



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“The Judgment of the Living Gentiles,” Matthew 25:31-46

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading for this morning is found in Matthew chapter 25 verse 31 through verse 46. This is, as you are able to see, the conclusion of the section on the Olivet Discourse, and we turn now to read the incident in which our Lord sets forth the judgment of the living Gentiles. This has, incidentally, been called a parable. It has certain parabolic features about it. It may be, however, something more than simply a parable, probably something unique in our Lord’s teaching. The 31st verse begins,

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and ye gave me food: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and

ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer (incidentally, this is the only time in the Gospel of Matthew that the Lord Jesus speaks of himself as the King, but as you can see as several times this takes place here.) And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was hungry, and ye gave me no food: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: and the righteous into life eternal.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

It is the common belief of Christendom that there shall be one, final, general resurrection and judgment. For example in the Westminster Confession of Faith, a justly famed standard of biblical doctrine for Reform churches, we read these words: “God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father, in which day, not only the apostate angles shall be judged, but likewise, all persons that have lived upon the earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ to give an account of their thoughts words and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.” A few sentences later on in that chapter 35 there is a reference to a day of judgment.

In the Apostle’s Creed, we read, “From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead,” a statement many of us have repeated countless times in meetings of churches on Sunday morning in the morning worship service.

The doctrinal standard of the Anglican Church is the Thirty-nine Articles, and in the Thirty-nine Articles, in Section IV or the fourth of the articles, we read, “Christ did truly rise again from the dead and took again his body with flesh bones and all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven and there sitteth until he returned to judge all men at the last day.

It is not easy, and I say this with real sincerity to differ with the considered opinion of a large part of the Christian church, and I do so with a great deal of diffidence. I think that it is very important for us to pay attention to these great documents of the Christian church, which were the products of a great deal of searching of heart and mind, of a great deal of counseling together of conferring. The Westminster Confession of Faith was the product of a great deal of theological deliberation, as was also the Thirty-nine Articles. So it is the part of wisdom of Christians to pay a great deal of attention to the things that large bodies within the Christian family have thought were the teaching of the word of God.

So I say that I differ with them on this point with a great deal of diffidence, and I really mean that. There is one comforting thing, however, and that is that we all agree that is those that hold to the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Thirty-nine Articles or some of the other Christian standards. We all agree that there will be a judgment of all men. We may differ regarding the circumstances. We may differ with regard to the specific persons who appear at certain different times before God, the judge, but nevertheless we do agree that there is to be a judgment of all of us, and that’s I think what we should remember as we study Matthew chapter 25 verse 31 through verse 46.

If it is true that this passage is thought to refer to a general judgment, then it is one of the most commonly misunderstood passages in the Gospel of Matthew, just because it is thought to be a proof text for a general judgment. In the Middle Ages, as many of you know, the artists sought to represent their theological views in their paintings, and in the Middle Ages the art of that time portrayed the last judgment frequently. It was portrayed in the cathedrals and the frescos and even in illuminated manuscripts, and one of the interesting things about the art of the Middle Ages is that in their frequent portrayal of the last judgment, they generally relied upon two passages of Scripture: one, Mark chapter 13 verse 26 and 27, which also has to do with the Olivet Discourse; and this passage here, in Matthew chapter 25 verse 31 through verse 46.

This was a popular passage in the representation of the last judgment. So it is not surprising then, that there should be some misunderstanding of the teaching of this passage if we can show that it does not refer to a general judgment.

A number of years ago I was traveling in the western part of the city of Dallas on a streetcar. I’m not trying to contend with Mark over who’s the oldest; we’ll keep that a secret between us. [Laughter] I was uh very interested however to know that Mark is laying claim to being aged, as I have been laying claim to that. But anyway, I remember when there were streetcars in Dallas, and I doubt that he can top that [laughter].

And I was riding on a streetcar, and I was reflecting on this uh this past week remembering those street cars that we used to have in Dallas and thinking that really it’s not such a bad idea to get on a streetcar. You at least were forced into conversation with people who sat down right next to you. And I sat down one day going out to preach by a man who was a clergyman in another denomination in this city. We sooner or later we soon fell into conversation as I remember, and naturally the thought turned to biblical things, and I was young and anxious to see if he really was one of the faithful, so I asked him was he really a Christian man?

And in the course of the conversation, we got into a debate over the principle of grace. It was obvious that he did not believe that men were saved through grace but rather were saved through good works. And soon, he cited this passage and said, this is the passage in which we have the last judgment, and if you read this passage, you’ll see immediately that we are to be judged according to our works, and with that he cited, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me. And since this was the passage that had to do with the last judgment and since the judgment seemed to be concerned with deeds to these my brethren, that seemed to settle the question for him.

As many of you know I was brought to faith in the Lord Jesus by the preaching of Donald Gray Barnhouse, and he was a Presbyterian man who, as I, had been instructed in the Westminster Confession of Faith. But in one of his books he makes reference to the fact that in matters of judgment we must pay attention to the various jurisdictions of God in his judgments of different classes of his creatures. He said, suppose you met a man who was stupid enough to tell you that he was going down to court to listen to a trial, and that the case involved counterfeiting, murder, arson, embezzlement and parking the car by a fireplug. And you ask him where the trial is to be held, and he replies, well it’s at the federal, state, county, municipal police court. And you ask him if he isn’t a little confused

and he answers moronically, so Dr. Barnhouse said, oh, is there more than one trial?

[Laughter]

Well in our legal system there is more than one court. We do have federal courts. We have state courts, and we have country tribunals, and we have city tribunals and we do have a police court – at least I think we do. And it is not therefore surprising that in God’s system of tribunals we should have different judgments.

Now it is my opinion that in this passage we have the judgment of the living Gentiles. But before we look at it let me remind you of the different judgments that are set forth in the word of God. There is first of all, our Lord’s suffering on Calvary’s cross. That is called a judgment. On the cross, Jesus Christ was judged for sin, and therefore those who have come to believe our Lord Jesus Christ do not have any judgment, because we have borne our judgment in our substitute. We do not bear the penalty of sin because we have already borne it in our substitute the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not have to bear the condemnation for sin, because we have already borne it in our substitute the Lord Jesus, and we shall not be asked to bear again the penalty which has already been borne by us in our substitute. It would be unjust of God to have two payments for the judgment of our sin.

There is also the believer’s self-judgment according to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. That has to do with our daily sins, and it is our responsibility to examine ourselves, to judge ourselves as we live our Christian lives, confessing the sin that the Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance in order that we may have restoration with the Father. The believer’s self-judgment.

We read in the Scriptures, too, that we shall all – that is, all believers, the context makes plain – appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, and there we are to receive rewards, so there is a judgment that believers look forward to, which is called the judgment of believers for rewards.

The Bible also speaks of the judgment of living Israelites with a reference to the Messianic kingdom. It speaks of the judgment of living Gentiles here in Matthew chapter 25. It also speaks of the judgment of the fallen angels; their judgment is still future. And finally, it speaks of the judgment of the unbelieving dead in Revelation chapter 20 verse 11 through verse 15, that very familiar passage in which we have the Great White Throne Judgment. So it is my belief that we have, in Matthew chapter 25, the judgment of living Gentiles, and the goal of this judgment is entrance into the Messianic kingdom.

Now the picture, I think, is very plain. The Lord Jesus is at his Second Advent upon a throne. The angels, the holy angels are about him. There are two groups before him, and there are several things that are told us about this scene. The first thing is that before him are living Gentiles.

Now I want you to notice verse 32, particularly, and before him shall be gathered all the nations. The word, nation, is the translation of a Greek word *ethnos*. *Ethnos* often is translated “nation,” and then it is translated often “Gentiles,” particularly in the plural. We have here gathered before the Lord Jesus, all the *ethnae* all the Gentiles.

Now if you will take your concordance – I’ve done this again just to check my old notes of this point this past week – if you will take the concordance and look up the term translated here, nation,s in the Gospel of Matthew, you will find it occurs a number of times ,and never does it refer to any other person than a Gentile.

Now we gather from this then that we are to give to force to this word all the nations, all the Gentiles. So what we have then, as the subjects of this judgment, is the living Gentiles. We have this, by the way in this very chapter, in this very discourse in chapter 24 and verse 7, we read, “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” Then in verse 9, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.” And then in verse 14, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come,” passages that seem to have in mind

Gentile nations. So then what we have here is the gathering of the Gentiles around the throne of the Lord Jesus with the holy angels.

Now I say that this has to do with the living Gentiles, because there is no indication here of any resurrection. If there had been reference to a resurrection, then we would have to change this in order to make it agree with the fact that they are resurrected, but when I say the term, living Gentiles, I mean Gentiles who have lived through the period of the Great Tribulation, and now are before our Lord at his Second Advent.

The goal of this judgment is entrance into the kingdom. We read in verse 34, “Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” What time does this judgment take place? Well the context I think makes very plain that the time is the time of the Second Advent. We have just read about the Second Advent and here it is reiterated, when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him. So, the time of this judgment is the time of the Second Advent.

Where shall this judgment take place? Well, we do not have any specific statement here in the context of this particular passage but we have reference to the Advent, and the Advent of our Lord is to the earth. In Zechariah we are told his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, and in the Book of Acts, when he departed, we read in the Book of Acts that it was said, then this same Jesus that you have seen ascend into heaven from the Mount of Olives shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. So we assume then that his Second Advent is visible, it is material and he shall stand on the Mount of Olives.

The implication of this, it seems to me, is that this is a judgment that takes place on the earth immediately after his Second Advent. The most startling thing about this to me, however, is not that the subjects of this judgment are the living Gentiles or that it is the time of the Second Advent and that the place is the earth. The most remarkable thing

about it is what might seem to be a very obvious thing; is that our Lord Jesus is the judge, the Son of man is the judge.

Now that is an amazing revelation, and the reason it is amazing, I’d like to try to bring home to you. Because remember, now let us think for a moment about our Lord’s status at this time. He was in the days of his flesh. He therefore came in the likeness of sinful flesh – not in sin, not in sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh. He looked as other men looked and furthermore in just a few days he would be upon a cross at Calvary lending clarity to the apostle’s statement that he was crucified in weakness. So the Lord Jesus in the flesh, looking just as any other man, makes this amazing statement that the Son of man shall come in glory, and he shall be the ultimate judge of all of the nations of the earth.

It is a remarkable revelation, and it is, of course, an amazing claim on his part. In fact, with Calvary only three days off, when he would be hanging there crying out, “My God My God why hast Thou forsaken me?” Why it’s staggering to contemplate the change that shall take place from that, that cross-work and the Second Advent when he stands as the sovereign of this universe. So it is I say, a statement which is amazing in its revelation and remarkable in the claim that our Lord makes for himself. This weak person, to be the judge of the whole universe? Why it’s obvious that only a madman or else a very truthful man could make a statement like this.

You may also notice, too, that there is no reference to a separation or division of these nations by anything that our Lord does. It’s almost as if the power of separation and division rests in a glance from him. So we have this amazing picture, then, of sovereign activity on the part of the Lord Jesus, and yet he was a weak individual apparently who makes this remarkable claim.

The dogmaticians of the Reformation days made a great deal over the Second Advent and judgment teaching. They thought that the doctrine of the judgment of the world by the Lord Jesus was an extremely important truth, and they treated it not only

theoretically, but they also treated it ethically and morally. They pointed out in their teaching that the fact that we have here the revelation that the Lord Jesus is coming back to the earth, and he is going to judge all the nations, we have here indication that the first and second comings of Jesus Christ should be distinguished.

That at the first coming, he came, it is true, to do his atoning work. He came in gentleness. He came in meekness. He came in weakness, but there is coming a time when he shall come in strength and power and sovereignty. And they made a great deal over that, and I think rightly so. It’s something for us to remember.

But they also made another claim or two with reference to it. They laid a great deal of stress upon the fact that if it is true that the Lord Jesus is the judge of this universe, then we should be fearful of the fact that we must ultimately stand before this great king and sovereign, and driven by divine fear and divine awe, we should be kept from sin, since we do face that judgment.

Other dogmaticians agreed, essentially, with this and went on to affirm that the doctrine of the last judgment was the greatest prophylactic against sin and incentive to good works that is found in the Bible. There is also, it seems to me, a point about that that is extremely important. If it is true that the Lord Jesus is to stand in ultimate judgment over men, then that should be the greatest prophylactic with reference to sin, and it should be one of the most tremendous of all incentives to good works on the part of his believing sheep.

Well now we have a word for the sheep. You will notice, incidentally, there are no political implications in this at all, that the sheep are on the right and the goats are on the left. So we have now a word for the right, and the word for the right is commendation. “Then shall the King say to them on his right hand,” we read in the 34th verse, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” The sheep receive the blessing of the Great Shepherd who is the ultimate judge of all the living Gentiles.

Now we want to look very carefully at this 34th verse, so I want you to notice first the wording of the blessing. Come ye blessed of my Father. Now notice that he does not say, Come ye blessed by your good works. He says, Come ye blessed of my Father. It is not of works that they are blessed. It is of the Father. In other words, the ultimate source of the blessing of the sheep is the Father in heaven. It is not really a text that teaches that men are saved through good works. The blessing is the blessing that proceeds from the Father. He does not even say, Come ye blessed by the decisions of your free will. There is nothing here that indicates that it is the decision of one’s free will that is the source of our blessing.

When we get to heaven, we shall not find people up there who will be saying, I do praise the Lord that I have been the recipient salvation since I have believed of my own free will. It is remarkable when you read the Book of Revelation through you do not read any such sentiment. You do not read anything other than that they who are in heaven are praising the Lord and the Lamb. They attribute all of their salvation to the things that the Lamb has done as a result of the Father’s purpose and will. It is the biblical teaching that we are blessed of our Father who has brought it to pass, that there is a redemptive work by the Son and who, through the Holy Spirit, works on the hearts of men whose wills are in bondage to sin, to bring them to a decision that is favorable for themselves and towards God.

We do not deny volition; we deny free volition. There is a world of difference between denial of volition and denial of free volition. We do say, men must make a decision, but we say that men cannot make a decision acceptable to God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that makes the unwilling willing. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that brings us from darkness and bondage to sin to light and to freedom of the salvation of Jesus Christ. This is what we say. This is what we affirm. This is what we say, the Bible affirms, and incidentally, it affirms it of us after we

have become Christians, too, for we read, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

It is the biblical teaching that if there is anything good out of man that comes out of man, that God honors and blesses, it is the product of the grace of God. Come ye blessed of my Father. The Lord Jesus is sound in his theology. [Laughter] Come ye blessed of my Father. It’s almost blasphemy to say something like that, isn’t it? And the only reason I say it is because there are so many who are so confused in the evangelical church over this fundamental principle, that we are saved through sovereign work of our great God in heaven. There are not two sovereigns: a sovereign man who possesses sovereign free will and a sovereign God in heaven. There is only one sovereign, and it is through his sovereign work that we are saved.

And when we get to heaven, we shall find that they in heaven, the angels who have observed what has happened, and especially the redeemed who know what has happened to them, they know where to put the crown. And they do not put the crown on good works. They do not put the crown on free will. They put the crown on our Savior who offered the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Now this is emphasized further when he says, come ye blessed of my Father, inherit. Have you ever received an inheritance? Well if you’ve ever received an inheritance, you’ll know you didn’t earn it. If there is one thing that is characteristic of an inheritance, it is that it is not earned. It is something that comes to you, by the death of another. He says, inherit the kingdom. Inheritance is a work of grace, a word of grace. Inheritance means that it comes not by our works, but as a free gift through legal processes. So the entrance into the kingdom is an entrance that is inherited by virtue of the death of our substitute, our representative the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then he says, a kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Why isn’t that striking? The Lord Jesus believes that this entrance into heaven – or I’m sorry, into the kingdom – the Lord Jesus believes that this entrance into the kingdom is

prepared for these Gentiles who are sheep from the foundation of the world. It is all prepared for them. In other words, there, it would seem, has been an agreement in the eternal Trinity over the status of the sheep, and it is that they shall have a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

Now we often talk about the doctrine of election, and I often have said that election is the fountain of all of our blessings. This is why we talk about election. This is why the Bible has so much to say about the doctrine of election, because ultimately election is the fountain of all of God’s sovereign work toward us. Election is the fountain, or the fountain of all of blessing, to turn it around another way, the fountain of all blessing is the sovereign unconditional election by God of a people. So that’s why we praise the God who elected, because that’s the fountain of our blessings.

If we talk about salvation, we are talking about a blessing into which we have entered but that blessing had its origin in the sovereign activity of our triune God in ages past. Whatever the blessing is that we are experiencing at the moment—even individual good works are said in Scripture to be the result of the sovereign activity of our triune God before the ages. The Bible says, we are saved by grace through faith that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them. Everything that we have proceeds out of the sovereign work of electing grace. That’s why we talk about it. That’s why we think it’s great.

Well at least I do. I don’t know about you, but I do. [Laughter] I love this great teaching because it’s the biblical teaching. Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. It’s not simply taught in the Gospel of Matthew. It’s taught all through the New Testament. The Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 9 speaks along the identical lines when he says in that 9th verse, who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the

world began. The apostles were hung up on this doctrine of a sovereign God because they learned it from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in support for his statement, he says in verse 35 and verse 36, “For I was hungry, and ye gave me food: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” So he justifies the inheritance of the kingdom because of their good works.

Now isn’t that striking? Just in the light of what I’ve said. It would seem that he would have simply said, “Well you have inherited these blessings because you have believed in sovereign grace.” Well now there is another aspect to this truth, and it’s the same truth, but it has different facets just like a diamond when you look at it, it has beautiful facets to it. You see, these simple deeds – and incidentally, they are simple deeds that anybody could do – these simple deeds are the products of this grace. They are the inevitable issues of this grace.

They are not the ground of our blessing; they are the evidences of the blessing. There is a great deal of difference between the ground of something, and the evidence of it. Paul said, “We are saved by grace through faith that not of ourselves; it’s the gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus,” but then he adds, “for good works.”

Or James does not deny the doctrine of salvation by grace when he says, “Faith without works is dead.” Because you see, the true, living, vital faith in Jesus Christ must issue in good works, but it is the living faith that justifies. One is the ground, the faith that rests in the atoning sacrifice, the shedding of the blood, the cross; the other is the inevitable evidence of it. That’s what he speaks about. He says, you’ve inherited the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world, for the evidence of it is you have acted in this way, and incidentally every true believer in the Lord Jesus who talks about sovereign grace should manifest that great fact in the simple activities of daily life, such as,

when there’s a saint in need, help the saint. When there’s a saint who is struggling in difficulty, minister to that saint. A saint who needs mercy, minister to that saint. That is the inevitable issue of the man who has truly grasped the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

And I think in Believers Chapel it is something that should characterize us. If we know a saint who is having a difficult time, we should have mercy and sympathy for them, and not only that, but we should help them. We shouldn’t stand off and say, we will pray that you may have help which we ourselves may very easily give. It is our responsibility to our Lord, and it’s our responsibility to the saints. And it would be my prayer and my hope that Believers Chapel would not be known so much—well I don’t know whether I ought to say it that way [laughter]—be known as much for its sound doctrine, should be known as much also for its sound practice of Christian lives, in its manifestation toward the saints.

And really, if we all have the love for the doctrines of the grace of God that so many of you have, it should be evident when someone comes in our midst and stays for a while. May God speak to us to that end.

Well, like all the saints, these sheep are surprised that mercy has been shown to them. I do not doubt that there will not be any preacher – I can only speak for preachers, cause that’s what I am – I do not believe that there will be any preacher who shall enter the kingdom of God who shall not be continually surprised that mercy has been shown to him. And these sheep are surprised at the blessing. Lord, when did we see thee a stranger and took thee in, when did we see thee naked and clothe thee, when did we see thee sick, and in prison, and came unto thee? And the king shall say to them, incidentally, that sense of surprise grows as we come through our Christian life to understand how wicked we really are.

Now he says, by the way, that inasmuch, when they when they express surprise, he says, why I say to you inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my

brethren, ye have done it unto me. Well now here’s another aspect of this particular section. Who are the brethren? He said, he’s divided all the nation or the Gentiles into the sheep – they’re over here, and the goats are over here – and he says to these sheep inasmuch as ye have done it unto these my brethren. Well, it cannot be a reference to the goats, because they are not these, his brethren. There is a third party here. What is meant by these my brethren?

Well if you take the context of this particular discourse, and its setting in the setting of the last days when the Nation Israel is upon the earth, being persecuted, preparatory to receiving being through divine discipline, prepared for reception of the kingdom promised to them, to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, and if you’ll realize in the Gospel of Matthew it is stated right in the beginning, the Lord Jesus is a Jew, his genealogy traces him back to Abraham through David, it seems clear that these my brethren are the Jewish believers of that future period of time upon the earth when the judgments of God are being poured out.

When anti-Semitism shall reach its height, there are some Gentiles, who by love for the God of heaven, shall minister to the Jewish people who are believers, and thus in the ministry to them, minister to the Lord Jesus himself who has identified himself with them, they are my brethren. I need not remind you of the story of Rahab, but you know that Rahab believed the promises that Israel would be given the land, and so when the spies came in to spy at the land in Jericho, she took them in and sent them out another way protecting them from the Jerichoites. And that was an evidence of her faith, James says—not the ground of her faith; an evidence of it. Faith without works is dead. Well, here we have the sheep are a whole collection of Rahabs who have ministered to the Jewish people of the tribulation period, who are believers. Justification, you know, leads inevitably to sanctification. And that is what we have here.

Now I don’t want to dismiss without a word, at least, for the left and in verse in 41 and following we have a word for the left. I started to say, leftists, but I won’t say that,

because we don’t want to inject too much politics into this. He has a word for the left, for the goats. “Then shall he say to them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” It is almost the exact opposite of the preceding. We had heaven, or the kingdom, and now we have hell. One is to depart into the kingdom; the other is to depart into fire. Incidentally to depart into fire is to depart from the Lord Jesus so there is a double evil here.

And notice, too, that the Lord Jesus says they are responsible for their destiny, for we read, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared not for you but for the devil and his angels. Isn’t that striking? When we preach the sovereignty of our great God in heaven, we also preach, not the free will of man, but human responsibility. We are responsible because of our sin, and we cannot plead that God has chosen some and he has not chosen me, and therefore I am not guilty. The Bible always holds men responsible for their deeds, and they are responsible.

Well you know the rest of it. They come and ask in surprise because you see there are people who are lost who will be surprised that they are lost – that’s the sad thing about being lost. Men are blind. They do not realize that they sit in our congregations. They even hear a sermon on the grace of God, his sovereign grace and they are lost, and they are surprised, ultimately, that they are lost. And these are surprised. When did we see thee naked when did we see thee sick, and we didn’t minister to thee? And the Lord Jesus shall say to them, verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. Isn’t it striking that the thing of which they are guilty is the sin of omission.

Now when I was growing up in the Presbyterian Church, we were taught that there is a difference between the sin of commission and the sin of omission. There are sins of commission of which we are guilty, and there are sins of omission, but we were taught we were guilty of them, too, rightfully so. Did you know—well, this of course is one of the reasons why we have such a poor sense of sin in the 20th Century; we’ve lost

some of these things that are very important. If you ask a person, is that man a sinner?, he would think that you mean, is he an adulterer, is he a thief, is he a burglar, is he a murderer, whereas the Bible would give an affirmative answer, of course to everyone, but an affirmative answer if he’s guilty of envy or jealousy.

If you say to a person you are a sinner, he thinks that he you’re accusing him of some great outbreking sin, like adultery. But in the Bible, in the Bible, three of the greatest condemnations of sin are against sins of omission. Let me remind you of them.

The Lord Jesus said, the Holy Spirit is coming, and he’s going to convict the world of sin righteousness and judgment of sin because they believe not on me. The Apostle Paul says, if any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed, and the Lord Jesus says, inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me. Sins of omission bring us under divine condemnation.

And finally he concludes by saying, and these, over here on the right, these sheep—well I should start with the left [laughter] these; these over on the left. These goats, they shall go away into everlasting punishment: but these, these sheep into life everlasting. Incidentally, the same adjective that is used to describe the punishment is used to describe the life. In other words, the length of punishment is the same as the length of life. It is eternal.

There is not one inch of standing room for a universalist or a restorationist in this text. Everlasting punishment is the teaching of the Bible, just as much as everlasting life is the teaching of the Bible. There is a story about Mr. Whitfield which I like. I have it in the Believers Bible Bulletin. Mr. Whitfield had an uncanny ability to look out over an audience and realize what they were thinking, just as I’m able to look out, and I am able to tell what you are thinking. [Laughter]

He was preaching on verse 10 of this particular 25th chapter, and the door was shut. He was making a point that the time is coming when there is not going to be an opportunity for men to respond to the gospel message, and as he was going along, two

fellows who were way back in the crowd turned to one another because they were kind of making fun over of the things that Mr. Whitfield was saying. and they were saying, what does it matter if the door is shut? Another will open.

And just a few sentences after that, Mr. Whitfield said, “It may be possible that there is some careless trifling person in this audience, who is trying to ward off the impressive force of these words by saying, what does it matter if the door is shut, another one will open?” And these two men were rather paralyzed by what he had said, because it was obvious he had not heard them. And then he went on to say, “Yes, another door will open, and I’ll tell you what door it is. It’s the door into the bottomless pit, the door of hell, the door which hides the eyes of the angels from the terrors and horrors of damnation. There is only one door, and he is our Lord Jesus Christ. I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture. So I say briefly to you, come, enter the door, the door that delivers from divine judgment which is sure to come. May God speak to your hearts. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these passages from the word of God which so beautifully magnify the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus and the sovereignty of divine grace and the certainty of divine judgment. And O Father, if there is someone here who would be surprised to discover that they are lost, O give the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit in such a way that they sense their guilt and peril and turn to him who is able to save to the uttermost, who has offered the atoning sacrifice for sinners. O God, work in our hearts to that end.

May grace mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“The Judgment of the Living Gentiles” by S. Lewis Johnson
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