



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“The Mission of the Twelve,”– TRANSCRIPT

Now will you turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 9? Matthew chapter 9, and the Scripture reading will begin at verse 35, and I'm just going to read a rather brief section. We are going to try to cover, in the morning message, the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter and the entire 10<sup>th</sup> chapter. So, to save a little time for the exposition, in which I will read the entire section, we'll take a brief section now for our Scripture reading. Matthew chapter 9 and verse 35,

“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.’ And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; the first, Simon, who is called Peter,

and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alpheus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddeus;”

(Now, it’s difficult for me to pronounce that Thaddeus because I’ve always pronounced Thaddeus, THAD-eus, [laughter] but in my edition the accent is on the “AE,” so if you have a complaint about that, I agree with you.)

“Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, ‘Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

May God bless this reading of his word.

The subject for this morning in the continuation of our study of Matthew is “The Mission of the Twelve,” and we’re turning to chapter 9 verse 35 and seeking in our forty-three minutes to expound the remainder of chapter 9 and the entirety of chapter 10.

There are two great lessons that come from the mission of the Twelve, and one of them is dispensational in nature. We have been noticing, as we have been going through the Gospel of Matthew that the thing that Matthew has primarily been attempting to set forth is the Messianic authority and position of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I think that is pithily and concisely and succinctly summarized in the account of the Crucifixion and of the superscription that was placed above the cross of our Lord Jesus.

Now, we know from reading all of the gospels that the superscriptions above the cross consisted of these words: This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Matthew’s account, however, puts it much more concisely. He has simply, “This is Jesus, the King of

the Jews.” And everything in the account of the ministry of our Lord according to Matthew is directed toward that: the presentation of him as the King of the Jews.

Now in the preceding two chapters, we have been stressing the fact that the King, when he came, was to perform certain miracles. They were his credentials. And we have looked at chapters 8 and 9 in which a series of miracles have been presented by Matthew in order to confirm the fact that he was the promised Messiah. Now, however, the expansionist work of the divine enterprise is launched. And it has a very strange direction. In the passage that we read from Scripture, the Lord Jesus took the Twelve and he said to them, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter not, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

That seems a very strange thing for Jesus to say. In fact, what it means, very simply, is that if you had been in the land of Palestine or in the nearby lands, the ministry of the Lord Jesus was not for you. Do not go to the Gentiles. Do not go the Samaritans, but go to Israel. There was a unique direction to the ministry of the Lord Jesus. That seems very strange, but the reason for it, as we have been saying, is that Israel was the recipient of the promises of the Old Testament. The Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant were made with Israel in mind. Those covenants contained provisions for Gentiles, but the ministry was to go first to the Jew, and that is the program suggested by these words of our Lord.

The expansionist work of the divine enterprise is something that any businessman could understand. I know that you don’t realize this, and couldn’t imagine it to be true, but I used to work once myself [laughter]. I was in the insurance business for eight years, and I know a few things about business – very few – but I do know a few things. I know that if you want to start a new business, one of the first things that you have to be sure about is your staff. I know also that if you want to expand a business, and it’s a business in which you are merchandizing a product, you need to develop a larger force of salesmen. So here in this expansionist program of the Lord Jesus, he calls to himself

twelve men who are going to be apostles, and who are going to carry on the work of making the gospel kingdom known.

There is another important lesson here, and it concerns the practical ministry of Christians such as you and I are. Christian service is a necessity, and it will involve terror and joy. It will involve terror because we are sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, and we can expect opposition because our Lord had opposition, and the servants shall not be differed from their lords. But at the same time, it will involve joy, for we know that we’ll not only have the assurance of the providential hand of God in protecting, but we will also have his union with us as we proclaim the message of the Lord Jesus.

In fact, in the last statement or so of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter, in which he says, “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me,” there is a proclamation of that mysterious oneness that exists between the Lord Jesus and all that are related to him. To receive his legates is to receive him, and to receive him is to receive the Father who sent him. And that is one of the great joys of the ministry of the word of God, and I do not speak simply of the man who stands behind the pulpit, but of any individual Christian. One of the great joys of Christian service is that when we serve him, he is with us. We are joined together in an indissoluble union that cannot be broken.

Let’s look at our passage now, and, first of all, at verses 35 through 38 of chapter 9, which form a kind of introduction to the passage that follows. Matthew, having recorded the number of credentials of the Messiah, states, in the 35<sup>th</sup> verse, that “Jesus went about all the villages and cities, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of sickness and every disease among the people.” There is one thing that stands out in that brief introduction to his ministry, and it is this: that the Lord Jesus did not carry on a ministry in uncertainty.

The Scripture states that he taught, that he proclaimed or preached, and that he healed. In fact, I think you could summarize these things by saying that his ministry

consisted of exposition of the will of God, application of the will of God as he proclaimed that message with the authority of a herald – for that’s the meaning of the term, “preach” – and then he illustrated it by means of the healing of every sickness and every disease among the people. So that there was exposition, there was application, and there was illustration; there was no uncertainty in the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Jeffrey Heywood, who was headmaster at an outstanding English public school – incidentally, the English call private schools public schools, as probably most of you know. Someone has said, “If there’s a wrong way to do anything, the British will be sure to find it” [laughter]. And there are indications that that has a measure of truth to it, but Mr. Heywood, headmaster of a great English public (private) school has said that “The great problem and tragedy of this age is that we are standing at the crossroads, and the signposts have fallen down.” The Lord Jesus did not minister with any sense of uncertainty. He knew exactly what he wanted to say, and he said it with authority.

This passage also speaks of the compassion of the Lord Jesus, and he teaches us who are engaged in the presentation of the Lord Jesus. When I say, “us,” now, throughout the message, it will not be simply the preacher, but any individual who is related to Jesus Christ. He teaches us how to look at men, and he looks at men from the standpoint of their inner makeup, and he looks at all men as being shepherdless apart from him. When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them because they were faint, they were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. They are shepherdless, and he sees them in that light.

And furthermore, he tells us how the sight should touch us. He is touched with compassion. When God in heaven looks down on men, he is touched with pity, and when the incarnate divinity looks upon men, he is touched with compassion. And the reason for this is the condition of the sheep. They are dejected. They are despairing. They are disintegrated. They have been lacerated. They have been flayed and harassed –

all of these words are descriptive of the sheep as they are set forth here. They are faint. They were scattered abroad.

They are, to use Milton’s words, they are the objects of the ministry of men who are “blind mouths.” That’s one of the most beautiful expressions of false ministers that I have ever come across: blind mouths. Instead of feeding people with the word of God, ministers are themselves expecting to be fed financially by those to whom they minister. They are not in the ministry of the word, because of the truth of God, but because of the truth of God, but because of what they may get out of it. It’s no wonder that Milton goes on to say the hungry sheep looked up and are not feed. So, the sheep are dejected and despairing, and the Lord Jesus sees them as shepherdless.

This is a beautiful description of our day, the religious day in which we are living. Because if you look out over the religious world and at the theology and biblical beliefs and ministry being given by outstanding theologians, you cannot help but say the Lord Jesus was speaking about our day, if not directly then indirectly, because the hungry sheep are looking up, and they are not being fed.

Well having said that, Matthew goes on to speak about the call of the Twelve. And the appointment of the Twelve is given for us in verse 1 through verse 4 of chapter 10. And we have already read these verses; I will not read them again. In these verses, Matthew points out that the Lord Jesus chose the Twelve, they did not choose him. He called the Twelve, they did not invite themselves. And he appointed them to the ministry of apostleship, they were not self-appointed. Isn’t it striking that there are twelve men who are described here as belonging to the apostles. We know a great deal about three of them. We know something about three more of them. But we know practically nothing about six of them. There are six obscure apostles here.

Now of the three about which we know a great deal – Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John – it’s striking to look at the Book of Acts in the light of the fact that we know a great deal about them and see how the Book of Acts treats them. Now,

we hear a little bit about Peter in the first part of the Book of Acts, but along about the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, the last thing that we read about Peter is that he escapes from prison. We see him hammering at Mary’s door, we see him brought in among the saints who had been praying that he might be released from prison. We see him have a brief, eager talk with his friends, and then he vanishes to hide in another place. And the only other mention that we have of Peter in the entire Book of Acts is the reference to him in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter at the great council held in Jerusalem about the admission of Gentiles into the church.

The second of the three, James the son of Zebedee, the only thing we read about him of any significance is that he was killed off in a kind of parenthesis in the book, and that’s all we read about this apostle.

And the third, John, appears in the Book of Acts in two places. Once in connection with a miracle Peter performed as a kind of silent companion, and then, again, before the Sanhedrin. And think of Paul himself, the larger part of the Book of Acts is concerned primarily with the Apostle Paul, and the Book of Acts closes with him left in his own hide house, within sight of trial and sentence, and neither the original author of the Book of Acts nor any other author after that has bothered to write three little lines about what happened to him when he was imprisoned in Rome. We are left hanging, so to speak.

All of this testifies to the fact that the true hero of the word of God is not man, but the true hero of the word of God is God. And in the reading of Holy Scripture we are always to have him before us. These three apostles, Peter, James and John, do not really loom large in the work of God. Yet, in the case of the six men whose names only we know of them, they are not forgotten.

And I learn from this that all work that is unrecorded is not necessarily forgotten by God. For we read in the last part of the Book of Revelation, when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, the foundations of the New Jerusalem are the names of the

Twelve Apostles, so that the six obscure apostles have their names written into the foundations of the New Jerusalem, instructing us in the fact that even obscure, unrecorded work is remembered by God and is important as far as he is concerned. These men were appointed to be legates of the Lord Jesus. Mark tells us that they were appointed to be with him. Now I must say I like that expression, because I think that is the first prerequisite for effective ministry. No one is ever an effective minister of the word of God who has not first of all spent time with him – with God – in Christ. And so the apostles were appointed to spend time with him first, and then to preach. And you cannot have effective ministry of the word of God if that man does not come from the presence of God. That really is the secret of an effective ministry of the word of God.

Well they have authority, and their authority is to go in and preach, to heal the sick, to cleanse the lepers, and – if there should be some of our Charismatic friends in the audience, I want to say to you in love that the next class is important – raise the dead. For you see, one of the characteristics of this ministry of presenting credentials is raising up the dead. And if we should say today that healing of the New Testament type should take place, we shall also include raising of the dead. And if that should happen over a number of cases, I’m willing to grant that you are right and I am wrong, and I will admit it. Just raise a few people from the dead for me [laughter]. This was unusual ministry designed to authenticate a message which was: the King is at hand, therefore the kingdom of the heavens is near.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> verse, we come to the charge that the Lord Jesus gave and really the beginning of the discourse, “The Mission to the Twelve.” And this, incidentally, is the second of five major discourses in the Book of Matthew, the first being the Sermon on the Mount. Let me read, now, beginning with verse 8, since we have read from verse 5, through verse 15. The Lord Jesus gave the commission:

“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye

have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go from there. And when ye come into an house, greet it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it (incidentally, a worthy house is one that is predisposed to receive Jesus; not worthy because of some merit the individuals possess): but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.”

There are five themes in this discourse, and this is the first: Mission and Ministry. And the mission is described in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> verses. They were not to go to the Gentiles; they were to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. When you read this, you are not surprised to discover that some students of Scripture have wondered if this really is genuine. Can you imagine the Lord Jesus saying to his apostles, “Do not go to the Gentile?” Can you imagine him saying, don’t go to us? Don’t go to the Samaritans; go only to Israel? And so in the light of the difficulty of imagining that, some have suggested this must not be original, but inserted by a Jew later as the words of our Lord.

Why, the very uniqueness of it is evidence of its genuineness, and the reason for it is simply this: that he was presenting the kingdom to those for whom it had been promised. The ministry that follows is the proclamation, the kingdom of heaven is at hand; the authentication, the apostles themselves were to perform signs (Paul later speaks of the signs of the apostles “being wrought in you Corinthians, in your midst.”); and then he has words concerning provision. These words concerning provision are very

interesting, particularly for a preacher. “Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, not a bag for your money, neither two coats, neither shoes.”

Now that little phrase, “neither shoes” shows that not one of the apostles was a woman, because no woman could ever take a journey without having more than one pair of shoes [laughter]. I don’t know why it is that women have to have so many pairs of shoes. But men have, usually, two or three or four, and if there’s some who have feminine inclinations, they may have five or six [more laughter], but women have anywhere from twenty to forty pairs of shoes and think nothing of it. They have to have one for every dress or every occasion. Now the fact that they had only one pair of shoes meant that all women had declined to become apostles. [Laughter]

Now these words, incidentally, of instruction concerning provision, it seems to me are designed to bring these apostles into the place where they would be totally above suspicion in the ministry of the word. The Lord Jesus, evidently, desired that there be no criticism whatsoever of the financial situation in which they found themselves. They were not to take money, they were not to take any extra. They were to be above suspicion.

And furthermore – and I think perhaps even more importantly – they were to sense that they were completely dependent upon God. By the way, when the rabbis taught the word of God, they did not make the word of God costly. A rabbi was bound by law to give his teaching freely. He was absolutely forbidden to take money for teaching the law which Moses had freely received from God. And it seems to me that these words of our Lord here do have something to say to us today, in which in so many of our churches the Lord’s work is carried on in a way that is really not completely in harmony with holy Scripture. They did not take up collections. They did not demand fees for the seminars that they would conduct.

The second theme is the theme of Peril and Persecution. It begins in the 16<sup>th</sup> verse. Will you listen now as I read verses 16 through 23:

“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak (incidentally, this applies only to the apostles; does not apply to you young, fledgling preachers; you will discover if you do not prepare your messages ahead of time, when you stand up you really won’t have anything to say). For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved (incidentally, that’s not a gospel message; that’s simply: he that endures to the end shall be physically delivered). But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.”

#### Peril and Persecution.

Isn’t it a strange thing for a shepherd to say those opening words of verse 16: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves”? For the picture is very vivid. It is a picture of a helpless little flock of sheep in the midst of a group of wolves who are standing about with gleaming, gnashing teeth, waiting to set upon the helpless flock. And the Lord Jesus says that it is he who is sending them forth in the midst of the wolves. The reason for this is that this is a good picture of the situation. For the truth of God is in the

world, very similar to this. It is like sheep in the midst of wolves, and the world is anxious to seize upon it and to tear it to pieces.

The only thing that I think is of some significance in this section is the last statement of verse 23, in which he says, “You shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.” There, as at the end of preceding section, he looks on to the end of time, and affirms that the ministry of the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom shall not be consummated until the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. I wish we had time to say more about it, but the subject will come up in Matthew chapter 24 again.

Now let’s turn to the third of the sections, in which we have Comfort and Confession. Verse 24 through verse 33. I hope you have your New Testaments with you, and you’re reading along with me,

“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not (notice three times he urges them to not be fearful) therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

Comfort and Confession. The apostles, the Lord Jesus says, may expect to be treated just as he was treated.

But, there are three reasons why they should not be fearful. They should not be fearful in the first place, because, ultimately, they shall be vindicated. What they say and what they understand in darkness, they speak in light. And what others hear in the ear, that proclaim upon the housetops, he says, but, he states that there is nothing covered which shall not be revealed. There is nothing hidden that shall not be known. There shall be an ultimate vindication.

Furthermore, do not fear because they are able, only, to kill the body, but the soul is the important thing. And finally, do not fear because God’s loving providence cares for you. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? That’s a beautiful expression. If you turn over to the Gospel of Luke, you’ll discover that he says, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?” And not one of them is forgotten before God. Two sparrows for one farthing; five sparrows for two farthings; evidently, if you bought in quantity, you got one thrown in free [laughter]. Two for one, but five for two.

Now the indication of that is that there is one that is so worthless it’s just thrown in because of the two farthings. It seems to me it’s probably that sparrow that our Lord is speaking about here. And he says that not one of them shall fall on the ground without your father. We’re inclined to think of that as a sparrow that falls about the ground dead. Perhaps that’s the meaning. Some interpreters have said, however, that what is really meant by the word fall is not the fall of death, but the fall of a sparrow that falls to the ground and lights upon the ground to hop around for some food. And if so, it, too, is a beautiful picture of the providential care of God—he’s even concerned and knowledgeable about the little sparrow that comes down to the ground to hop around upon it to look for food.

And he also says that the very hairs of your head are all numbered. That does not mean, incidentally, that he counts the hairs on our heads, though that’s a beautiful thought. That, however, does not require a great deal of ability for some of us, at least. It wouldn’t require a great deal of ability for my head to know exactly how many hairs I have upon it. As a matter of fact, I have a good general idea myself [laughter].

Reminds me of the fellow who was very, very careful about his bald head. He had two hairs on his head, and that was all. He looked at them every morning and admired them. And one morning, as he awakened, he looked down upon the pillow and he saw the two hairs, and he said, “My God! I’m bald!” [Laughter]

Now what is meant by this [sustained laughter] fact that he numbers our hair is rather that he understands our situation, and he understands us so well that he knows exactly our situation. He numbers them – not counts them – but he regards them. That’s the point, it seems to me, of this.

The last two verses of that section, incidentally, are a very, very terrifying word. “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” I do not think that this is confession of an individual upon an individual occasion. If that were true, then Judas would be in heaven, and Peter would be lost. As far as I can tell – I cannot give you any Scripture for this – the fact that Judas was chosen as one of the Twelve Apostles would seem to suggest that at least once he identified himself with the Lord Jesus. I think if you studied Judas’ life, you will discover that there was a specific time when he began to separate himself from the Twelve.

And then there is Peter, who was characterized by, generally speaking, obedience, but there was that time when he specifically denied the Lord Jesus three times. What the text speaks about is the general bent of one’s life. And the general bent of one’s life is either the confession of him before men, or the denial of him before men. And that fact has eternal consequences.

J.P. Mahaffey, the famous scholar and man-of-the-world from Trinity College, Dublin, was once asked if he was a Christian. He said, “Yes, but not offensively so.” And by that, he meant that he was a professing Christian, but he did not allow that confession of Christ to intrude upon his life.

The true function of the preacher is given for us in the 27<sup>th</sup> verse. “What I tell you in darkness, that speak in light, and what you hear in the ear, that proclaim upon the housetops.” It is the function of the preacher to speak out of his relationship to God, and what he hears from God in private as he studies and meditates and prays concerning the holy Scripture, he proclaims in the pulpit as the word of God.

Hugh Latimer, many of you will know, was a very famous preacher in the days of King Henry VIII. Mr. Latimer was one day preaching in the presence of the king, and the time came in his message when it was necessary for him to say something that he knew would probably offend the king. The truth, you know, is like the light to sore eyes occasionally. And so, in the midst of the message, as he was getting ready to say something that might offend the king, he soliloquized with himself in the pulpit, and he cried out, “Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! The king is here!” And then he said, “Latmier! Latimer! Latimer! The King of Kings is here.” And then he proceeded to speak his rebuking word to King Henry VIII.

The true preacher is the man who preaches the word of God regardless of its consequences. What you hear in private, in darkness, speak in light. What you hear in the ear, that proclaim upon the housetops.

The next section has to do with Divisions and Discipleship. Verse 34 through verse 39. Will you listen, now as I read these verses,

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother

in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

#### Divisions and Discipleship.

There is one thing that comes through our Lord’s words very strongly. It is, of course, that he knew that the fair form of truth does not cause men to take truth to the heart. The fact that truth is beautiful does not mean that men receive it. The fact that truth makes sense does not mean that men receive it. The fact that truth is very appealing does not mean that men receive it. As a matter of fact, humanity is set in opposition against God. And so he warns the apostles in frankness and honesty that he has come – do not think that I have come to send peace upon the earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword – these are just as much the words of the Lord Jesus as any of his other words. I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

One might think that this suggests there will be the reception of the truth among the young, for the three who are responsive here are set forth as young, but the preceding reference to groups of people might seem to suggest the other, and perhaps it’s only an illustration. What he is saying, then, is that he will be a divider of men, and this is something that believers might expect. They may expect that the Lord Jesus and the truth may set the dearest of friends and the dearest of relatives one against the other. That is a fact of Christian ministry.

And further, he warns against undue love. I must confess this is the thing that has appealed to me, as I read through and studied this passage again. He states in verse 37, he that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Now think about that

for a moment. This claim to absolute supremacy in our hearts is an amazing claim. There are many people, as you well know today who say that Jesus Christ is not God. He was simply an admirable man. If you attend most of our colleges and universities, and attend their religion classes, almost all of the professors will grant that Jesus Christ was an unusual man. Many of them will even say that we must accept his teachings; it is the finest system of truth ever set forth in the realm of ethics or religion, and we should listen to it and, if possible, obey it. But at the same time, accompanying the appeal to the beauty of Christian truth is the affirmation that the Lord Jesus, of course, is not God, and that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is not necessarily the true doctrine.

Now in the light of that, I want you to take a look at this statement here. Here is a man who was, according to that thinking, simply a Jewish peasant who lived 1900 years ago. And here in this text he stands up before the whole of the human race, and he asserts his right to their love. And not only to their love, but to the love of every one of us in a deeper sense than we love those who have given birth to us or to whom we give birth. He has demanded a total relationship to him. Now, we may admire many men. And those of us who have studied Scripture and have written about Scripture and are deeply indebted to them, have great admiration for men. But the Lord Jesus demands a total relationship to him.

We do not have anything as warm as love for men who have come and gone in ages past, though I say in a popular way I love Jonathan Edwards or I love John Calvin or I love Martin Luther or something like that. But here is one who demands a total response of affection to himself. And furthermore, he doesn’t give us any explanation of justification for it. He does not say, now you must love me more than father or mother for these reasons. He just says, you must love me more than any other. And in fact, he says if you don’t do that, you are not worthy of me. He seems to think the reasonableness of this demand on men needs no explanation whatsoever.

Surely, never did any teacher, supposedly only a man, demand something like that. And never besides did any succeed in persuading generations unborn to yield to his demand as the Lord Jesus has done. And the strangest thing about this is that today, there are literally thousands, perhaps millions of people, who do love Jesus Christ more than everything besides, and their chief self-accusation is that they do not love him more.

What does that say about his claims? Why that says, of course, that he claims to be deity. And if he is not deity, then these demands here make no sense whatsoever. They are foolish. And if he is not a deity, and these claims make no sense whatsoever, then why should we follow him, even as a teacher? It’s evident that these claims are claims of deity. And the very fact that we may read through these passages – not having come to Christ (I used to do this) – and yet there rouses up within us a feeling that what he’s saying is right, and we don’t react against him, is acknowledgment of the fact that this is the truth of God.

And if you can read this, even though you have never come to Christ, and there’s something within you that says, “Yes, he’s right,” then there’s a testimony implanted in your heart to the truthfulness of the divine record.

“He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.”

To receive the legate – to receive the apostle – is to receive the King.

And we’re taught here again the mysterious oneness of the believer in the Lord Jesus. These words contain in germ-form the doctrine of the unity of the Lord Jesus with

those who have believed in him. I’m sure that as we reflect upon the fact that even if we give the cup of cold water in the name of the Lord Jesus, or even in the name of the disciple, that is not forgotten in heaven. Nothing human ever dies, someone has said, and how true that is with respect to spiritual things. All who stand on the same level evidently receive the same kind of reward, too. God does not forget any of the deeds that are done out of faith in the Lord Jesus.

If you’re here this morning, and you have never believed in our Lord Jesus, the invitation goes forth to you to put your trust in one who died for sinners. If there has come to your heart the conviction that you are not in relationship to God, that you are a man and therefore under sin, guilt and condemnation, the response that God asks is the response of faith. May God speak in your heart, to your heart, and may you, within your heart, say to him, I thank Thee, Lord, that Jesus Christ has died for sinners. I am a sinner. I do come to him to receive his salvation. Only the Holy Spirit is able to bring you to that decision. May you respond.

Let’s bow together for a closing word of prayer. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord, for the privilege of the study of the word of God, and we are thankful for the ministry of the Holy Spirit who has spoken to us in Scripture. And we pray, O God, if there should be someone here who has not responded, give no rest or peace until they rest in Christ

Now may grace, mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.