



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

TRANSCRIPT

“The Feeding of the 4,000, the Signs of the Times, and a Warning Against Heresy

I know that some of you are beginning to wonder if we shall be able to finish the Gospel of Matthew before the Lord returns, [laughter] and I do want you to know that we are planning to do that. We will not continue after he returns, of course, but we are hoping to finish the gospel before too long. So, occasionally, in order to accomplish that, I will take in a longer section in some of the sections of the gospel that are not quite as important in comparison with others. So today is one of those days, and we are going to begin reading in chapter 15 and verse 29 and read through chapter 16 verse 12. Chapter 15 verse 29 a through chapter 16 verse 12. Now remember, in the immediately preceding section, the Lord Jesus, in the Gentile territory of Tyre and Sidon, has healed the daughter of the woman of Canaan. We read in the 29th verse then,

“And Jesus departed from there and came near unto the Sea of Galilee and went up into a mountain and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and put them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be well, the lame to walk, and the blind

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.”

Now it is evident from this – this was generally Gentile territory, but it was mixed territory in one sense – that a number of Gentiles were healed by the Lord Jesus, and evidently they gave to him the same preeminence that the woman of Canaan had. For we read that as a concluding part of that those many healings, they glorified the God of Israel. So evidently they regarded the God of Israel as the preeminent God, and therefore because objects of the healing ministry of the Lord Jesus. Matthew continues:

“Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, ‘I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.’ And his disciples say unto him, ‘From where should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?’ And Jesus said unto them, ‘How many loaves have ye?’ And they said, ‘Seven, and a few little fishes.’ And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and broke them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken pieces that was left seven baskets full and they that did eat were four thousand men besides women and children. And he sent away the multitude and got into a boat and came unto the borders of Magadan. The Pharisees with the Sadducees came, testing him desired that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, ‘When it is evening, ye say, It

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and over and overcast. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

These last words are very solemn and thought provoking:

“And he left them, and departed. And when his disciples were come to the other side, (evidently they had been on the eastern side and now they come back to the western side of the lake) they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, ‘Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘It is because we have taken no bread.’ Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, ‘O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake not to you concerning bread, but that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?’ Then understood they that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”

May God bless this reading of his word.

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Our subject this morning is “The Feeding of the 4,000, the Signs of the Times, and a Warning Against Heresy.” I come to a message like this with a little bit of trepidation, because essentially it is three messages in one, and I know that you are thinking, well, Dr. Johnson, you rarely finish on time with one message, what are you going to do this morning with three? But this is an attempt for us to make a little progress in this gospel, and I think that taking this lengthy section is justified from that standpoint.

It is doubtful that any miracle of our Lord is more overlooked than this miracle of the feeding of the 4,000. When I was a student in theological seminary about thirty years ago, we had a speaker come from the State of New York, Frank Gaebelein. He was the Headmaster of the Stony Brooks School for Boys, and a well-known evangelical man. He still lives and edits a new commentary on the whole of the Bible written by evangelical men. Came to give the Griffith Thomas Lectures at the seminary.

In those days we had the public lectures at night, and then in the mornings in the chapel sessions at the seminary, he spoke on various section from the word of God in a short series of expository messages. And one morning he turned to the feeding of the 4,000 and entitled his message “The Almost Forgotten Miracle.” It was a good title, because this account is an almost forgotten miracle of the Lord Jesus.

Most commentators, when they come to it in their commentaries will say, now the lessons from the feeding of the 4,000 are the same as the lessons from the feeding of the 5,000, and let’s go on to the next section. And I must confess that that is to some extent justified, because the lessons are largely the same. We’ll suggest a few things in a moment or two, but it’s fair to say that this is an almost forgotten miracle because of its connection with the feeding of the 5,000.

The incident concerning the signs of the times which follows that, indicates that the Lord Jesus regarded his ministry as being exceedingly clear. It’s evident that he thinks that he has given such a clear presentation of the Messianic ministry to that point that the

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Pharisees and the Sadducees should have been able to know the signs of the seasons because of the clarity of his presentation of the Messianic work. So he speaks to us with a great deal of stringent force to the apostasy of our day.

It is a sad and yet a startling thing that today after hundreds and hundreds of years of the study of the word of God which is so patent and pellucid to anyone who reads it that we still have individuals who open up the Bible and do not understand its doctrinal teaching.

Malcolm Muggeridge is a very well known commentator and announcer with the British Broadcasting Corporation, or at least he was for a length lengthy period of time-- was widely known all over Great Britain and even the United States. And Mr. Muggeridge has made a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, and a man of that stature has created quite an interest in spiritual things as a result of what has happened to him. He has written several books, and one of his relatively recent books is entitled Jesus, the Man Who Lives. In it, he has a paragraph or two that I thought were most interesting in the light of what we are saying here about the clarity of the Bible.

He states that the story of Jesus has been more told, mulled over, analyzed and expounded and illustrated than any other in human history. So many hands, so many diverse versions and interpretations, and then going back to the beginning with the rough dialogue of the mystery plays, to the haunting notes of the plain song, to Renon’s lush prose, Dickens’ unctuous sentimentality, and the fathomless inanity of D. H. Lawrence’s Then Man Who Died. We have diverse interpretations of the Lord Jesus.

He says, “We can go on to the wasteland of the Freudians and the priests who have run out of their presbyteries and their monasteries, theologians celebrating the death of God, exaltees intoning LSD pieties, freaks and comunards and clerical Playboy fans, all engaged in promoting by one means or another have become the great 20th Century Jesus cult, with large and profitable affiliates in the entertainment industry.”

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Then he says, “We could consider the rows and rows of scholarly and pseudo-scholarly works in which men look for the historical Jesus: the freedom fighting Jesus, the erotic or frantic Jesus, the proletarian or revolutionary Jesus. And now,” he said, “we have new translations proliferating, and each one of them to him, stylistically speaking, seem more flat and unprofitable than the last. And all contain in one form or another, so he says, a revisionism whereby Jesus’s essential message is modified, if not drastically changed, and we are told that his kingdom is of this world, and that man can live by bread alone, and that he must lay up treasure on earth in the shape of an ever increasing gross national product.”

And finally he concludes whereby saying, “Future historians, assuming there are any interested in such matters, are likely to conclude the more we knew about Jesus the less we knew him. And the more precisely his words were translated the less we understood them or heeded them.” He’s speaking about the same thing the Lord Jesus was speaking about when he said, “O ye hypocrite, you can discern the signs of the skies but you cannot discern the signs of the times.”

Now the last section is a concluding warning against the doctrine of the two sects who have now united finally in one thing on which they can agree: hatred of the Lord Jesus and the great salvation that he has brought. Let’s look now at these three paragraphs and first at feeding of the [sic, 4,000].

The Lord Jesus, remember in our last study, was left in the land of the Gentiles about Tyre and Sidon. It was in the spring of the year because he had just fed the five thousand, and when the five thousand were told to sit down upon the ground, the text of scripture say that they sat down upon the grass. So it must have been in the early spring, whereas at the time of the feeding of the four thousand they sat down on the ground, the implication being that the grass had now become gray and withered away and there was no grass. So it was evident that there probably was a time, perhaps even of six months,

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

between the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand, so that this circuitous route which the Lord Jesus took from the west back to the east, and to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee consumed about six months. And it must have been for the occasion of the teaching of the disciples the things that he wanted to teach them in the light of his soon-coming separation from them.

Now he arrives in the east, and he sits upon a mountain, and in the Markan account one miracle is singled out for special attention. A man who was deaf and who was dumb was brought to the Lord Jesus, and in a very strange healing ritual the Lord Jesus touched the ear of the deaf man, and then spit upon his hand and took the spittle and put it on the tongue of this man who was dumb. And then looked to heaven and shouted out in Aramaic, “Ephrathah,” which means “be opened,” and the ears of the man were opened, and his tongue was loosened, and he heard and he spoke.

And evidently this made such a tremendous impression upon the people that crowds came from the whole of the territory, and many were healed by the Lord Jesus. And the fact that they glorified the God of Israel as a result of these many healings is evidence of the fact that they recognized that the only basis upon which they as Gentiles had the right to be healed by the Lord Jesus was that they recognized themselves to be little doggies of the [sic, Jews]. They took their proper place, and in taking their proper place, they received the continental ministry from the Lord Jesus.

Would it not be wonderful if individuals were as concerned about their spiritual needs as we often are about our physical? I love that statement. I put it in the Believers Bible Bulletin, that the Apostle John makes in the third epistle when writing to Gaius, he says, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, (physical health) even as thy soul prospereth.”

We like to turn it around. We like to turn it around and say, well I wish that you were as healthy spiritually as you are physically. He says I would like for you to be as

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

spiritually as physically healthy as you are spiritually. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if people were crowding in to hear the word of God and to get to know the Lord Jesus and come into the family of God and possess the forgiveness of sins and desire to fulfill their real role in being here on this earth to glorify God?

Well, the crowds came for healing, and we can be thankful for that and that was the occasion for the feeding of the 4,000. This event is not to be confused with the feedings of the five thousand, although the accounts are very similar. The details differ, and what makes it quite evident that they are not the same is that we have the account of the feeding of the 5,000 in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and the account of the feeding of the 4,000 is found in Matthew and Mark. So both of these gospels record both of the incidents. So it’s evident that the authors of these gospels – in the first, Matthew, regarded himself as an eye witness – did not have any difficulty in putting the two in the same gospel. They thought of these incidents as different incidents.

Now notice that the account begins in verse 32 when the Lord Jesus said, “I want you to come here to me,” and then as the disciples gathered to him he said, “I have compassion on the multitude.” Isn’t that characteristic? You see, the initiative of spiritual blessing again begins with God, in this case God the Son. All spiritual blessing toward men comes from the divine side first of all. We do not seek him; he seeks us. And we seek him only because he has first sought us. We love him because he has first loved, and our love is the response of his love. We do not love him and provoke him to love us. We do not urge him and incite him to love us because we love him, but we love him because he has already loved us. I have compassion upon them.

Calvin said, “He had compassion upon them, and he called them to himself, and the crowd did not come first because of their brutish dullness.” How true that is. The incident is very simply given. It’s very much like the feeding of the 5,000 in its details. The disciples ask where shall we get the food to feed this great multitude, they are

looking to themselves, emphasis rests in the Greek text on that little word, we, in verse 33—from where should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to feed so great a multitude?

The Lord Jesus asks simply how many loaves do you have and how many fishes, and they said seven loaves and a few fishes, and he commanded the multitude to sit down upon the ground, and when they had sat down he took the loaves and the few fishes and he gave thanks for them to God and he broke them. All of this is very typical, incidentally, of what would he would do on the cross at Calvary because the breaking of the bread was a figure of the death that he would die, and then as a result of that he gave to the disciples who in turn were to give to the multitudes, and they were fed. All very typically of the blessing of God coming to us by virtue of the deaf ministry of the Lord Jesus and the agency of the preachers and teachers of the word of God.

Now the lessons of this incident are rather simple, and I think that’s the first one of them. We have here illustrated the Lord’s methods in his work. He gave to his disciples. We are stewards of the blessing of God. We do not accomplish anything. If I were to preach to you this morning and several or more of you come to faith in the Lord Jesus, it would not have been because I have been effective. It would be because the Holy Spirit has deigned to use his word to the conversion of men.

Now let us remember this, that in the church of the Lord Jesus there are two kinds of gifts, generally speaking. There are those that are utterance gifts, such as apostleship and prophets and pastor-teachers and teachers and the gift of exhortation. But then there are gifts that are not utterance gifts. There are gifts of oversight and ministry, service. All of us, every one of us has at least one gift. We are members of a body. Everyone of us has a responsibility in the body. If it is an utterance gift, you are responsible to minister the utterance gift. If it is a nonutterance gift you are responsible to minister that nonutterance gift, and each of us is equally as important for the maturing of the body of

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Jesus Christ. Paul sets it out so fully and plainly in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 7 through 16 that we cannot misunderstand it with the help of the Spirit.

So here we have a beautiful illustration of how the Lord carries on his work. He does the essential work, but the disciples are called to be agents, stewards, and they distribute the pieces of bread which the Lord Jesus multiplies that the multitude may be fed. That’s one lesson.

Of course this is an illustration, one of the commentators had said, of his omnipotence. By the fact that he repeats this miracle, it proves that his miracles were no accidents. He can repeat them if he wishes, and great stress rests upon his omnipotent power. He’s the Messiah.

Perhaps also, and I say this with a little diffidence, because I don’t know that this is really so obvious a lesson. Since in the first part of the chapter the Lord Jesus has spoken out strongly against the tradition of the elders and spoken about how traditions often violate and make null and void the commandments of God, perhaps we have an illustration here of Israel’s apostasy. And then in the healing of the daughter of the woman of Canaan, we have an illustration of how the call of the gospel has now gone out to the Gentiles in this present age in which we live so that we have Jewish disobedience and now Gentile reception of the truth, God having moved now toward the Gentile multitudes of the world.

And since in the last part of the chapter we have both Jews and Gentiles being fed by the Lord Jesus, perhaps that’s an illustration of the Messianic kingdom in which we shall have both Jews and Gentiles. So that the chapter, then, may illustrate the dispensational program of God down through the ages. Well, we don’t want to make too much of that, because that is not specifically stated here, it is a kind of typical illustration that may be in the Scripture. I don’t want to speak dogmatically about it.

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Now there is one final point I want to say something about. You know we have a lot of interesting people in our audience here. And I get a lot of interesting comments. Some objections to what I’ve said. Some in which additional thoughts are given. And some of you have good senses of humor, you come up and you notice some interesting and amusing things in the word.

A few weeks ago one of you came up and said to me, did you know that the Lord Jesus and the disciples were environmentalists? And I said, no, I didn’t know that. He said, well after the feeding of the 5,000 they took up of the broken pieces that were left twelve baskets full. It’s evident they were interested in cleaning up the environment after they had that big picnic on the slopes of that hill. And then I think he came to me again and said the same thing about the feeding of the 4,000 before I got to it. He was reading ahead. They did all eat and were filled and they took up of the broken pieces that were left seven baskets full.

Well, perhaps they were. I’ve heard that advice to tourists these days in under-developed countries, don’t drink the water; in developed countries, don’t breathe the air. Perhaps the Lord and the disciples were environmentalists. Did you notice too those words, after the feeding of the 5,000 there were twelve baskets of fragments left, after the feeding of the 4,000 there were seven baskets? In the Greek text there’s an interesting change in the words that are used, and it’s preserved in chapter 16, too, the distinction, so evidently it was a meaningful one.

When the five thousand that were largely Jewish were fed, they took twelve baskets, and the word is a word used of a little wicker basket which was relatively small with which a Jewish man or woman might carry their meal or any other type of provision they wished to carry along with them. But here the word is a word that refers to something like a hamper, it is much bigger. And in fact, the seven hampers of fragments might have been more than the twelve baskets in the feeding of the five thousand. But

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

the hamper was a word that was particularly used of the Gentiles, and their habits of carrying things. So it was a Gentile kind of basket that illustrates the fact that these accounts are, since it occurred in the Decapolis, the Gentile region, authentic.

Let’s look now at the section on the signs of the times. After the feeding of the 4,000 on the east of the sea, the disciples come back toward the west, and the old enemies of the Lord Jesus, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, are up to their old tricks. They want to defeat him, although he has up to this time defeated them by the manifestation of the Messianic signs, and so they come to him after he has done all of these mighty miracles and say to him, “Show us a sign from heaven.”

This reminds me of something that the man who led me to the Lord said when I was just a brand new Christian. I came to him and spoke to him about a friend of mine with whom I had spoken about the Lord Jesus, and whom I’d sought to bring to faith in Christ, and was totally unsuccessful. And then he said, Lewis, you’ll notice this about dealing with the lost. They frequently will come to you with six or eight intellectual reasons why they should not believe the gospel. He said, you ask them to list them, and they do, and you answer the first objection, and the second objection, and so on down through the six or seven. And he said, Lewis, you will notice that when you finish answering the seventh, the last one, they won’t say, well then I’ll become a believer as a general rule, they’ll go back to number one again.

That is the habit of the obstinate rebellion against the truth that we have naturally. Well that’s exactly what has happened. They have asked him for signs before, he has performed all of these mighty signs, now they come to him again and say, show us a sign from heaven. I wonder if perhaps they meant, your other signs have been earthly signs. They figured out a new way by which they may test him. Up to this time he’s been performing miracles down here on the earth, but give us a sign from heaven, because after all, Moses in the Old Testament, he brought down the manna from heaven.

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Now the Lord Jesus has already said that it was Moses that brought the manna down, it was God, but nevertheless they looked at it as a miracle that Moses had performed. So Moses brought down the manna from heaven. And that Joshua, he stopped the heavenly bodies in the midst of the sky, another miracle in heaven. And Samuel caused a great thunderstorm to come in order that the Children of Israel might win a battle. And Elijah called down fire from heaven. So if all the prophets of the Old Testament, and the godly men of the Old Testament, could perform heavenly miracles, show us a sign from heaven.

Now this is amazing in light of the fact that the sign from God was standing right there before them. And in a few days, relatively speaking, he would be placed in the sepulture, and he would rise again from the dead on the third day and ascend into heaven. What a sign from heaven. Having come from heaven, come here, passed through death, burial, resurrection, go back to heaven to sit there and come again the second time from heaven. What a sign from heaven. No wonder he said I’m not gonna give you any kind of sign except the sign of Jonas.

Now I made a mistake in the Believers Bible Bulletin. I did not read over what I had written, and a church secretary printed exactly what I had—which she was supposed to do—and in the course of the comments on the genuineness of verses 2 and 3, what comes out in those notes is that verses 2 and 3 are not genuine, whereas I had intended to say that they are genuine. Some of the manuscripts do not have verses 2 and 3, but I was trying to point out that verses 2 and 3 are genuine, because no blundering scribe—and most people who copied manuscripts were blundering scribes—no blundering scribe could have ever invented these words of the Lord Jesus concerning the weather. Would anyone ever be able to formulate such a beautiful illustration of human ability and inability?

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Now he said, when they asked a sign from heaven, “When it’s evening and you look out at the west and you see that the sky is red, what do you say? You say the weather’s going to be good. But if in the morning if you get up and take a look toward the east and the sky is red and overcast, what do you say? It’s going to be a terrible day.” Now of course what we should say is, this is the day that the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it, but we don’t usually say that.

Now he knew that it was very common and a well-accepted practice to forecast weather by the color of the sky at certain times of the day. Now what is striking about this of course is that he has taken redness, which is the same, but has shown that when it’s in the evening it means one thing and when it’s in the morning it means another. And furthermore, he’s given them a sign from heaven in a sense. He’s saying, you can interpret the heavens, why cannot you interpret the ministry that I have given?

Now I know that probably those weather forecasters were just about as accurate in those days as they are in ours, maybe perhaps they were more accurate. Someone has said you can fool all the people, you cannot fool all the people, well you cannot fool, you can [Johnson laughs, audience laughs]. We’ll forget what that person said. [Laughter] There was, there was someone else who said, you can fool some of the people all the time and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time, but weather forecasters come close.

Now we have been the victims of a great subterfuge, because instead of predicting the weather now, the weather forecasters say, today there will be a 20 percent chance of rain. They cannot miss. If it rains, well it was in the 20 percent. If it doesn’t rain it was in the 80. So as long as they give us percentages, they’re always right. I say it’s because they have a inferiority complex. But in these days, evidently, they could forecast the weather by looking at the skies.

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Now the Lord Jesus says, you can look at the skies and you can discern the face of the sky, but can you not discern the signs of the times? The Greek text says, signs of the seasons. So evidently he’s not thinking about the long progression of time through the centuries, but the signs of these present seasons through which we’re going in my ministry. What is he saying when he says, “O ye hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky but can ye not discern the signs of the seasons?”

Why he means simply this: I have come, I have been born in a supernatural way, I have lived in your midst as a sinless Messianic king, I have proclaimed the fact that I am the Messianic King and I have performed the Messianic signs. I am soon going to the cross at Calvary; there I will bear upon myself the sin of sinners. I will cry out—I’m expanding this a little bit—I will cry out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” I will be buried in death, I will be raised in the resurrection, and I will ascend to the right hand of the Father on high. You can discern the signs of the sky, but plainly before your eyes the scriptures have been fulfilled, and you hypocrites are unable to discern the signs of the seasons. What a magnificent statement.

By his ministry, his death, the new covenant has been inaugurated. Forgiveness of sins is now possible, and there is a full manifestation of the grace of God. That which we saw only in a cloudy, confused way, like this foggy day that we are having, the grace of God we see full in full manifestation today. The Apostle Paul said that Jesus Christ by his death, burial and resurrection has brought life and immortality to light. The law came by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest of the interpreters, John Calvin, has said, “In the Old Testament they had light, of course, but their light was minor light in comparison with the major light that we now have.” And furthermore he went on to say that “Men of the Old Testament speak relatively to their times. They only saw God wrapped up in many coverings. But we see him plainly through the Scriptures now.

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Is there any application of this section to us today? I think there is. We are living in days in which some of the great doctrines of the word of God have come under serious attack. The doctrine of the Bible, for example. There are men who stand in the pulpit, who are religious men and who affirm that the Bible is not an inspired book. It is not a book inspired by the Holy Spirit, and therefore inerrant, but a book, sometimes they say it is authoritative, but it has many errors and sometimes it is not authoritative at all, but simply the record of the religious experience of men.

The deity of Christ? There are many who stand in the pulpit who affirm that the Lord Jesus is not God, though he may be a little better than men. And then there are some that say that the Lord Jesus, when he died on the cross, did not die unto the punishment of God – God does not punish the innocent or the guilty – therefore we do not have a penal satisfaction theory of the atonement, but the Lord Jesus died either as an example or as a kind of substitute for us by which he does not really bear our penalty at all. These are false doctrines. These are denials of the teaching of the word of God, and one would want to say, you can discern the signs of the sky but can you not discern the teaching of the word of God?

Now that was a warning addressed to those who were the enemies of the gospel. He now turns to warn the believers about the false teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and this warning therefore is directed toward his own. It’s a good way for us to conclude today because, you see, false teaching is like leaven. It insinuates itself in, it is not recognized at first, until finally the minds of men who are susceptible to false teaching because of the old nature have embraced it, and then it becomes too late.

The occasion of this was that when they passed back to the western side of the lake they had forgotten to bring bread. The Lord Jesus had said to them, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” The 9th verse. And they thought by the mention of the term leaven which was associated with bread, well perhaps he said that

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

because we haven’t brought any bread with us; we forgot to bring bread. He saw that they did not understand the fact that he was using leaven in the well-recognized usage among the Jewish people, the metaphorical sense of an evil influence (we had that back in chapter 13 and verse 33).

And therefore he spoke to them and said, “O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves because ye have brought no bread.” Don’t you understand what I did when I fed the five thousand, and there were twelve of those kothanoi that were left over? And further, I fed the four thousand, and there were seven of those spuraes that were left over? What is he telling them to do? Why, he’s telling them to do something that we need to have told to us. Apply doctrine to life. Apply doctrine to life. They thought, we have no bread, how shall we get along? He’s just fed five thousand, fed four thousand, and they’re wondering where they’re going to get bread. O ye of little faith.

How often this applies to us. We read the Scriptures, we read of the mighty miracles of the Lord Jesus, we have placed our faith and trust in him. He is our God and Savior, and then we wonder about the little things of life. When we do, we do not apply doctrine to life. The Lord Jesus said to the disciples, the Twelve in the Upper Room, if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. How is it that you do not understand that I spoke to you not concerning bread, but that you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

Well we read then they understood that he bid them not to beware of the leaven of bread but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They’re learning, but slowly. They understood. The Greek word means “they put two and two together.” They finally came to understand it.

What was the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees? Well, in the case of the Pharisees, it was rigid legalism and sophistry by which they took the word of God and added to it all types of human traditions. We do that too, believe it or not. We might

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

even have a few floating around in Believers Chapel. It’s so easy to add human traditions to the word of God. The Pharisees were experts at it.

And the Sadducees, what was their doctrine? Well they didn’t believe in the supernatural, they were rationalistic materialists. Both failed to see the sin of man and the need of the new life. Well, is there any need of this kind of exhortation to the Christian church today? Yes.

Just recently we have seen the disgraceful ordination by one of our leading religious organization that professes Christianity. We’ve seen the ordination of a lesbian priest, priestess. That is a disgrace to the Christian church. That is a flaunting of human tradition and human opinion over the plain testimony of the word of God. Not too long ago, I read of another large professing Christian organization that had lost over five hundred thousand members in four years, and one of the reasons was that they were guilty of tolerance, ecumenism and relevancy, one of their own men said, and this man wrote a book on why conservative churches are growing, and he said, “Tolerance ecumenism and relevancy are a formula for failure.”

Tolerance? Why that seems to be an excellent thing. But the kind of tolerance he’s speaking about is the tolerance of doctrine contrary to the word of God, not the tolerance of people and their right to hold the doctrine that they would. And when he spoke of ecumenism, he spoke of uniting together on the basis of the least common denominator of biblical doctrine, which is to sin the same way as a denial of the truth. Fortunately, that movement about which a great deal was said has apparently failed for the time-being.

And relevancy is nothing more than a failure again to listen to the stinging words of holy Scripture, as they speak to our sins in this day. Must be disturbing to the religious establishment that God doesn’t always choose to relay his instructions through proper channels. Well, I think I can understand now. It’s not surprising to me that the Lord

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Jesus should remind the resurrection denying Sadducees, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead but of the living. And I think I can understand why he should preach to the ritual-loving traditionalist Pharisee, except a man be born again he cannot seek the Kingdom of God.

If you’re here this morning and you have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, I remind you again that the Lord Jesus died for sinners, and if by the grace of God you have been brought to the assurance that you are a sinner, that’s a work of God, then you’re a candidate for the salvation which he has wrought by the shedding of his precious blood and that salvation may be yours by simple trust in him.

The abandonment of trust in your church, in your baptism, in your observance of religious testimonies and religious ordinances, religious good works, by your abandonment of your trust and your education or culture or any other thing on which you may have based your hope for eternal life and by trust and reliance upon the Lord Jesus who has accomplished, objectively, an atonement for sinners, you pass from death into spiritual life and from the darkness of sin and unbelief into the light of the knowledge of the glory of God and the face of Jesus Christ.

Would it not be a wonderful thing that you should come into this auditorium this morning blind and without Christ and leave seeing and with the Lord of Glory. That may be your experience. You may have that assurance. You may have the assurance that you pass out of this auditorium with justification that is acceptable to God, standing righteous before him because that’s what he conveys when we believe in Christ. You may pass out of the out of these doors the sons of God when you have come in as sons of Satan. You may pass out of these doors with the forgiveness of sins, doors into which you entered a few moments ago under divine judgment the wrath of God abiding upon you.

You may pass out of these doors singing, when he shall come with trumpet sound/ O then I shall in him be found, rather than with those Arminian notes of, may I

“The Feeding of the 4,000, Signs of the Times, and Warning Against Heresy” by S. Lewis
Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

then in him be found [laughter]. As an ambassador of the Lord Jesus I invite you to put your trust in him. It’s very simple. If God has wrought in your heart, and he has prepared you, why don’t you bow your head and say, I thank thee O Lord for giving the Son of God to die for sinners. I am a sinner. I rely upon him. I abandon my trust in anything else. I rely wholly upon him. Thank you for the gift of life. May God give you grace to make that decision. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] How grateful we are, Lord, for these words of warning from the Lord Jesus, for we do need them. O God, as Thou didst through the Son warn the believers, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, Thou dost warn us in the word of God to beware of the leaven of the false teachers of today.

Give us, Lord, deliverance, for it is the truth that frees us and enables us to rejoice in the purity of the word of God.

And Lord, if there is someone here who has not yet come to faith, O give them no rest until they rest in Christ, abandoning all rest in anything else. Give them the sense of the assurance that Thou dost desire the children of God to have.