And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine. But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

(Incidentally, that awkward expression, they were gathered together, in the Authorized Version English text is derived from a Greek text, which is ultimately traceable to Psalm 2 and verse 2, the messianic Psalm in which the words “Why do the heathen rage and the Gentiles imagine of vain things? The kings have set themselves and the rulers have taken counsel together against the Lord and against his Messiah, saying, lets break their bands from us,” and that expression, the rulers

have taken counsel together, is the basis of this statement that Matthew makes when he says, they were gathered together, and so it’s evident that Matthew regards the gathering of the Pharisees as a conspiracy against the Messiah, so even in little incidental things like this you can see how the apostle is interpreting these incidents in our Lord’s life. We pick it up at verse 35:

“Then one of them, who was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, ‘Master, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with all Thy heart, and with all Thy soul, and with all Thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shalt love Thy neighbor as Thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’”

One would of course be interested in knowing what the lawyer said in response to our Lord’s answer to his question, and Matthew doesn’t tell us that, so we have to look over to Mark and in chapter 12 verse 32 through 34 we have the response of the lawyer who asked the question. And in verse 32 of Mark chapter 12 we read,

“And the scribe said unto him, ‘Well master thou has said the truth for there is one God and there is no other but he: And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the soul and with all the strength and to love his neighbor as himself is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.’ (And you can see that this lawyer or this scribe does understand a great deal of spiritual truth. He knows that it is more important to love God and love one’s neighbor than it is to bring whole burnt offerings and sacrifices, or to

fulfill outwardly the Levitical ceremonies. And then we read Jesus’ response to him) And when Jesus saw that he answered discretely (or with understanding) he said unto him, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” And no man after that dare ask him any questions.”

Which shows that people do learn some things even from our Lord. Don’t try to entrap him with your questions. Lets bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are again amazed as we read in Holy Scripture the ministry of our Lord Jesus, amazed at the depth of perception of the Word of God which the God-man possessed, of the skill with which he used the Holy Scriptures in his daily life, and of the depth of the doctrinal teaching that is contained within his words. We know, Lord, that these incidents are designed to teach us not only things about him and things about the nation, and the nations, and the things about the plan and program of God for the ages, but also things about ourselves and our needs, and we can see, Lord from these incidents how important it is that we become acquainted with Holy Scripture in order that Thy Word may be our food in all of the experiences of life. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God, the Scriptures have said.

And we perceive Lord, that if we are to have a life that pleases Thee, and if we are to meet the challenges of our daily lives, we must learn how to rely upon the enablement the comfort the consolation the food of Holy Scriptures, of the Holy Scriptures as they are taught us by the Holy Spirit.

Father we ask Thy blessing upon the ministry of this local church and particularly pray for the elders that Thou will give wisdom and guidance, for we do not have the wisdom and we surely do not know the future well enough to guide us one step of the way. We need Thy help. We need Thy blessing. We need Thy direction, and we pray, O God, that Thou give us wisdom and guidance as we think about the future ministry of Believers Chapel.

We pray Thy blessing upon the deacons, giving Thee thanks for the faithful service for the men, and pray that Thou strengthen Them and give them the sense of accomplishment of things that are pleasing to Thee. We know how necessary such men are for the conduct of the ministry in the local church. We are grateful for those whom Thou has given us, we pray Thy blessing upon them.

As we think, Lord, of the other ministries, we again ask Thy blessing upon them, may the Word of God, as it goes forth bring forth fruit. We especially, Lord bring to Thee those who are sick and ill, those who are in the hospital. We commit them to Thee, we pray again that Thou wilt minister to them and bring healing in accordance with Thy perfect will. We pray for those who minister to them; give them wisdom and skill.

We ask Thy blessing Lord upon the whole body of Jesus Christ. We pray Lord that in this very difficult day in which we live, in which there are so many enemies of the truth, we pray that Thou wilt so work through the teaching of the Holy Scripture and the whole body that all who truly name our Lord Jesus Christ as their own Savior may be strengthened and encouraged and built up. We look forward Lord, to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, and rejoice in the promises that are contained in the Word. Give us, Lord, all of the benefits of a vital hope in his soon return, and may, Lord, that hope be productive in the life of each individual here.

And Lord, for those who may be here, who do not know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we pray that through the ministry of Thy Word they may be brought to him to trust in him that leads to everlasting life.

This we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

[Message] It is Tuesday, the so-called day of questions, and the conflict with Judaism continues. Our Lord has just told three parables designed to teach two essential things. First, that there is coming a transformation in the program of God and that the nation of Israel that has been steward of the kingdom of God is going to have that stewardship taken from them, and it is to be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it. We have interpreted that, though there are differences

of opinions concerning this as a reference to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, the great body of which down through the centuries have been Gentiles.

The second lesson that has been taught throughout these parables is that it is absolutely necessary that there be a response by way of application to the great truths of the divine revelation, and of course it is evident as a result of our Lord’s ministry that in Israel, generally speaking, there has not been a response. Our Lord’s exposure of the human heart, of its sin, of its wickedness, of its need of redemption, in each of these events has provoked no response from them.

Now today as we look at the section before us, he contends with the secularists, or the Herodians, together with some disciples of the Pharisees. He contends with the rationalists or the Sadducees, and he also contends with the Pharisees by themselves who may be called, I think, generally speaking, ritualists.

Now these are general terms, and of course, there were good Sadducees no doubt, and many of the Pharisees were very fine and upstanding men. We must not think that every Pharisee in the time of our Lord was a man who deserved the things that are said about the ones that appear before us in the New Testament. We do know of some Pharisees who came to faith in the Lord Jesus, such as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, so we are using the terms Pharisee, Sadducee in the disparaging sense in which the particular ones in view appear in the New Testament.

They all seem to have forgotten this truth that when we have the revelation of God and have been given great privilege and opportunity, we should bring forth, therefore, fruits, need for repentance. So this great truth which the Pharisees the Sadducees the Herodians and others of the religious people had not learned, it’s a truth that comes before us in almost all of these pages.

Now we are inclined to look back at the Jewish people in the time of our Lord and say how bad they were, but as you look around the church of Jesus Christ, you discover that the same sins that mark Israel are the sins that mark us out. They are the sins of making great profession of faith and then not having any vital life signs flowing from our profession, so that the same exhortation

that John the Baptist and our Lord gave them that they should bring forth fruits, need for repentance, are exhortations that we are ourselves should heed.

There are some incidental lessons here that are very striking, and I think if I were a textual preacher or preached textually, these texts could be the subject of lengthy messages. For example, in verse 16 of Matthew chapter 22, we have a beautiful illustration of the veracity of the living word; that is, the personal word of the Lord Jesus. And not only did he speak truly, not only did he not fear the face of any man, but even his enemies said this of him.

Now, of course, we are very grateful when our friends say nice things about us, but when our enemies too say those nice things, the chances are that they are true. And they had come to the Lord Jesus and they said master we know that thou art true. Thou teachest the way of God and truth. You do not care for any man and you do not regard the person of any man. It is impossible to influence you by bribe. You speak truth. It does not make a bit of difference whether you are speaking to a king or a peasant, you speak the truth. It is a remarkable and beautiful example of the way in which the enemies of our Lord pay tribute to the Lord Jesus, thus making their own rejection of him all the more irrational.

Now another thing appears here that I think is important, and that is that we have here an example of the applicability of the Word of God to us even when we do not understand it. We are again inclined to diminish the application of the Word of God to us by the extent of our knowledge of it, and if it is something that we do not know, we say well, we’re not responsible for that because we do not know it; our responsibility is limited to our knowledge. But I think that our Lord’s statement in verse 31 denies that. He said with reference to the Sadducees as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God? In other words, even those passages of Scripture are of which we are ignorant, have their application to us. We cannot limit our responsibility to the things that we know.

Now I could launch out into a discussion of how our Arminian friends like to do that, but I will forbear. Matthew Henry made a great statement. I think it’s a great statement. He said, “We are

responsible not only for the truth of Scripture which we knew and have not applied, but we are responsible for the truths of Scripture which we might have come to know and have not come to know.” So we are responsible as human beings to the whole of the Word of God. That’s why we exhort you. That’s why I pray, myself, constantly, as I’m on my knees to come to the knowledge of all of the Word of God. How great and important that truth is.

And finally I think the thing I want to stress near the end of the message more than anything else is that we have here a wealth of truth touching the entire question of the genuine spiritual life. What is it? Our Lord stresses the depth of human need in his exposition of what is the great commandment. He also expounds the proper expression of life in Christ: love toward God and love toward men, and implied throughout of course, with particular reference to the covenant in verse 32, is the necessity of redemption through the Lord Jesus.

But now let’s look at the conflict, and the first is the conflict with the Pharisees and the Herodians. Perhaps it would be wise for me, in case there are some here who do not understand the distinction between the two, the Pharisees and the Herodians, to make a simple distinction between them.

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jewish people composed primarily of the scribes and lawyers who were students of the Mosaic Law. They were traditionalists in the sense that they studied the Scriptures, and they felt that they were the proper interpreters of them they took the lead in the teaching of the Word of God. They were ritualists, and they were traditionalist because of that. The Herodians were a sect that had certain relationships to the family of Herod. That is, they supported Roman authority in the land of Palestine.

Now you can see that these two sects of the Pharisees the ritualists and the traditionalists, and the Herodians who are supporters of Rome in the land of Palestine, had nothing really in common much more than the fact that they were Jews. They were enemies of one another. But they unite here just as the enemies of one another tend to unite in their common hatred of the Lord Jesus. Remember we are told in the Gospel of Luke that as a result of our Lord and the ministry that he

had that Herod and Pilate, who had been enemies, became friends, so men who are naturally enemies are able to unite over their common hatred of the Lord Jesus.

It’s one of the tragedies of human life that we try to be united, we try to be ecumenical, and in the church we even have great movements to be one, but we can never be one, because the one thing at which we are one is our sin, and our sin is the thing that keeps us from ever being united with one another. It’s one of the ironies of human nature, one of the ironies of the fall of Adam, one of the ironies of the blindness of men that they seek to be one, and the one thing at which they are one is the thing that prevents them from being one. I must say I often sit at my desk and lean back and smile. God must have a sense of humor. Of course it’s great suffering for him, and it’s much concern for him, but he must have a sense of humor in the light of the things that men seek to do.

The Herodians would have been very unhappy over our Lord Jesus coming into the city of Jerusalem as a royal king. The Pharisees would have been very unhappy over him making himself out to be the messianic king prophesied in the Old Testament, so they both were angry at the turn of events and they united together in their common hatred.

And so with some of the disciples, with the Pharisees and the Herodians, they came to the Lord Jesus with a little question. They introduced it with some flattering remarks, but it was simply a clever attempt to entrap him. You see, if the Lord Jesus who was asked the question, is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not, had answered that question, yes it’s lawful to give tribute to Caesar, that would inflame the nation Israel, the Pharisees, who in turn would use it to inflame the nation, but if he had said, no, it’s not lawful to pay the poll tax to Caesar, then of course he would inflame the Herodians, who in their turn would inflame Rome against the nation.

So they thought that they had him. They had managed to concoct this dilemma which, if he answered, yes, he would be wrong, and if he answered, no, he would be wrong. Now, I’m sure that they spent a little time over this, because it is a clever question, and we don’t have any evidence of their great cleverness elsewhere. The response of the Lord Jesus is masterful in its penetrating insight of their hearts and in the perception of the real issue.

These play-acting dissemblers stand before the King of kings and think that they can trip them up. So the Lord Jesus, after they asked the question, perceiving their wickedness said, “Why test me, ye hypocrites?” No one ever shall say of our Lord Jesus that he was simply the meek and gentle Jesus. He didn’t hesitate to call these men to their face wicked hypocrites, but having said they were hypocrites he said, bring me a piece of money with which you pay the poll tax, and there was a little silver denarius which was minted by the Romans in order for this tax to be paid.

This denarius had a picture of the emperor on one side, and then on the other side had a picture of the emperor sitting upon a throne with a diadem on his head, and he was clothed in the garments of the High Priest. It was the claim to unite, in himself, kingship and high priesthood. Ultimately, of course, from this, has come the title, *pontifex maximus*, which is one of the titles of the Roman pontiff today. Greatest bridge builder; the mediator between God and men.

Well when they brought the denarius to the Lord Jesus. He held it up before them. He said, “Whose is the image and superscription?” This you see, was just a simple little object lesson. Whose is the image and superscription? Of course, they blurted out immediately, why, it’s Caesar’s, and then on the basis of their own confession, he gives his reply, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and the things that are God’s, render to God.”

Now there are a couple of things about this that we want to notice, and first of all, the Lord Jesus did for them just what they had commended him, for he taught the way of God and truth, and he proves the truthfulness of their words by the remarkable answer that he gave them. I said the Lord Jesus was a John Knox kind of a man who did not fear the face of anyone, and that’s what they said about him here, you do not regard the person of men, so standing before the Herodians and the disciples of the Pharisees, both of whom would have been happy to put him to death immediately if they could get away with it, he spoke exactly the truth to them.

But not only that, in answering them, he corrected them? You, they had asked him a question a kind of either-or question: is it lawful to render tribute to Caesar, or not? Either-or. Now, his answer is a both-and: Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and the things that are God’s

to God. In fact, the whole answer of the Lord Jesus can be summed up in two conjunctions. The “or,” of verse 17, which is their question: is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not, and his answer, render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s *and* unto God the things that are God’s. They had said what about, “or,” and he said it’s “and,” not “or.” In other words, both responsibilities pertain.

The truth, of course, is that we have a responsibility in this world in which we live. In the simple, political world, we have political responsibility or governmental responsibility, whatever we like to call it. We live in the midst of a society which has been given by God human government, and so we are responsible to human government. We are responsible. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. That is our responsibility. But we also live in a society in which our first responsibility is to God, and so we are to render the things that are God’s unto God.

The believers, such as probably the majority of you are, the believers should not overlook the temporal realm in which we have responsibility. We cannot say we will not pay our income tax because we are citizens of the New Jerusalem. That is not designed to impress the IRS too much anyway, but we should never be so irresponsible as to use any kind of excuse like that. We have responsibilities to the government, but at the same time the non-believer should remember that while he has responsibilities to the government, he also has responsibilities to the divine government or to the Lord. We live in both of these spheres. The Bible tells us some other spheres that we live in, too.

Oh, one last question. I want you to notice that in the answer he says, render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s. They had said, is it lawful to *give* to Caesar or not? He said: it’s not a matter of giving, it’s a matter of paying back; that Greek word means, “to pay back.” So the concept that our Lord gives here is the concept of giving back to God some of the benefits that have come to us by virtue of the his own arrangements. So we render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. We give back part of the benefits that we have because there is such a thing as human government given by God. We would have total chaos in the world had not God given us human government, bad as it may be.

So we render back some of the benefits that we have received. The reason you and I pay taxes, according to this interpretation, is that we are paying back to the government some of the benefits that we have received from human government. Now doesn’t that make it so much easier to pay the tax to remember that? [Laughter]

But the same is also true in the divine sphere. Render to God. Pay back to God some of the benefits that you have derived if you have been redeemed by him. You respond by virtue of what has been done by you, and what you render to him is only part, incidentally, of what he gives. We could never in any way repay him for what he has done for us.

Well the reaction of these men is that they marveled. We read, they marveled. So you might think, well, they were so awed by his wisdom that they were believers now. No not at all. They had actually come to the conviction that no man spake like this man, but they were not believers. We read, they left him and went their way. You see it’s possible to understand our Lord as a wise remarkable man and be lost and these men who had come to awe by reason of his wisdom and the manifestation of it, nevertheless, left him having no vital touch with him. How true that is. It’s possible for us to know a great deal about the Word of God and have no vital relationship to Jesus Christ. It’s possible for us to have a great appreciation of him as a man, an unusual man, a man above other men, and still not have a vital relationship to him as our own Savior.

The same day, Matthew says, the Sadducees came to him and Matthew tells us something about the creed of the Sadducees. They say there is no resurrection. Here are the rationalist. Incidentally, in Acts chapter 23, Luke adds that they not only don’t believe in the resurrection, but they don’t believe in angels or spirits; now angels are Spirit beings and it may be he means the same thing by that. But these are men who do not accept the supernatural.

They are so typical of men today in our colleges and universities who have professorships in the department of religion. Over and over again in the scholarly literature today you read about the impossibility of miracles taking place. Now when a man does not believe in the miracles of the Word of God, he has a basic presupposition, and that is that this universe in which we live is a closed

universe in which the principle of cause and effect operates, and the effects are the result of causes within this closed universe. Some honest interpreters of the Bible like Rudolph Bultmann have acknowledged that. That is their basic presupposition. They have put it down in black and white. But many others do not willingly do that. But they have that basic presupposition that we cannot have the supernatural, we cannot have miracles, and consequently, everything is interpreted from that faith position.

Talk about living by faith—these men often say simple believers live by faith, by which they mean believing something that’s not true, according to them, whereas we are solvist, and we look at these things from the scientific standpoint. Now you can be blind, but the worst kind of blindness is be blind and not know it. And the worst kind of spiritual blindness is to think that you are not living by faith when your faith rests on such basic presuppositions, as there is no supernatural. No angel, no spirit because we have never seen one or touched one, and we’ve never seen a resurrection. So these are the ones who come, and you know they were mortal enemies of the Pharisees. The Pharisees the traditionalists, these the Sadducees, were the priestly element, and consequently they had political control of Judaism itself. The great body of the Sanhedrin were made up of the Sadducees, primarily.

Now what made this question that they brought to the Lord Jesus doubly difficult was the fact that it was derived from Scripture. They had all of these arguments about is there such a thing as a resurrection, is there an angel or spirit, and you know after centuries of argument they had on their part thought up little questions by which they could stump the Pharisees, and no doubt the Pharisees had things they could stump the Sadducees over.

But this is a very good one. This is an old conundrum, no doubt, that they had used many times to the discomfiture of the Pharisees. And I say it’s especially bad, difficult to answer, because it’s taken from Scripture. It’s kind of like, where did Cain get his wife?—that has been used for centuries to stump Christians. Where did Cain get his wife? I won’t answer that today. Incidentally.

[Laughter]

Now there was this passage in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy Chapter 25, at which it was said in Israel that when a brother married a woman and died before they had children, it was the responsibility of the brother-in-law to marry the widow, and to have children and that the child that was born would carry on the name of the brother who had died. The Latin term for brother-in-law is *leyvere*, and from that has come the word the adjective leveret, so this was the leveret law in Israel. That’s what they are talking about.

So they say, now there were with us seven brethren. Now they are not talking about any particular brethren named Finberg or Goldstein, but they are just talking about seven brothers in illustration. They are saying, now, lets just imagine seven brothers, and one of them marries a woman and he dies before they have any children. And then of course, according to leveret law, the next brother should marry the woman. Well he dies, and the third, and so on through the seven, and they all die, and finally the woman dies. Now when they get to heaven, whose wife will the woman be, because she was married to seven men?

Now you can see what this is grounded upon. It’s grounded upon the fact that the material, this kind of materiality, this flesh and blood, is the only kind of reality. In other words, they have assumed the conclusion in the statement of the particular conundrum. But the Pharisees [Sadducees] must have had a great deal of trouble with it, because they seemed to triumphantly give it to the Lord Jesus. In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven, for they all had her?

Now the Lord’s answer is a magnificent answer. He answers it first, negatively, by saying, you’re just ignorant of the Bible, and secondly, well, he says you’re ignorant of the Bible and the power of God. And he deals first with the power of God and then with the Bible. So what he said, first of all is, you don’t know the power of God. You don’t know that God is powerful enough to create conditions that are not the same as conditions down here in heaven. He says you do err not knowing the Scripture nor the power of God, for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven. The future is a deathless existence.

The reason that we have marriage now—incidentally this gives us a little insight on the importance of marriage; it’s not the all important thing, incidentally. I say that to you who are married and to you who are hoping to be. Marriage is not the all-important thing. Do you know the reason why we have marriage? Well so that we can propagate the human race, that is one of the great reasons. There are others, of course, so that there may be represented the relationship between Christ and the church and other things, but never lose sight of the fact that marriage was intended for the propagation of the human race that God may accomplish his purposes for that race.

So what they have assumed is that this material existence is the only reality and that we need such things in the future. And our Lord answers, no there is no marriage in heaven, nor are we given in marriage; we are like the angels of God in heaven—incidentally, that does not mean, for those of you who have been married for a long time, that there will be no such thing as the kind of love that we know down here in heaven. Love continues in the glorified state, except that it’s just defecated and sublimed. That is, it’s greater love than we have down here.

And not only do we love our wives, but we love other Christians. We do not, when we pass into heaven, sever the relationship that we have with the one whom we have loved for years, but that relationship is taken to a higher state. In other words, there will be the most endearing intimacies. Hearts will intertwine with hearts in the body of Christ in heaven. We shall truly know what divine love is in it’s fullness there. And we will not be unhappy that we have relationships with others as well as with our wives and husbands.

Well, that was the first mistake that they had made. Incidentally, I love that expression there, we shall be like the angels of God in heaven. We could have an entire message on that, because there are so many things that that suggests to us we shall be like the angels and the quality of their persons. That is, we shall not die. What a beautiful thing to think about. There are no funerals in heaven. Funerals are very sad times. There are no heart attacks in heaven, there are no strokes in heaven, no graying of hair.

Among the angels in heaven we read, bless the Lord, ye his angels that excel in strength. And so we shall have the strength of angels. We shall have the wisdom. In fact the Bible says we shall judge angels, so I am inclined to think we have higher relationships. We shall be like them in the matter of their character. They always do his will perfectly, cheerfully and with alacrity. Who doesn’t, who has believed in Jesus Christ, want to be able to obey God cheerfully, immediately and continually? And that’s what we shall be able to do.

The Bible speaks a lot about the angels singing. That’s why I said at the 8:30 service that I was going to be able to sing like Lynn Ballard in heaven. And when the meeting was over this morning, one of the deacons rushed up and said, you created quite a unknown by saying you would be able to sing better than Lynn Ballard in heaven, because isn’t Lynn going to be in heaven, too? And I assured them that what I meant by that was that I was going to sing then better than Lynn sings now, [laughter] and then it was of pure oversight I had excluded him of the roll of the Lamb’s book of life by that statement.

Now then he answers them from Scripture. He says, touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God saying, I’m the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob; God is not the God of the dead but of the living? Now it’s possible to interpret this answer in two different ways. We can look at it and say, he says I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, laying a great deal of stress on the present tense. And since he said I am the God of Abraham hundreds of years after Abraham lived, and yet it’s still I am the God, that means Abraham is still living. And since Abraham and our Lord would have had the Jewish concept of human existence—that is, that there is definitely bound up in human existence the life of the body, the spirit and the soul—if Abraham is living, then he must ultimately live in bodily, fashion too. Thus there must be a resurrection.

Now it’s possible to take that interpretation, but I personally doubt that, because in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament from which that is derived, and in the New Testament text, no emphasis is laid on the present tense. In fact, the emphasis seems to be laid on these genitives: God

of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob because we then read, God is not the God of the dead but of the living. What he is affirming is a relationship to them.

And when he says he is the God of Abraham—incidentally he didn’t say, I’m the God of Adam, the God of Enoch, the God of Abel—it’s Abraham, Isaac and Jacob now that links him with the covenant made to Abraham. So when he said, I’m the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, he reminded them of the Abrahamic covenant which had these promises in it: Abraham’s name would be made great; that Abraham would be given a seed and he would be the spiritual means of blessing for all of the earth and that they would have a land they would have a seed a royal seed who would set upon a throne, and they would have the land that God had promised them. Now if they are going to have a royal seed and they are going to be on the land, if Abraham is going to live on the land, he must be resurrected. So the argument for the resurrection then rests on the Abrahamic covenant. You have to have a resurrection for the covenantal blessings to come to pass.

Now this was such a startling answer to the Sadducees that we read in verse 33, and when the multitude heard this they were astonished. The Greek word says, literally means, to strike out. It’s almost if they were struck out by a curve from the Word of God, to use a baseball metaphor.

But what it really means is that their eyes popped out of the their head at the wisdom and understanding of this answer that he gave to the old conundrum with which they had so discomforted the Pharisees for many years. There goes our objection that we raised to the Pharisees, and they have got to think up something else now.

Well word travels fast, then as well as now. Word traveled immediately to the Pharisees that Jesus had put the Sadducees to silence. He stopped the mouth of the Sadducees. So they realized, these ritualists, if we now step up and ask him a question that he can’t answer, then we really do sit on top of the mountain. And so they come up, some of them, no doubt, were angry at his success, and others chagrined at their failure to see the way he answered those Sadducees, but they come and they ask him now which one is the great commandment,

Now that was very natural, because the Jews had read through the Old Testament and they had discovered according to Levitic teaching that there were 613 commandments in the Old Testament. With 613 commandments, I had a friend who used to teach spiritual life, drawing up fifty commandments that you were to follow and that’s the way he taught spiritual life. He put a list on the board of the fifty and started at number one first day. He covered the first ten the next day, ten to twenty, and so on. Well 613 commandments, you would naturally ask the question, which one is the greatest?

Incidentally, they had decided that of the 613, 248 were positive and 365 were negative commandments, so the question is a very natural one. And he answers with two citations from the Word of God. He said, thou shall love thy God with all thy heart with all thy soul with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment: you must be true to God. And the second is like it: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: true to man. These two responsibilities, incidentally are two responsibilities under which the whole Old Testament could be gathered. Every statement in the Old Testament can be related, ultimately, to these two commandments which our Lord has set forth for us.

All that the prophets command, all that Moses commands can be subsumed under these two things: our responsibility to God, our responsibility to man, and notice, incidentally, it is responsibility to God, first of all. In other words, our responsibility is to have a relationship to him, first of all, right relationship to God and then right relationship to man. As a matter of fact, we cannot have right relationship to man if we do not have right relationship to God first.

Rabbi Hillel was one of the Jewish rabbis who had a great influence on Judaism. One of the Gentiles once came to him and asked him to teach him the law while standing on one foot, and what he wanted the rabbi to do was to sum up the teaching of the Bible, because you cannot stand on one foot too long. So this is the way he is traditionally reported to have summed up the Old Testament: do not do to your fellow that which is hateful to you. This is the whole law. The rest is its interpretation. You will notice in this interpretation of Judaism there is not a word about faith in

God, not a word in it about man’s relationship to God, and that’s the thing that distinguishes our Lord’s interpretation of the Old Testament from Judaism. And incidentally, it distinguishes our Lord’s interpretation from most of Protestant teaching today.

One of the reasons that we do not understand the atonement of the Lord Jesus is that we do not understand the moral law and vice versa. It is only gross ignorance of the requirements of God’s love that make people under value the gospel. The man who has the clearest view of the moral law will always be the man who has the highest sense of value of Christ’s atoning blood.

Think about this for one moment, my friends. The Lord Jesus said that our responsibility toward God is this: to love the Lord our God with all our hearts with all our souls with all our minds. Can I ask you a question? Have you done that? Have you loved the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind? That is your responsibility before God.

Well now, in case you are so self-deceived to say, I think I have, the Lord says, and you should love your neighbor as yourself. Now have you done that? No need to ask. If you honestly stood before for these two requirements that our Lord Jesus set forth here, you could not help in the presence of these requirements to sense a real depth of human need. We are lost. We have not fulfilled the requirements that are laid upon us by God. We must present him with a positive righteousness, and we do not have it. No man has it.

To think for one moment that you can get to heaven by doing the best that you can is to absolutely deny the words of Jesus Christ. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart with all thy soul with all thy mind. So the real demands of the law are evident: complete love of God, complete love of man. I face an audience of sinners, and you face a preacher who is a sinner. We have broken God’s law. We stand condemned. Who, I say, does not plead a fervent guilty? We’re dead all over, which is what total depravity means, and we stand in need of a double work. A work by which we may maintain a judicial relationship by God, and then a work in which he may work in our dispositions and affections so that we begin to fulfill some of the aspects of the Word of God. And I want to tell you there is no one to whom you can turn except the Lord, who gave these

commandments. There is no help, [even if you say] I’ll become a monk, as Luther thought at one time in his life. The only way we can come to the knowledge of God in redemption is through the appeal of faith through him.

May I say just one last thing. If it is true that we are condemned, and if it is true that we have this need for the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus, if we stand at the foot at the cross of Jesus Christ, we will be enabled to see the full extent of sin and the full extent of the righteousness of our great God. If you stand below the cross of the Lord Jesus and see the Son of God hanging upon that cross, you can, if you ask the Holy Spirit to give you enlightenment, ultimately come to see how guilty you are. Because it costs the death of the son of God to purchase redemption for sinners. And standing at the foot of the cross, that will give you some measure of how much you owe. And furthermore standing at the foot of the cross will also give you some measure of how holy God is. He cannot forgive, cannot forgive, apart from the death of the Son of God.

And if the Holy Spirit has brought you to the place where you have come to see that this is for me, then you don’t need any legal motives to obey God. You don’t need any, thou shalt, thou shalt, because when the sense of the depth of the deliverance which God has obtained for us through the sacrifice of Christ comes home to us, then the basis of true morality is built in the love of God because of what Christ has done, and consequently the love of God for our fellow saints and fellow men, because of what he has done for us.

If you are sitting here in the audience this morning and you have never come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus, we remind you of your condition of what God has done through Jesus Christ, and we appeal to you, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, to come to him. Receive from him the forgiveness offered to sinners. That means you. May God help you to come. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee Lord, for these great passages from the Word of God. We are also humble Lord, to be reminded again of the depth of our need. But we also are so grateful to Thee Lord, because now we understand better the heights of the love of God through Jesus Christ.

“Christ’s Answers to Carping Questions” by S. Lewis Johnson
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O God we pray that through the Holy Spirit Thou will work through the hearts this meeting, to bring them to the knowledge of him to know is life eternal.

May grace, mercy, and peace be with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.