



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

TRANSCRIPT

“The Mustard Seed, Leaven and the Growth of the Kingdom,” Matthew 13:31-35

The Scripture reading for this morning is found in Matthew chapter 13 again, and we’re reading verses 31 through verses 35. Matthew chapter 13 verse 31 through verse 35. Now you will remember that the Lord Jesus has been giving what he has been calling the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And he has been teaching in parabolic fashion, because the generation which had listened to him proclaim his message had responded to him negatively, and as a result of their negative response, generally, he had begun to speak in parables in order to conceal the truth from those who had responded negatively in judgment, and to reveal the truth at the same to those who had responded positively. And the parables that he is teaching are parables that he has said are descriptive of things that will happen during the age at which he will be absent from us. So these parables are parables that tell us things that are relevant for us, since they reveal characteristics of the present age of which we are a part.

Now in verse 31, he continues his parabolic teaching by saying,

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest

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among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.’ Another parable spoke he unto them; ‘The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.’ All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spoke he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.”

May God bless this reading of his word.

We are continuing our studies in the Gospel of Matthew, and the subject for this morning is “The Mustard Seed, the Leaven, and the Growth of the Kingdom.” Humanism is a term that has both an historical and a philosophical meaning. In the historical sense, when we think of the term humanism, we are reminded of the study of the classics during the centuries just prior to the Reformation, and as a result of which, there developed the Renaissance in learning. And the Renaissance – our British friends sometimes pronounce it Ren-AY-sense – but the Renaissance led ultimately into the Reformation period of time.

But when we think of humanism we do think of that period historically in which there was a rebirth of interest in the old Latin and Greek classics, and out of that came some movements intellectually that led right on into the Reformation period which is so meaningful for Christians, because, of course, we think of that period of time as the time when the things that we preach and the things that we are so much interested in became important matters in the history of our Western world.

Humanism also has a philosophical sense. And in its philosophical sense, it refers to any philosophy that recognizes the dignity of man, making him the measure of all things, or recognizes human nature in its limits or its interests as it seen. As outgrowth of humanism, we have modern-day communism, the philosophy of pragmatism, the

philosophy of personalism, the philosophy of existentialism. We are living in a day that might well be called the flowering of humanism, the efflorescence of all that the humanists thought they had discovered through the study of the classics.

And there are three important themes in humanism which are very important for understanding our society today. There is the theme of freedom, by which is meant, as Pico put it in his oration on the dignity of man, that you might mould and fashion yourself into that form that you yourself should have chosen. So that freedom is the right to make ourselves what we ourselves want to be.

I wish it were possible for us to do that, of course. I wish it were possible for me to make myself what I would like for myself to be, and I also wish it would be possible for you to make yourself what you ought to be. When I was coming to church this morning, instead of coming for the 8 o’clock service, we are now meeting at 8:30 in the earlier service, and so I’m listening to a different radio program. And so instead of listening to Richard Dean in the radio Bible class in which good orthodox teaching is given, I listened this morning to the same radio station, and didn’t have to listen to about three sentences to realize I was listening to the sowing of tares rather than the sowing of wheat. [Laughter] It was the program of unity.

And in the course of the discussion this morning, the man who was leading the discussion said, “Don’t you want to be a wonderful person?” And almost before I could think I started to say yes. [Laughter] I was riding by myself, and that might seem strange, but I listened about I might be a wonderful person. A wonderful person—what is a wonderful person? Well, a wonderful person is a person who is good and kind, and in fact, the greatest characteristic of a wonderful person is that he thinks you’re wonderful, he said. And then he went on to describe how I could make myself a wonderful person, and that involved decisions. He didn’t say what kind of decisions, but nevertheless, that it involved decisions, and that really the whole answer to the problem of making yourself a

wonderful person was to simplify, and to unite with the Christ of God who dwells within you. Whatever in the world that means. [Laughter]

Well, that was the general gist of the program, and as he continued the program he said that if we would follow his advice of making these decisions and uniting with the Christ of God within, he would awaken the sleeping giant that lies within us. Now, that kind of teaching is the product of humanism. Humanism in the religious sphere. Humanism laid great stress upon freedom; the freedom to mold yourself and fashion yourself into the type of person that you yourself want to be.

Naturalism is another thing that is characteristic of humanism, and by that is meant, simply, that man is a part of nature, and that the sole good of man, and the one aim and goal of man is pleasure. And when we think of this, we think of Lorenzo Valla, who wrote an ancient work called *De Voluptate*, which means “Concerning Pleasure.” And in that, Lorenzo Valla, one of the great humanists, posited the idea that pleasure is the goal of man. He was Hugh Hefner before Hugh Hefner.

And then humanism, which is not necessarily a false religion, because some of the humanists were genuine Christians. Humanism did not necessarily have an antipathy to religion or to Christian religion. But generally it did, because the humanists were permeated by the spirit of tolerance, and the spirit of tolerance made it very difficult for them to accept the idea that Christianity was a unique system of truth, given to us by God in revelation, by which we could know that which is truth. And so, they were permeated by a spirit of tolerance that led to the belief that all the religious beliefs of mankind were bound together in unity.

Now if the humanists are right, then we should expect our ages to be getting better and better and better and better. Now, I do think that we are often confused, because there is a sense in which we have begun to get better and better and better. It’s true that our forefathers made their way around in the world in which they lived by the

use of a wagon or horse, and we are able to make our way around in a much more lovely wagon.

There are many ways in which we have scientifically progressed, but when it comes to the values of life that really count, it would be doubtful that anyone would really say that we have gotten better and better. But, according to humanism, we should.

There are two things that distinguished the early church and that marked them out as separate from the humanists. In the first place, they believed that the fundamental axiom of all truth was this: the Bible is the word of God. That was their fundamental axiom. The Bible is the word of God. Everybody, incidentally, has fundamental axioms. And the Christian’s is, the Bible is the word of God and God has spoken to us in revelation. So, the early church believed that when they opened the Scriptures, they were looking at truth – not relativistic truth, but absolute truth – given by a God who exists in heaven.

The second thing that distinguished the early church from the humanist was that they believed that the salvation of the individual was a work that was accomplished by God through Jesus Christ, and that which he had done on the cross at Calvary in his work of redemption. These two pillars are the pillars upon which the early church rested, and they distinguish the early church from all types of humanism, especially the philosophical types.

Now if humanism were correct, we would expect the Lord Jesus in the discourse in Matthew 13 in which he has given us insight into the age that is to take place while he is at the right hand of the Father in heaven, in giving us characteristics of it, we would expect that that age would be an age in which men would get better and better, that an optimistic view of life would be presented.

Instead, the Lord Jesus is telling us that this age, while it is characterized by an age of the sowing of the seed of the word of God, is nevertheless characterized by the sowing of the tares, the sowing of the seed of the wicked one. In fact, he has stressed the fact

that when the good seed is sowed, the birds of the air come and take the seed. It falls upon rocky ground. It does not have anything more than a brief growth that fades away. No real development into fruit. He describes the seed falling by the pathway, unable to make its way. As a matter of fact, it’s very pessimistic, because he suggests that out of the four types of soil, only one produces fruit.

He has spoken about the sowing of tares alongside the wheat, and he has said that the tares and the wheat have grown together throughout this whole age. And in fact, they are so much alike that you can hardly tell the difference. And in fact, he warns us not to make any distinction between them insofar as persecution is concerned – not within the church, but within the kingdom – the testimony to the truth of God that has gone out to the whole of the world.

He says there is going to come a final separating judgment at the end of this age, and then the tares are going to be taken out of the kingdom, and the wheat left to shine as the sun in the kingdom of the Father. So I think that you can see that Jesus was not a humanist. He was not a humanist.

Now, of course, we must not think that everything in humanism was bad. In fact, probably the greatest humanist of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was a man by the name of John Calvin. John Calvin probably knew more about the classics than any other man of his day. In fact, Cardinal Bellarmine, one of the great polemicists of the Catholic Church, who was opposed to Calvin in almost everything that he taught, said we didn’t know anything about the past until John Calvin made us study.

So, it’s evident that a person might be a humanist, interested in ancient learning and interested in the truth that one may gather from the Latin and Greek classics – happens to be an area of my study and major when I was in college – and there are many values that one can learn there. But there is a distinct difference between humanism and Christianity. And Christianity is not humanism, but humanism has gripped the mind of our Western world.

Well, Jesus was not a humanist. Let’s see what he really was. Let’s look now, first, at the Parable of the Mustard Seed, the first of two most interesting brief parables that we shall look at this morning. Have you noticed how the parables are taken from everyday life? For example, the Parable of the Soils. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, taken from the life of a farmer. The Parable of the Dragnet, which we shall study in a later session together, taken from the life of a fisherman. And now, the Parable of the Mustard Seed, taken also from the life of a farmer or from the life of a gardener.

It’s a very simple little parable, and it’s expounded for us by the Lord in verse 31. The essence of it is this. He says the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and he planted it in his field. Now, he adds the word that the mustard seed is the “least of all the seeds, but when it is grown, it becomes an herb; in fact, it grows to the size of a tree. And when it grows to the size of a tree,” he adds the words that “the birds of the air come and nest in the branches of it.” Very simple story which I’m sure those who have listened to it have seen carried out many times in nature. But what does it mean?

Now we must look at a few of the terms that need some discussion, and obviously, we must ask ourselves, what does he mean by this expression, “a grain of mustard seed”? Now if you’re interested in the Latin name for the mustard seed, it was the *sinapis negra* or the black mustard. It was a very, very small seed. And it was planted in the ground, it ordinarily grew up to be a bush.

Now Thompson, who wrote a book called *The Land in the Book*, and preachers and Bible teachers have used it for generations, has said that he traveled in the land of Palestine a long time ago, and he noticed that some of the bushes of the mustard grew to the size of a horse and rider. Now it would be possible to call that a small tree. And of course, this could mean that the Lord Jesus is speaking about normal growth. A mustard seed planted in the ground, instead of becoming a bush, becomes a small tree. Now, that is possible.

On the other hand, since that is not the normal thing for the black mustard seed to become a tree, I personally am more inclined to think he is speaking about abnormal growth. He saying, I want you to take a look at the mustard seed, which you know very well and you know it grows to a bush ordinarily, but in this illustration that I’m using, the mustard seed is planted in the field, and it not only becomes an herb, but it grows to be a tree. Abnormal growth.

Luke, when he writes this parable, in our English version, says it becomes “a great tree,” and if that were in the original text that would prove my point without a question. And evidently, some of the scribes who copied the manuscripts many hundreds of years ago thought that was, because they added the word, great. But if it becomes a tree, I think that we must say then that it is abnormal growth. So I’m inclined to think then that what he is saying is the kingdom of heaven is like a man planting a mustard seed which grows abnormally. And we’ll make a point in a moment about abnormal growth.

Now another thing we need to understand before we explain the points of the parable is what is meant by the birds of the air? Now will you turn with me back to verse 4 in chapter 13. In the Parable of the Soils, we read that when he sowed, some of the seeds came and devoured them. The birds came and devoured them. Now, the birds of the air, here, evidently, are bent on some evil work. Notice the 19<sup>th</sup> verse in which this is explained, “When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in the heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside.” So you see, then, that the birds of the air probably indicate the work of Satan.

Therefore, what shall we say about this parable? The Parable of the Mustard Seed in which the small seed, so small, is placed in the ground, there is abnormal growth, and as the growth matures in its abnormality then the birds of heaven come and nest in its branches. Well, there’s one thing I must say something about before I explain that, and that is the expression here that the mustard seed is the least of all the seeds.

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Now you know, of course, that in Believers Chapel we believe the Bible to be the word of God. In fact, we believe the Bible to be the word of God inerrantly. That is, there is no error in the word of God taught. Now, it so happens that we now know, so botanists tell us, that the mustard seed is not the smallest seed of all the seeds. So shall we acknowledge that the Lord Jesus made an error?

Well, I think if the Lord Jesus had meant, now the mustard seed is the least of all the seeds that anyone plants anywhere, not only in Palestine but in China or in America to come, then we would have to say the Lord Jesus, evidently, made an error, and the Bible contains an error, and the Bible is not the inerrant word of God. But does it necessarily mean that? I don’t think so. I think that he is obviously speaking about the land of Palestine. And so far as the horticulture of the land of Palestine is concerned, the smallest of the seeds is the mustard seed, and we have no evidence of any other seed being smaller.

So I think we are to understand this that it’s the least of all the seeds that are planted by gardeners in the land of Palestine. That seems to me to make normal sense. And so, you’re going to have to find a bigger error than that to make me believe that the word of God is not inerrant.

Well having said that, what is the force of the teaching of this parable? A single little mustard seed which becomes a mature tree and in its ultimate, mature growth, the birds of the air come and dwell in it? Well, the first thing, I think, we can say from this is that the kingdom is to have an usually small beginning. It’s going to be like a mustard seed in its beginning. Now what is meant by that? We are not given indications, so we must engage in Scriptural inferences.

I always like to tell my students at the seminary, you must distinguish between what the Bible says (you believe that, even if you don’t understand it), second, what the Bible teachers say the Bible says (you don’t believe that nearly so necessarily as you

believe the other), and third, what the Bible teachers infer from what they say the Bible says (and you believe that least of all). So, I’m going to infer a few things.

I think it’s fair to say the kingdom will have a small beginning. What is meant by that? Well now, we know that the Lord Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem. That’s a mighty small beginning. We know that throughout his earthly ministry, he gathered together just a few men, twelve of them to be exact, to be his apostles. We know that at the time of his crucifixion, after three years of ministry by the most skillful minister of the word of God that we have ever or will ever have, that 500 people saw him in his resurrection. So that was a very, very small beginning of the testimony of the word of God.

So all that we know about Christianity is that it did have a small beginning, began in a little part of the country that was so out of the way that we might have said it began in Arkansas. [Laughter] Now, the second thing. I hope you know me well enough to know that I’m just joking. I should have said Alabama. [More laughter]

The second thing that we notice about the kingdom is that it will have an abnormal growth. Now what is suggested by that? Now, remember, the kingdom is not the same as the church. The kingdom is the professing testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ in its worldwide proclamation, ultimately. Let’s use the word, Christendom, to include all of Christianity and all of its manifestations, and the influence of Christianity in our world.

Well, it is stated, then, that the kingdom will have abnormal growth. In other words, there will be an unusual expansion of Christianity. And it is amazing that Christianity, having begun so small, has now become the great worldwide religion that it has become – one of the three great worldwide religions, Judaism, Mohammedanism, Christianity. So it is remarkable that it has had just what this parable suggests: an abnormal growth.

And some of it is traceable to the times of Constantine. You remember Constantine, in the early part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, the monarch of the Roman Empire died,

and there was a struggle over succession. Two armies met at a little bridge in northern Italy called the Milvian Bridge. One of them was under the command of Constantine. And as these armies bivouacked over against each other, waiting for the coming day and the order of battle, the western general, Constantine, who had come into contact with Christianity, made a vow.

And he made a vow that if he won the battle, he would become a Christian. And, that night, according to later tradition, he was supposed to have seen a vision in the sky of a cross, and below the cross the word, *In Hac Signo Vincas* – “by this sign you shall conquer.” The sign of the cross. Now we can ignore all this monkish accretion to the truth. Evidently, this man did make some type of vow with some type of supernatural being. But as history has unfolded, it is evident that he did not make an agreement with God, but he made an agreement with the God of this age, or Satan.

Because of the result of Constantine’s victory in that battle and the incorporation of Christianity into the Roman Empire, and the setting of Christianity upon the throne as the official religion of the Roman Empire, the greatest of harm was done to Christianity. Constantine was converted; there’s no evidence that he was born again.

Gibbon, who wrote the *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* and was a bitter foe of Christianity, had this to say about Constantine,

“The sublime theory of the gospel made a much fainter impression on his heart than on his understanding, and as he gradually advanced in a knowledge of truth, he proportionately declined in the practice of virtue. And the same year of the reign in which he convened the Council of Nicea, that same year was polluted by the murder of his eldest son. The gratitude of the church has exalted the virtues and excluded the failings of a generous patron who seated Christianity on the throne of the Roman world, and the Greeks who celebrate the festival of the imperial

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saints seldom mention the name Constantine without adding the title,  
‘equal to the apostles.’”

What happened when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire?  
Well, the priests of Rome had been the priests of Venus and Mars, and they had been  
paid by the Roman treasury. So now that Christianity had become the official religion, the  
priests did exactly what you should expect them to do: they all became Christians. So  
they marched to their baptisms in order that they might make their profession of  
Christianity in order that they might continue to be supported by the Roman government.  
And the result was that Christianity became confused with the Roman world, and the  
world with Christianity.

Immanuel Deutch has spoken of that time in which the gods of Greece and Rome  
went into exile. They were either degraded into evil spirits or promoted into Christian  
saints. John Wesley was a very wise man. Wesley understood exactly what happened at  
that time. He said, “I’ve long been convinced from the whole tenor of ancient history that  
this very event of Constantine’s calling himself a Christian and pouring a flood of wealth  
and honor upon the Christian church was productive of more evil to the Christian church  
than all of the ten persecutions together.”

But Christianity became a world wide type of religion. There was the abnormal  
growth, but instead of being a good growth, there was a bad growth, for the purity of the  
gospel was lost. And it became a religious system, characterized by adherence to certain  
doctrines and, incidentally, incorporated into Christianity now were all of the multitudes  
of doctrines which were derived from eastern deities: confession; the use of holy water;  
and such types of things known long before the Christianity of the New Testament, but  
incorporated into Christianity as a result of Constantine’s decision.

Well what’s the final thing that we can say about the kingdom? Well, the kingdom  
is to have Satanic activity in the last times, as the birds of heaven come into the mustard

tree and nest there, we can expect that the testimony to Jesus Christ can become influenced by Satanic activity. And we know, from the study of the word of God, that that is exactly what has happened. Christianity has grown. It’s had an abnormal growth from that small beginning in the manger in Bethlehem, and the twelve apostles, and the few scattered Christian believers – it’s become a worldwide phenomenon. A great religion. But all of this shall ultimately reach its climax in the man of sin, the anti-Christ, who shall arise and proclaim the lie, shall set up the image to himself in the Temple, and call upon the whole of the earth to worship him. The birds of the air shall come and nest in the branches of the mustard tree.

What a beautiful picture. A beautiful picture of just exactly what has been happening. A great prophecy attesting to the deity of our Lord Jesus.

Now what about the Parable of the leaven? This one is disputed by the optimists and the pessimists, too. The optimists would like to tell us that the woman taking the three measures of meal – an ephah of meal – and putting leaven in it, and leaven permeating the whole of the meal, symbolized the preaching of the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel shall permeate our human society that we shall be transformed by the preaching of the gospel, and we shall become a kingdom of God and shall be able to welcome, at the Second Advent, the Lord Jesus, who shall have nothing to do at his second advent but pat us all on the back and say you’ve done a great work.

Now there are some optimists who acknowledge that this is a parable of victory unto victory, his army he shall lead, they do acknowledge that at the end of time there is going to be a struggle. So, I don’t want to mislead you. There are some who feel that this is optimistic, but we are looking at both optimism and a short period of the activity of Satan at the end of the age.

The difficulties with taking this as an optimistic picture are these. In the first place, the meal suggests the wheat. We all agree on that. The three measures of meal

suggest wheat, and the wheat suggests the true seed are the doctrines of the Lord Jesus and his work of redemption.

But the leaven. If you look in the Old Testament and look up all the references to leaven, and then look up in the New Testament all the references to leaven, you discover that instead of being something that is positive, it almost always has a negative meaning.

For example, in the meal offering, designed to represent the Lord Jesus in his person and in his work, it is specifically stated that if a child of the Nation Israel offers a meal offering, there should be no leaven in it, because leaven suggests sin, and there is no sin in the Lord Jesus.

When the Passover is observed, it is an especially important regulation that the leaven should be removed from the home in which the Passover lamb was to be eaten. And for seven days, they were to eat unleavened bread as they observe the feast.

Then if you come into the New Testament, and if you turn here in the gospel of Matthew to the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter – why don’t you turn over there and read verse 6 through verse 12 – you will see that the New Testament conforms to this teaching. Then Jesus said unto them, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have taken no bread,” verse 8 which when Jesus perceived, “O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves because ye have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, neither remember, the five loaves of the 5,000, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the 4,000 and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye not understand that I spoke not you concerning bread, but that you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” Then understood they that he bade them not to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Leaven in the New Testament is used of the evil of hypocrisy. It is used of the evil of impurity. It is used of the evil of rationalism, characteristic of the Sadducees. It is used of the evil of formalism in religion, characteristic of the Pharisees. And it is used of the

evil of materialism and naturalism characteristic of the Herodians. And Mark tells us that the doctrine of the Herodians could be characterized as leaven as well.

So leaven, then, in the Old and New Testaments suggests that which is evil. Furthermore, the other parables, as we have been seeing, suggests that alongside the sowing of the good seed there is the sowing of the tares. And finally, history itself has told us that we’re not getting better and better and better. That apostasy is rather the condition than the opposite.

So what, then does this parable teach us, then, why this parable teaches us that in the proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus and the truth concerning him, we shall expect – incidentally, the woman – I don’t want to be dogmatic about what is meant by the woman. But we do know that in the Bible, in Revelation chapter 17, the figure of the woman suggests ecclesiastical impurity and ecclesiastical action. And it’s just possible that the woman – evidently perhaps related symbolically to Eve in the Garden of Eden – it is perhaps possible that the woman here is designed to represent ecclesiastical introduction of the leaven into the truth concerning the Lord Jesus.

And if that’s what is meant, of course, that we know is what has happened, that the introduction of false doctrine into the proclamation of the message of the Christian church has been done by the leaders in the Christian church. The men who stand in the pulpit and teach us, they are the ones who mislead us.

So then, we are to understand by this that throughout this age, it is to be characterized by the tendency on the part of the leadership – perhaps the leadership of the Christian church; the fact is still true – characterized by the introduction, secretly into the truth concerning Christ that which is erroneous. Until finally we shall have the whole leavened, this age shall end in general apostasy.

Do we see anything like that today? Why of course, we see it constantly. We see moral apostasy, and we see doctrinal apostasy. We see moral apostasy, particularly. We are living in a day in which the Christian churches are wrestling over such questions as,

“Shall we recognize homosexuality as a normal kind of behavior?” In the light of the teaching of the word of God, how can there be any debate whatsoever over that question?

Recently, in one of the columns of one of the religious journals, the editor who was writing a column on this very point, this month, spoke of a 30-year-old man who wrote for counseling, and he counseled with a clergyman about his homosexuality. And he came, as a result of it, he said, “To have an experience of God that gave him serenity and peace. He found enough courage to tell his parents that he was gay.” And he also found, I’ll quote his words, “the man with whom I plan to spend the rest of my life.” He concluded, there are his words again, “I never felt so fulfilled and contented. Life is beautiful.” I don’t believe it for a moment. Life is terrible when we live in sin, in any kind of sin.

Now, of course, the Christian church should have a heart for all sinners. I’m so happy that they had a heart for me as a sinner. And we should have a heart for homosexuals, but we don’t have hearts for homosexuals when we say that homosexuality is not a sin. I think the striking thing about this is the words he said at the end, “I never felt so fulfilled and contented.” Because you know, it is so easy for us as Christian believers to rationalize away our sin.

The word of God teaches us a certain thing in a certain life decision. And we don’t want to make that decision. And so, we rationalize and we rationalize and we rationalize, and finally, we make a decision that is contrary to that which our conscience and our best judgment tells us is contrary to the word of God, because we want to do something else, and we fall into sin. But what do we say, often? We say exactly what he says, “I never felt so fulfilled and contented, and God has given me peace in my heart over this decision.”

Now let me assure you, my good Christian friend, that there is no peace whatsoever in any decision that a person makes that is contrary to the word of God. No

peace whatsoever. There is a false peace, and you may have peace for a while. But you will be sure to find out that any decision contrary to the word of God will ultimately bring disorder and anxiety and disturbance and frustration and maladjustment into your heart. God has said, “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” And that principle applies to the saints, too. And when David sinned, he said, “Ah, my moisture has turned into the drought of summer,” and gave the most beautiful description of some of the terrors of being out of relationship with the Lord.

We have moral apostasy in the church today, and two denominations, right now, are wrestling in committee form over whether to accept this sinful practice as a legitimate thing. Now, we have doctrinal apostasy, too.

Doctrinal apostasy exists – and I’m sure that many of you know about doctrinal apostasy, and I don’t have to say anything about it – but did you know that it even happens in evangelical circles? There has just come to our attention, recently, several articles written by one of the most outstanding of our evangelical leaders. He has written two articles, at least that I know of, in which he suggested that perhaps there is salvation in other heathen religions.

Now this is an amazing thing, because this man is a very fine student of the word of God, and to imagine that the Bible countenances other systems of truth as resting by the side of Christianity is just beside my comprehension. The Apostle Paul said, “If any man preaches any other gospel unto you than that which I have preached unto you, then let him be accursed.” Not only has this Christian teacher suggested that there is perhaps, ultimately, salvation through other religions and that God really has spoken through them, and that Christ dwells in them incognito, but he has suggested that perhaps if we pass out of this existence, there is a second chance if we have never heard the gospel, and then, in addition, states that surely God will accept those who have a desire for salvation. Paul says there’s none that seeketh after God, no not one. But, to imagine that a person is saved because he has a desire for salvation, and somebody else is lost because they don’t

have a desire for salvation, is to fall into a legalistic salvation by works, just as contrary to Scripture as the teaching of Pelegius, the ancient monk with whom Augustine wrestled over the question of grace. We have apostasy in our Christian church.

Yesterday I had a call from a man in another city in this country. He had asked me, in the course of a conversation, to come and minister over certain doctrines. I was unable to do it. In the course of the conversation, he began to speak about the church with which I was familiar. They have lost, recently, a pastor, who was a very good teacher of the word of God who has gone to another locale, and they’re looking for a minister.

In the course of our conversation, he said to me, “Dr. Johnson, there are two groups in our church. There are those who love the word of God, and desire to be taught in a deep fashion. And then there are those who are not nearly so interested in the depth of teaching, but would like to have it much lighter, and furthermore, would like to spend a great deal of our time in praising Jesus”—those were the words that were used—“in praising Jesus.” And he said, “I’m not embarrassed to tell you, Dr. Johnson, that I belong to the second company.”

He was telling me over the phone that we do not want deep teaching anymore. We want lighter teaching, and we want a great deal of stress on experience and praising Jesus. Now, I can almost give you the history, future history of that church if that is what happens.

What were the Reformation principles? What are the fundamental principles of Christianity to which we must hold? Well, let me suggest them in four Latin expressions so you can remember them. [Laughter]

First of all, *sola scriptura* – the Scriptures alone. The Scriptures alone; the Bible, the word of God, is our fundamental axiom of revelation. That is the basis upon which the Christian church stands. The scientist stands on the fundamental axiom to reach truth through the scientific method. The Christian stands upon the fundamental axiom that we

cannot reach any certainty of truth through any form of rationalism or empiricism or any other form of human reasoning. We can only have certainty in truth if God reveals truth; only if God reveals truth to us. So we stand on the basis of the Scripture alone, and we believe our axiom is better than their axiom

Second, *solo Christo* – by Christ alone. We proclaim that salvation is only through Jesus Christ, and the finished work of redemption which he accomplished on the cross when he bore the judgment of God and satisfied the righteousness and holiness of God for sinners. By Christ alone, no salvation in any other than the Lord Jesus. He expressed it himself: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”

Peter expressed it in this way: “There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Paul expressed it this way, “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews expressed it as, “Coming unto God by him.” By Christ alone.

Third, *sola gratia* – by grace alone. Not by works. We come to Christ on the principle of grace. We do not offer him anything by ourselves; we receive as a gift the salvation of God. We do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and do good works. We do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized to be saved. We do not believe on the Lord Jesus and sit at the Lord’s table in order to be saved. We do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and become educated in order to be saved, or cultured, or prayed through, or any other kind of religious activity other than faith alone. By grace alone, because if it’s by faith, it’s through grace. It’s something we receive. It’s not by grace alone plus the decision of our free will. By grace. Free gift.

And then finally, *sola fide* – by faith alone. Not by joining the church. By faith, alone. Those four great principles, *sola scriptura, solo Christo, sola gratia, sola fide*; Scriptures alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone – these are the fundamental things that the reformers fought for, and which we fight for still. And anything else introduced

within it, becomes leaven, which ultimately, if it is not judged, will leaven the whole Christian truth.

Well, may I close, for our time is up. The passage conclose—concludes – concloses, that’s a new word [laughter] I added to the English language, in case you’re interested. The passage concludes with a statement by Matthew about the use of the parables, the Lord Jesus speaking in parables, and he relates it to a passage in the Old Testament, Psalm 78.

May I conclude, then, by saying this? Contrary, to humanism, the world is not getting better and better. The world will not bow before the word of God, and thus we can expect the deepening shadows of apostasy to develop. In the midst of the deepening apostasy that is around us, and will no doubt develop in the end of the age, it is our duty to proclaim the word of God, to sow the seed, and to call upon men, saying to them that today is the day of salvation, and call upon them to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

If the Apostle Paul were preaching today and were to come into the presence of the Philippian jailer, and he were to ask again, “What must I do to be saved?” and there was a modern theologian standing around, I think we might hear something like this. As the Apostle got ready to say what he was going to say, someone would say, “Make an existential leap, and you will be saved.” [Laughter]

And then someone else would but in and say, “Saved? You are saved. Live what you already have experienced.” Because we are taught by large sections of Christendom today that everybody is saved and everybody’s going to be saved. It’s going to be great when we get to heaven and we have one great big company with the apostles and Judas and Satan and all of the other [laughter] of the men of the Old Testament who have gone on to their reward.

Another would say, “Well, be saved? What are you, the jailer? Well, the answer is clean up the conditions in the jail. And if you clean up the conditions in the jail, you’ll be saved by that work of cleaning up the conditions in the jail.”

And then someone else would but in, “My dear man, in view of our present knowledge of the Bible and the modern mentality, you’ve asked a meaningless question. This selfish business of personal salvation is a bit of penitent Christianity, which had its revival in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, but we don’t believe in personal salvation today. Christianity is not, being saved personally. Perish the thought. It’s identifying one’s self with the forces of love and justice and the reconstruction of society.”

In the meantime, Paul is just waiting to get in his word, and finally he blurts out, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” And they all turn in a condemning tone to him and want to crucify him, and say, no doubt to him, you were never more wrong in all of your life Paul when you said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. But Paul would be never more right than that.

There is no other way of salvation, save through the Scriptures, through grace, through Christ alone received by faith. If you are here this morning, and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, we invite you to come to him. We invite you to recognize what the Bible says about you, that you are a sinner; that you’re under divine condemnation; that you’re headed to a Christless eternity; and that there is no second chance beyond this life.

But God has also commissioned to us to proclaim to you the way of salvation through the Lord Jesus. A work of atonement has been accomplished for sinners, and it is sufficient for all sinners. And so if you are a sinner, we invite you to come to Christ. In your hearts it’s very simple: Father, I do thank Thee that Thou hast revealed to me in the spirit that I am a sinner. I do desire to be saved. I want to have Christ for my Savior. I want to trust him. A simple decision like that is to pass from death into life and from darkness into his marvelous light. May God help you to come to it. Shall we stand for the benediction?

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[Prayer] We thank Thee, Lord, for these wonderful insights into the age of which we are a part, and may we learn from our Lord Jesus and flee to the refuge of Thy grace through the cross.

May grace, mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.