



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“Peter Learning Romans Seven,” Matthew 26:30-35

TRANSCRIPT

An important part of the section that we are studying today is a citation from the Old Testament by our Lord, specifically from Zechariah chapter 13. I'd like for you to turn with me to that next to the last book of the Old Testament, and listen as I read a few verses in the context of that quoted section, because it will help us to understand I think some of the things that our Lord means by the citation of it in his passion. Zechariah chapter 12 and verse 10. I'd like to begin reading that verse. This is a very familiar verse, Zechariah 12:10 and describes the national repentance of the Nation Israel at the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, and it reads,

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness to his firstborn.”

Now you can see it is the Lord who is speaking and he is saying that they shall look upon me whom they have pierced. Well that therefore is a prophecy of the first coming of our

Lord Jesus when he was pierced as he was hanging upon the cross. It also is a prophecy of the second coming, because it prophesied that they shall look upon him and they shall mourn for him, and that is specifically what John the Apostle tells us will take place in the future. So that is a prophecy of the first and second coming of the Lord Jesus, and it is specifically stated here that he would do his atoning work in his first coming.

Now will you skip to verse 1 of chapter 13? After the prophecy of national repentance which shall take place at the Second Advent, we read of national cleansing,

“In that day, there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.”

I’d like for you then to skip down to verse 7. I think there is very good logic in the prophet’s presentation of these points because after telling us that there shall be a day of national repentance and telling us that there shall be a day of national cleansing we might ask the question well how shall they be cleansed and so here he gives us the means of that cleansing in the atoning work:

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man who is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.”

It’s very interesting to me that in verse 10 of chapter 12 it says, “They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, but here it is, “Awake O sword against my shepherd and against the man who is my fellow saith the Lord of hosts.” So in one of the texts, it is the people who pierce him. In the other of the texts, it is the Lord of hosts who is responsible for the smiting of the shepherd. Well, this is the background. And remember, this was one

of the sections that our Lord Jesus studied as he was growing up, and as he was coming to his ministry.

Let’s turn over to the New Testament in chapter 26 of the Gospel of Matthew, and let me begin at verse 30. Matthew 26 verse 30, and I want to read through verse 35, and notice how that passage from Zechariah chapter 13 and verse 7 is used by him. It is the occasion of the completion of the Lord’s Supper – the last Passover, the first Lord’s Supper – and we read now in verse 30 of Matthew chapter 26. And when they had sung an hymn—I think, incidentally, it would have been much better if this were simply translated, “And when they had sung, they went out.” Or perhaps if we had to be freer, “when they had sung hymns,” because the hymn that they sang was Psalm 115, 116, 117 and 118, so they no doubt sang them one right after the other, but you hardly think of that as an hymn.

“When they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.  
Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this  
night: for it is written, (written in Zechariah chapter 13 verse 7) I will  
smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.”

Notice the difference in the prophecy in Zechariah. It is, Awake O sword against my shepherd, and the man who is my fellow. It is there, the direct activity of the Lord of hosts. Here our Lord Jesus, realizing that that, of course, was a reference to the Lord of hosts, or the Father says that Zechariah says I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. Perhaps a little bit more of a stress that some of the commentators have noted upon the divine initiative is found in the New Testament account. So,

“I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered

“Peter Learning Romans Seven” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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abroad But after I am raised up again, I will go before you into Galilee.  
Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended  
because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him,  
Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crows, thou  
shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with  
thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise said all the disciples.”

Now turn to verse 69. We’ll read through verse 75, and in this section we have the fulfillment of our Lord’s prophecy concerning Peter’s three denials.

“Now Peter sat outside in the court: and a maid came unto him, saying,  
Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied it before them all,  
saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into  
the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there,  
This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied  
with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him  
they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them;  
for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear,  
saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crowed. And  
Peter remembered the word of Jesus, who said unto him, Before the  
cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

The subject for today in the continuation of our study of the Gospel of Matthew, our eighty-ninth lesson in the gospel, is “Peter Learning Romans Seven.” The Bible’s pitiless portrayals of its paladins is one of the signs of its inspiration. We might wonder if the Bible simply gave us a glorified picture of its leading saints, if it really were truly the

word of God. But this unvarnished undisguised faithfulness to the facts impresses itself upon us as one of the marks of its truthfulness and genuineness.

Of course it is not surprising to those who know the Bible, because we understand what the Bible has to say about God, and one of the things that is from the beginning of the Scriptures to the end emphasized is that there is no respect of persons with him.

Human biographers more often than not in the past have glorified their subjects. As many of you know, one of my favorite characters was General Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall Jackson.” I read a biography of General Jackson some years ago, and remember that when I finished it, I was filled with a little bit of despair over ever being able to emulate the faithfulness of this man to the doctrines that he had professed. Here was a man who could say, honestly, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that. Some of his soldiers made fun of General Jackson behind his back. They called him a bumpkin Presbyterian fatalist, but I saw in him a remarkable man who lived out his faith in most trying circumstances in a very evil day.

I am very thankful that in some of the modern biographies there is a tendency to be just as frank as the Bible is about its biographies. For example, we have read a number of books about Franklin Deleano Roosevelt, since President Roosevelt’s passing, which have given us a much truer picture of that man than we had while he was living. We have learned that we do not hear all of the facts over the radio on television or in our newspapers or periodicals, and that the facts often do not come out until much later. We have learned some facts about John Fitzgerald Kennedy which have made us realize, if any of us had a question in our minds, that he, too, was not a saint, and these frank biographies are not only of the political sphere, but also in the spiritual sphere as well.

I would imagine that if a vote had been taken a few years back concerning the most popular contemporary theologian that Paul Tillich would undoubtedly won that

vote. But soon after Professor Tillich’s death, several biographies came out – one by his wife which revealed that he was not a saint as well; in fact, hardly qualified for being called a professing Christian. Now those who knew his theology had suspicion that a person who believed the things that Professor Tillich believed could not have been much of a saint, but it was not until these frank biographies were written that confirmation was given.

Peter, the Bible tells us, was a man of like passions with us, and his denials of the Lord Jesus make up his theological lecture on Romans chapter 7 verse 13 through verse 25. Personally, I do not think there is anyone who understands human nature apart from our Lord any better than the Apostle Paul, and in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Epistle to the Romans in the last half of that chapter, he gives us an insight into the psychology of a Christian and his struggle with sin that we do not have anywhere. And we have it in a section that most beautifully reveals the fact that the sin principle still dwells in our members and there is no victory for a Christian believer in independence of the indwelling Spirit.

Paul’s point in those verses it seems to me is simply this. Because of the fact that the sin principle still dwells within us, even though we have new life by virtue of faith in Christ, we cannot expect to please him, apart from a conscious real dependence upon the Holy Spirit for power in our Christian life. And furthermore, he lets us know that there is always a struggle going on. We never reach the state where, in the Christian life, we do not have any struggle any longer. That’s the point of Romans chapter 7, and it seems to me that this is the truth that Peter was exposed to and which he had to learn the hard way. Most of us have to learn these truths the hard way, unfortunately. We do not really take the Bible as seriously as we ought, and so we are forced to learn them the hard way. And Peter had to learn that truth the hard way. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we would just read the Scriptures and respond to them and not have to pass through these experiences which are so trying and involve so much suffering and disappointment –

sometimes tragedy – simply because we don’t pay attention to the things that we read in God’s word. We really have forgotten that it is God’s word.

Well the occasion of Peter’s lesson in biblical psychology is the last Passover and the first Lord’s Supper, and just after the finish of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, we read in verse 30, when they had sung an hymn they went out into the Mount of Olives. In this brief three verse section the Lord Jesus makes a prophecy to the effect that the apostles, all of them, shall be offended because of him that night.

What does it mean to be offended at the Lord Jesus? Well strictly speaking, when he says in verse 31, all ye shall be offended, that word means, all ye shall be scandalized. But to be offended at the Lord Jesus is the opposite of believing and delighting in him. It implies the desire to be dissociated from him, because too close an association with the Lord Jesus invites the treatment that he received from men. So Peter here is—and all of the apostles are—told that they are going to be offended because of the Lord Jesus that night. They are going to stumble over him. They are not going to want to be identified with this one whom they have come to trust. That’s the occasion.

Now I want you to notice the nearer occasion. In verse 30 we read, when they had sung an hymn. Now remember, in our last studies, I mentioned the fact that as they began the Passover it was customary for the Israelites to sing the hallelu Psalms. The hallelu Psalms were Psalms 113 through 118. It was a custom at the beginning of that service to sing Psalm 113 and Psalm 114, and then when they came to the end of the service, they sang the remainder of the hallelu Psalms, and those Psalms 115 through 118 were called by them the Great Hallelu.

Now hallelu means, of course, Hallelujah or Praise God. So they sang these Psalms and when we read then in verse 30, when they had sung an hymn, the reference is to the singing of the Great Hallelu; that is the singing of these four Psalms, 115 through 118. O unfathomable mysterious boundless mercy and mystery for the author of the

Psalms, through the Spirit – our Lord is the author of Scripture through the Spirit – he sings his own song Psalms.

Now the striking thing about this is that when you turn back to the Old Testament and look at these Psalms, you can see that there was a divine purpose in the background of all of this activity. I’m going to ask you if you will, to take your Bibles and turn back to Psalm 115 through 118 so you can catch some of the emotion that must have pervaded our Lord as he sang these hymns which spoke of him.

In Psalm 116 we have him singing of his sufferings. Look at the 10<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 116. I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted. Then will you look at the conclusion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse. I found trouble and sorrow. So as our Lord made his way out to the Mount of Olives and as the air was punctured by the singing of these hymns, our Lord was singing of the very experiences to which he was going to undergo in just a few hours from now. He sang of his sufferings.

He not only sang of his sufferings but he sang of his death. Look at the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse again, “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of Sheol got hold upon me.” Then look at the 15<sup>th</sup> verse, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” And so our Lord not only sings of his sufferings, but he sings of his death as he sings the Great Hallelu on the way to the Mount of Olives.

But he not only sings of his sufferings and sings of his death, but he also sings of his resurrection. In the 9<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 116, we read, I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. And then in case there is any question about the Messianic significance of what he is singing in verse 22 we read, “The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner”—a prophesy which our Lord refers to himself in his ministry in the Synoptic Gospels.

And finally, will you notice particularly the way the last of the Great Hallelu ends? In verse 27 – now, imagine the Lord on the way to the Mount of Olives where he will undergo this last great climactic struggle in the garden of Gethsemane, and there fight

through finally the question of going to the cross, there he will say, “O my Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me”—he’s thinking about his sufferings; he’s thinking about his death and all that it means. Now in verse 27 of Psalm 118, we hear the Savior singing, “God is the Lord, who hath shown us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.” What a beautiful expression of atonement by sacrifice and that was what he was singing on the way to the Mount of Olives.

But there is one important difference. Of course, the psalmist writes typically. What he is speaking is of situations that were true in his day and these are typical of the things our Lord shall undergo. In the Old Testament it was necessary to bind the sacrifice to the horns of the altar because there were no lambs or there were no bullocks that wanted to be sacrificed, and if they got the idea that they were to lose their lives, they did just as animals do today. They squealed and sought to escape, and so the animals had to be bound to the horns of the altar in order that the sacrifice may be accomplished. But in our Lord’s case it is all voluntary. He is the voluntary sacrifice who sings these great typical songs that are Messianic to the core and describe his own sufferings by way of illustration.

He concludes the Great Hallelu singing, “Thou art my God, and I will praise Thee: thou art my God, I will exalt Thee. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.” The Medieval hymn writers used to use this hymn singing, I should say, of the Lord Jesus and using this spoke of our Lord as singing like a nightingale from a May tree, emphasizing of course his love. But the thing that was not recognized by them was the importance of the justice of God. One of the Dutch theologians has put it I think very well. He has said, “We may as well say outright what must be said of this. Such poetry does injustice to the content and to the holiness of the gospel of the passion. We simply may not metamorphose the brutal outlines of Christ’s wrenched body and forsaken soul into the lush sweetness of a nightingale whose pulse

beats are regulated by life and love, and by these alone. For although love and the will to live cause the holy heart of Jesus to beat faster, the finger of God justice made it stop.”

So we should not think then of our Lord singing these hymns as simply being an expression of his love for men there is also bound up in this a recognition of the fact that God is a just God, and being a just God, he demands the payment of the penalty for the sin of men, and our Lord recognized that, because he said God is the Lord who hath shown us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. So the author sings his own songs, and they are the revelation of his ministry that he is going to accomplish. This is probably the greatest hymn singing that ever took place anywhere, and the most existential, because our Lord was singing of his own experiences.

And isn’t it a striking testimony to the joy that pervaded his heart, that in the midst of this terrible suffering over the will of God for him and what it meant (we shall see next week as we study the agony in Gethsemane some of the depths of what it meant); isn’t it a striking thing that in the midst of this great agony of soul over what is going to come to pass in his own heart and life, he can rejoice in the Lord? Thou art my God, I will praise Thee; Thou art my God I will exalt Thee.

He illustrates the apostle’s words. Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice. Paul and the saints with him could sing hymns when they were in prison and when they might have lost their lives, and the Lord Jesus can sing hymns of praise to the Father as he goes out to suffer on the cross at Calvary. And isn’t it a sad thing when we look around at our own lives and see how difficult it is for us to really say one word in praise and exaltation of the Lord Jesus in the midst of our friends?

Vance Havener, the well-known Southern Baptist minister says, “Isn’t it a strange thing that on Saturday afternoon we can go out to the football stadium and shout like a Comanche, and then come to church on Sunday morning and then sit like a wooden Indian, with no words of praise and thanksgiving for what the Lord has done for us?”

I love an old story about a Scottish preacher which I know doubt have used before here. He was not a very good preacher because, he was not preaching Christ. And he continued to preach about the things that he thought were relevant; the issues of the day. And consequently, the sufferings and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus had little place in his ministry. And finally one morning as he came in to the church and then came to the pulpit, he noticed a little note on top of the pulpit Bible, and the note said, giving the words of the Greeks from John chapter 12, “Sirs we would see Jesus,” and when he saw it, he was convicted by the Holy Spirit of his preaching.

And during the week and the weeks thereafter he sought to change and transform his ministry, so that instead of preaching on the political and social and economic issues of the day, he would turn his ministry to preach the great truths of the sufferings and the glories of the Messiah. And by the grace of God he was enabled to do it, and after a little while he entered into the pulpit again and there was another note on the pulpit Bible. With a little bit of trepidation he took it up and took a look at it and it was those words from John chapter 20 and verse 20, “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” What a beautiful thought.

You see, really the secret of joy is to see the Lord. And because our Lord is able to see the Lord, God is the Lord who hath shown us light: Thou art my God I will praise Thee. He is able to exalt the name of the Lord even in the midst of these terrible trials and troubles.

Well the prophesy then comes in verse 31. The Lord Jesus, after they had sung the hymn, after they had gone out to the mount, Jesus said unto them, “All ye shall be offended because of me this night.” All of you shall be scandalized, your faith shall totter and falter just as if you were standing in an earthquake, and then appealing to the word of God from Zechariah, he supports it. He says, “For it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.” So he appeals to that ancient Messianic text that we read for our Scripture reading, and he states that they are

going to be deprived of their visible leader, the shepherd, who has been in their midst, and furthermore they are going to be scattered abroad and they are not going to know where to turn.

We know that is exactly what happened when the Lord Jesus finally was crucified they all forsook him and fled. They turned tail just like animals and went off to lick their wounds, and no one remained there to suffer with him or to give him comfort around his cross experience. They all forsook him and fled. All ye shall be offended because of me this night for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. That’s a beautiful text because of course it reveals to us that there could be no national repentance – there can be no national cleansing – unless there is a righteous basis for it, and the righteous basis for it is the sacrifice, the penal, substitutionary sacrifice which the Lord will offer, and that is the meaning of the expression I will smite the shepherd. That is the penal sacrifice that the Lord Jesus offered.

Now notice here that in this text great stress is given to the fact that it is God who is responsible for this sacrifice. We’re too often inclined to think that the Lord Jesus was an unwilling victim. We say the Romans put him to death, or we say the Jewish people were responsible for his death. That of course is true, they are guilty of this, but behind the Romans and the Gentiles and behind the Jews is the will of God. It is God who is carrying out his purpose. It is the Lord of hosts who said in the Old Testament, Awake my sword against the shepherd and against the man who is my fellow, just as the Psalmist said, Thou hast brought me into the dust of death, in the Messianic Psalm 22. Or, It pleased the Lord to bruise him, Isaiah said. So here, Awake O sword against the shepherd and against the man who is my Father, saith the Lord of hosts. Ultimately, it is God who is carrying out his purposes, so that when our Lord dies the responsibility of it rests upon the Romans, it rests upon the Jewish people; it is the voluntary sacrifice of the Son of God and it all ultimately goes back to the plans and purposes of an eternal God.

And isn’t it striking, too, that he says in Zechariah chapter 13, Awake O sword against my shepherd and the man who is my fellow?

Now you might not know this if you had not used a concordance, that the word, fellow, is the Hebrew word *amiyth*. That word occurs about eleven times outside of that passage in Zechariah, and generally it is found in the Book of Leviticus. And in the Book of Leviticus it refers to a fellow Israelite, generally. An Israelite and then his fellow is another Israelite. In other words, there is an equality. Occasionally, rarely but nevertheless clearly, it is a synonym for a brother. That is one who is so equal as to be related by blood.

Now that is the word that is used there of the shepherd and the Lord of hosts. It is the Lord of hosts who says, Awake O sword against my shepherd and the man—the man who is my fellow, that is my equal—related to me. My kinsman. It is of course our Lord Jesus who is just as much God as the Father is God, and even in that text in Zechariah both his humanity and his deity are set forth: the God-man, the man who is my fellow, equal with me. So the sword is to smite the God-man, and it’s on the basis of that penal substitutionary sacrifice that redemption takes place.

And the Lord of hosts is the smiter – the fellow is a man – but he is also the suffering servant of Jehovah. We sometimes, in our evening service when we remember the Lord at the Lord’s table, sing a hymn which has a stanza that goes like this. I like it: “Jehovah bade his sword awake / O Christ it woke against Thee. Thy blood the flaming sword much slake / Thy heart it’s sheath must be. All for my sake my peace to make / now sleeps that sword for me. How true that is. Awake O sword against the suffering servant of Jehovah, and as our Lord Jesus bore those sufferings those atoning sufferings and accomplished that penal substitutionary sacrifice, that sword shall never strike through me, for I borne my penalty in my substitute the Lord Jesus. Now that’s enough to be happy. That’s enough to praise the Lord for I’ll tell you.

Well that’s a great text. The Lord Jesus adds, “After I’m raised up again, I will go before you into Galilee,” of course, that’s an indirect prophesy of their recovery from scattering and distress and a promise of a divine reunion with them. But Peter has caught one thing. He hasn’t paid a whole lot of attention to these atoning matters because his mind is not quite as theological as it will later become. The thing that upset Peter was the statement, all ye shall be offended in me. So he’s upset. He’s the American in the crowd. He’s the impulsive aggressive one, so he speaks out. Lord though all men shall be offended because of Thee yet will I – great emphasis rests upon that I, incidentally, in the original text. Not only does Peter use the personal pronoun, but he puts it in the emphatic position, “But as for me I’ll never be offended.”

Well that was good bragging, but it was just untruthful. So our Lord had to speak again and say, “Peter verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice.” Well Peter’s undaunted by that. His self-confidence is positively alarming. Listen to him. “Verily I say unto Thee, well though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee,” and then all the other apostles chimed in and said, that goes for me too.

What a poor Calvinist Peter is at this point. His self-confidence will prove to be the chaff of his life. The Lord Jesus had said just before this, Simon, Simon, Satan hath desire to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat, and that’s what will happen. And Peter will be so sifted that all of the self-confidence will go, and the only thing left will be that kernel of wheat the faith that God had implanted in his heart. That’s all that will be left. Chaff.

Christum, one of the early Christian preachers, said concerning this, “What sayest thou O Peter?” Because he knew what it meant to trust in our own self-confidence. That’s all chaff. You know, we fail the say we cease to fear to fall. That’s the time when we do fail. Jeremiah put it in the Old Testament this way, “Thus saith the Lord cursed be

the man that trusteth in man ,and maketh flesh his arm and whose heart departeth from the Lord.” How easy it is for us to trust in the arm of the flesh.

We do that in our church life. The churches are not operated often by trust in the Lord. We do everything that we possibly can according to wisdom human wisdom, scheming, devising programs rather than allowing the sufficiency of the word of God as used by the Spirit to be the source of the power of the church. Our monetary plans and programs are not gauged according to the word of God. The Bible says that God will supply all of our needs, and if we do the work of the Lord he will supply the needs, but we are so afraid to allow the word of God to be sufficient for us that we feel that we must plead for money. We feel that we must write long prayer letters and enclose self-addressed envelopes, and then say we don’t really appeal for funds; we just make easy for you to give. Our monetary programs are not according to the word of God. We have pledge systems, and then since the pledge system became out of favor we have devised certain faith promise symptoms which are nothing more than the same kind of pledge system with a different word, hoping that people will not think through these schemes that we as human beings have devised, failing to realize that the word of God, used by the Spirit of God, if we do his work he will support his work. And if he doesn’t support it, we having done that which the Scriptures set forth, then we should say Lord evidently this is what you want us to be and we want to be that.

We do this in the realm of membership. We think that it’s much better to have a membership roll on which we can inscribe a name. It’s not necessary to have a membership roll in a church. I’ve been in churches that have membership rolls and ones that have not. I see no difference. It’s much better to follow the teaching of the word of God.

And then as far as bringing people to Christ is concerned, we are not willing to trust the word of God and the preaching of the gospel. We have to have them make certain kinds of decisions. We must have them sign a decision card or raise their hand in

a meeting or have an invitation hymn at the end, invite them to come down the aisle to the front. We are not willing to trust the Holy Spirit to use the word of God to bring new life and to have it manifested in the confession of faith in water baptism. The biblical way to express your faith is not to join the church, not to raise your hand in the meeting, not to come down front – you all know this – but it is to ask the elders to be baptized in water, because God the Holy Spirit has brought faith to you in your heart.

We want, in Believers Chapel, to really trust God in his word. We want to feel that the Scripture is sufficient for us and we believe that the Holy Spirit is sufficient for the trials of life and that we do not have to spend half of our time rushing to psychologists and psychiatrists, who may upon occasion give some help in some situations – I don’t want to attack every one of them – but I say that the biblical principle is to trust the word of God as sufficient for our needs when that word is wielded by the Holy Spirit. Oh how easy it is to be offended at the Lord Jesus Christ.

What sayest thou O Peter? The day we fall is the day when we cease to fear that we shall fall. The self-confidence of the apostle so characteristic of every one of us.

Well let’s turn over a page and we’ll look at the denial itself. It’s a sad story. It’s very well known. Can you imagine it? The very man who said just a few weeks back, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, will say here, now, I don’t know the man. Can you imagine that? That shows the heights and depths to which an apostle can go. Incidentally, the opponents of the doctrine of inerrancy have indulged in quite a bit of crowing over this cock crowing, because in one of the gospels it says that before the cock crows twice, you will have denied me thrice, whereas in Matthew it says, simply, before the cock crows you will have denied me thrice. That to them is proof that the Bible is not without its errors.

Now they have engaged, I say, in a lot of crowing over this cock crowing, and not simply once or twice, too, because they are still crowing over it. But it is a rather interesting thing that Pliny in one of his books, speaks about *segundum galloconum* – a

second cock crowing time, and Aristophanes also speaks of the same thing. Evidently, in ancient times it was well known that cocks often crow rather sleepily and lazily around midnight but the real cock crowing is just before the dawn. That’s the one with which we are most familiar.

Now it appears that Mark, in the mention of the two crowings, makes reference to that double crowing of the cock, whereas in the case of Matthew, since the major one is the second one, he makes reference only to that. I used to illustrate this by two bells in the classroom. Over at Dallas Seminary, many years ago, I don’t even know what it is now, but in those days we used to have two bells. We would have a bell three minutes before the hour – the classes all began on the hour – we would have a bell three minutes before the hour and then we would have the final bell on the hour, and if you arrived after the final bell you were late, but whenever we said, has the bell rung, we were not talking about that preliminary bell; we were talking about the second one. But it was a second bell, and we would speak of it as just the bell, because everybody knew that there were two bells. So likewise here. There is nothing contradictory in the narrative.

Even if that should not satisfy a man it is possible that Mark refers to two quick crowings of the cock, and there is no contradiction. Well Peter is sitting outside the court, and a maid – isn’t it interesting a maid came to him, just a little maid? God likes to make all of our weaknesses so evident. It was not a strong Roman soldier, brave, brutal-looking like a Conrad Dobler [laughter], but it was a maid. Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied it before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto him that unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. Isn’t it striking? The man. He had said he was the Son of the living God, but now he’s offended at Jesus. He doesn’t want to be identified with him because he knows his own hide may be at stake.

And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I don’t like to do this and I beg your pardon for doing it, but I want you to catch the force of the depths to which the apostle has sunk. Then began he to curse and to swear saying, “Dammit! I know not the man!” And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Lord Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly. Yes Peter was sifted as wheat and everything was taken from him but his faith. And the faith itself, weak though it was expresses itself in the weeping bitterly.

Ah, he was a weak man really. He wasn’t a brave man. All of this, Though all be offended in thee, I will not be offended in thee I will go to death with thee—all chaff. And every kind of trust in human things will prove to be chaff in the final analysis. Every kind of trust in your own strength will prove to be chaff finally. Satan loves to take us at our strong points. Courage was Peter’s strong point. It isn’t long after this before he’s wielding the sword. He’s a man who’s up and down, but he has courage. It’s physical courage and so Satan takes him at that.

Moses was the meekest of men, and God allowed Satan to take him when he lost his temper. Abraham is the man of faith and he falls at the point of faith. Elijah is the great strong man who’s able to confront all the prophets of Bael and the prophets of the groves and win a great victory and then Jezebel the woman says a word to him and immediately he’s running south as fast as he can. So we see illustrated the power and the powerlessness of Satan. He takes us captives at our strong points, and the very time that we come to think we are strong in this or we are strong in that, probably is at that point that you’ll be proved to be simply chaff by the Lord.

And yet we also see the willingness and the weakness of a man. Someone has said it took forty days to get Israel out of the land of Egypt, and forty years to get them through the wilderness. Or you can put it another way and say, it took them forty days to

come out of Egypt into the wilderness, but it took forty years to get Egypt out of them. You see it’s very easy to be saved, and we are saved very quickly when we trust in the atoning sacrifice, but the rest of our life is the process of sanctification, and that continues for a long time.

Evidently it’s so difficult for the Lord to sanctify me that he’s left me here for over 35 years after I was converted. He was able to convert me on the moment at a moment, and now over a long period of time he is trying to sanctify this weak and unwilling and unfaithful vessel. You can just trace the steps in Peter’s downfall. They are very simple. He disregarded the first warning. He slept when he should have been watching in the garden. He was fighting when he should have been quiet. He was following a far off, putting distance between him himself and the Lord. He disregarded the second warning. And finally he was sitting with the enemies of Christ around the fire.

You can be sure that when the saints begin to depart from the fellowship of other saints, they are going to become weaker, and the fellowship of the world will weaken all of the saints of God. As the Scotswoman said, “He had nay business there among the flunkies.” [Laughter] I like that. But we also see the power of the prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ. He said Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat, but Peter, I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. And his faith did not fail. Everything else left him, but his faith stayed. And then he added, and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.

Well we’ve made a lot of fun at Peter, but let’s remember that the Lord restored Peter in love to him. Later on, he tells the angels to go tell the disciples and Peter – give a special message to Peter because he was disheartened over his failure – and he was restored, and then as Peter wrote his epistles which are found in the word of God, he strengthens the brethren. Brethren like you and like me. He says for example, be sober be vigilant. This is the same Peter who denied the Lord. Be vigilant, because your adversary the devil is like a roaring lion walking about seeketh whom he may devour.

May God give us as Christians to realize our weakness and our need of depending upon the Holy Spirit who dwells within.

If you’re here and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus you do not have that enablement. Your need is to come to the Lord Jesus who offered a sacrifice for sinners and to receive him as your own personal Savior. May God give you grace to do that. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father how wonderful it is to realize that we have not only been given the word of God but the Holy Spirit, the third person of the blessed Trinity to guide us, to guard us, to illumine us and to strengthen us. And we praise Thee O God, and we pray that Thou wilt enable us, weak though we are to lean upon him, and glorify and exalt Thy name. Lord if there should be someone here who has not yet come to the Lord Jesus, give no rest nor peace until they rest in Christ who was the shepherd, the suffering shepherd of Jehovah who offered the penal substitutionary sacrifice and has made it possible, righteously, for eternal life to be given. O God, bring men and women and children to Christ

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.