



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 33: 1-20

“God’s Fighter Retreating”

TRANSCRIPT

This morning will you turn with me to Genesis chapter 33. We will continue our series of studies in the Book of Genesis and particularly now in the life of Jacob. In the last of the installments, in the story of the life of Jacob, remember he has been called back to the land from Haran and on the way he has wrestled with the Angel, then defeated by the Angel, has begun to cling to the Angel, and received the blessing from the angel who turns out to be another of the pre-incarnate appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, in chapter 33 and verse 1, Jacob is on the way. He knows that Esau is before him and remembered that the last time he saw Esau was considerable number he has previously but Esau had said that if he could get his hands on Jacob, he would wring his neck or he would kill him in his own particular way. So, Jacob is little bit anxious about this meeting with Esau.

“Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. (It is obvious where his affections lie. They lie with Rachel and with Rachel’s son, Joseph.) But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to

the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. He lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and said, ‘Who are these with you?’ So he said, that is Jacob ‘The children whom God has graciously given your servant.’ Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down. And he said, ‘What do you mean by all this company which I have met?’ And he said, that is, Jacob ‘To find favor in the sight of my lord.’ But Esau said, ‘I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own.’ Jacob said, ‘No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably. (I think what is meant by that is that Jacob is simply saying that he sees a reflection of the favor that God has shown him in the friendliness that Esau has manifested in seeing Jacob. Verse 11,) Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have plenty.’ Thus he urged him and he took it. (Jacob was particularly interested that Esau would accept this gift of over 500 animals, which had been sent forward because he was, in the East if one took a gift that was the assurance that the relationship had been reestablished and so he was anxious to see that that was reestablished.) Then Esau said, ‘Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you.’ But he said to him, ‘My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die’ (now that sounds as if it is very wise on Jacob’s part but as we shall see, he is playing the hypocrite.) ‘Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir.’ (Now, Seir was down to the southeast and that was where apparently Esau was living at this time. Disturbance in the nursery. [Laughter]) And Esau said, ‘Please let me leave with you some of the people who

are with me.’ But he said, what need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.’ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth. Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. Notice those expressions, which described the pattern of Jacob’s existence at this time. He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for one hundred pieces of money. Then he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word!

When Israel or Jacob wrestled with the angel at Peniel and finally lost the struggle, the angel asked him what is your name and he said Jacob and then he said your name shall no longer be Jacob but Israel for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.

Now, that name Israel, for many years was thought by most bible scholars to mean simply a prince with God because the word for prince is very closely related to the name Israel. Most of the bible scholars today believe that is not quite right. Really the name Israel means something like God’s fighter or perhaps may God fight for him. The subject this morning as we turn to Genesis chapter 33 is, “After Peniel or God’s fighter retreating.” Peniel is an epoch in the life of Jacob. He reaches a new level of experience in the struggling with the angel and particularly as he realizes that the person with whom he is struggling is God himself for he says afterwards “I have seen God face to face yet my life has been preserved.”

He fought with that unknown person who came to him, thinking perhaps that he was a representative of Esau, since Esau was coming with 400 armed men and they struggled in the beginning of the night and struggled through the night and there seemed to be no way for each one of them to make headway against the other one until finally

this individual with whom he was wrestling who evidently possessed an awesome reserve of strength. As I mentioned in the last message two weeks ago, touched Jacob’s hip and immediately it was dislocated and out of joint and Jacob realized, at that time, that the person with whom he was wrestling was not after all a man but a supernatural being.

Now, Hosea tells us that he wept and sought his favor. So, evidently when Jacob realized what was happening, and that he was really not wrestling with a man but with a super human being, instead of wrestling with him, he began to cling to him and to weep and to seek the favor of this person with whom he had been struggling. That is a beautiful picture of the posture of power in spiritual things. Clinging, weeping, and seeking the favor of our great God and so the defeat, which Jacob experienced really became a victory because in the defeat, he was defeated but in the victory of the divine being, Jacob found his real victory because he had learned to cling and he is given the new name of God’s fighter or may God strive for him.

Now, it was a great high point in the life of Jacob to this point. But it is one thing to attain to a great level of spiritual experience and it is another to keep it. They are not the same thing, and so Jacob had reached a high level of spiritual experience. He has actually wrestled with God, he has come to see him face to face, and furthermore, God has blessed him and given him a new name, God’s fighter. But it does not take anything but Esau to change Jacob from clinging to cringing and so he is cringing again in Genesis chapter 33, and that is indicated by the use of the name Israel through the rest of this book. It illustrates for us the fact that Jacob is a person who is up and down and up and down even after this great experience.

Now in the case of Abraham, if you read the story of Abraham, he was called Abram but when God changed his name to Abraham, in the record itself, you will find that it is Abraham, Abraham, Abraham, generally speaking, thereafter I think may be in the case of Abraham entirely thereafter. And when Saul becomes Paul in the experience

as set forth in the Book of Acts, afterwards you read Paul and rarely if ever do you read the old name appearing. In the case of Simon Peter, the Simon, which means weak who has become Peter, the Rock, almost altogether thereafter Peter becomes predominant in the reference to the names of the two.

But if you read the rest of the Book of Genesis you will find that 45 times after this Jacob appears as Jacob and only 23 times as Israel thereafter and even in the use of the names, you can see that Jacob, while he has this great experience and he has reached this high plateau that night of Peniel, that afterwards he falls away from it quite often and the cost of this is seen in chapter 34, the chapter we shall consider next week, the Lord-willing, because the cost of falling away from the Lord and the cost of drifting back towards the world and camping toward the cities of the world is rape, treachery, massacre, and reproach upon the name of God. Unequal partnerships in life lead to disaster and Jacob unfortunately had to learn it by experience. So, the chief lesson then of chapter 33, as we shall see, is the danger of degeneration in the Christian life.

We are not suggesting, of course, that Jacob was not a believer, he was a believer and we are not suggesting that a person once having attained to a spiritual experience may fall away and be lost. We are not talking about the fact that he is no longer a believer, but it is possible for believers to degenerate in their Christian experience and Jacob begins the path that leads to that in chapter 33.

There is one other great lesson that one sees as in chapter 33 and that is the lesson that is found in the meeting of Jacob and Esau. Again, it is a kind of a classic of reconciliation, and as a matter of fact, one of the rather unusual things about this experience, that when these two brothers met after they have been separated for these many years and Esau, we read, ran forward, embraced Jacob, fell on his neck and kissed him.

The Lord Jesus, when he constructed the parable of the prodigal son, speaking of the prodigal who went into the far country finally came to himself, decided he would go

back to his father and in Luke chapter 15, I think it is about verse 20 as the Lord tells the story of the Father who is Jesus Christ’s picture of God. As the father looks down the road and sees the son coming after many years of separation from the father, he picks up his garments, his long lengthy garments and in a very undignified way it might seem but it is the dignity of a merciful God who loves, he races down the road, meets his son returning, falls upon his neck and begins to kiss him. It is as almost as if our Lord has borrowed from this very chapter, the words by which to describe that meeting, the classic meeting of reconciliation. It is a beautiful lesson. It is a beautiful illustration and we have it here in Genesis chapter 33.

Of course, there are other lessons here but we want to concentrate on the principal one. There are other lessons such as the power of kindness in our relationships one with another. There is the lesson of the wisdom of taking God along with us on our trips and while Jacob falls backward nevertheless, in the midst of the experiences of life, he does recognize that God is with him and of course, it illustrates the duties of remembering the mercy of God to us and Jacob does in spite of his failure remember the blessings of the Lord to him. But preeminently, it is the story of the danger of degeneration in the Christian life and that is what we want to concentrate on as we look Genesis chapter 33.

Now, the first four verses of the chapter record the meeting of the two brothers, Jacob and Esau after many years of separation and the first step backward of Jacob. The tests of life are illustrated here. In chapter 32, Jacob meets with the angel but now he must meet with Esau. How often we find this true in our Christian experience? We have great blessing from the Lord. There are times in our lives when we take a step or two forward and things seem to be wonderful and it is just at that time often that our tests come and here he has wrestled with the angel, and he has had the God himself bless him but now he must meet Esau.

Moses is on the mount and has that wonderful experience of talking with the Lord God, receiving the law from him, and then he must come down and face the rebellious nation that has gone after of the golden calf. Our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration has transfigured and has the remarkable experience of being in a sense glorified and given a fore-view of the successful completion of his work, but coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, just a few days after that, he must be on Mount Calvary and there suffering for the sins of sinners. So, it is almost a pattern of Christian things. Great blessing and then a great trial.

As someone has said, “He takes us up the hill difficulty and into the house beautiful where we sleep in the chamber of peace, which looks toward the sun rising not that we should stay there but that we should be rested and accoutered, and prepared to meet Apollyon in the valley and to pass unscathed through the shadow of death and Vanity Fair.” So, we should not be discouraged when we face trials and we should not expect because we have great blessings that everything is going to be wonderful thereafter. There is no such thing as a plane of life, which we may reach and upon which we shall never meet any difficulties or trials. Christian experience is not like that because God is still working with us. We are not built yet, we are still under construction and the saints of God should expect it.

In the Book of Proverbs, we read, “The fear of man is a snare, but whosoever putteth his trust in the Lord is safe.” Jacob forgot that text if he ever knew anything about it because now when Esau comes with his 400 men, the man who has wrestled with God, the man whose name now is God’s fighter must take on the attitude of obsequious servility with unusual attention devoted to Esau. There was no reason for Jacob to have passed on ahead of them and bowed himself to the ground seven times until he came near to Esau. It is true that in the East, they are very courteous, very nice but there was no reason for him to do that. He comes to Esau not in the power of the Spirit but in the power of the flesh.

Troubles may always be met in the way of the flesh or in the way of the Spirit. They may be met in panic or they may be met in the peace of God, which garrisons our heart. God had already told Jacob a long time before that he was going to be with him, and furthermore that he would accomplish everything in his life; that he was going to accomplish everything. He had the absolute assurance from the very word of God that everything was going to be wonderful so far as the future was concerned so far as the ultimate outcomes of things. But instead of meeting Esau in the power of the promises of God he meets Esau in panic and fear and wonder over how Esau shall respond.

Now, these are experiences of course that are unique for Jacob but they are the same experiences that you and I have. Some of us may have to meet a doctor in that way, some of us may have a meeting with our employer that way. We may be very disturbed. Some of us may have to meet a creditor. The trials of life are of all the same kind though they are not the same trials and as Christians, we meet in the peace of God not in panic.

While Jacob takes his first step backward from the high level of that struggle with the Lord God at Peniel, now in the conversation of the brothers that follows, there is the second step backward. You might think that Jacob’s words to Esau were simply polite and shrewd because when Esau invites him to come with him, while he just says after all you see I have got the flocks in the herds and they are nursing and if we march them too rapidly, they will die. And furthermore I have my wives and I have the little children with me and I have got to care for them and so Esau, you go on and then in verse 14, he says until I come to my Lord at Seir.

Now, Seir was down in the southeast and so Jacob’s words if he did what he said he was going to do would be simply polite, shrewd, declining of Esau’s invitation. In fact, it would be a testimony to the truth if given in the right spirit and the right motive and he would have been defended by God even if he had gone down into Esau’s territory. But there was no need for God’s Fighter to lie and that is exactly what he did. He didn’t

intend to go to Seir. He said he was going in order to get rid of Esau but we read in verse 16 and 17 that Jacob journeyed to Sukkoth. Have you looked on the map? Seir is down to the southeast and Sukkoth is up to the northwest. So, as soon as Esau passed over the horizon, Jacob decided now is my chance to go the other way and so he took off to the northwest.

Now, what do you imagine Esau said about Jacob when he found out that Jacob was not following? He said, “That is the fellow that said that all of that property that was given to him was given to him by God. He is the one who said that God in his wonderful grace gave me all of this and furthermore he is the fellow that said when he looked upon my face, it reminded him of the face of God and how he had been kind and good to him.” I can just imagine him talking about Jacob saying like “You know Jacob hasn’t changed a bit. He is still a liar and a supplanter” and how often things like that happen in the lives of believers. You see how easy it is for the world to reproach and blaspheme the name of the true God when we do not live up to profession that we so loudly make. It would be much better not to be using the name of the Lord if that is the kind of activity that is going to follow it. So, here is the danger of nullifying our verbal professions by our vile, contrary conduct of lying and cutting the corners so far as the truth is concerned.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, who has written some notes on the Book of Genesis, has said that Jacob’s name was changed from Jacob to Israel but it might well have been from the rest of the book through, Jacael or Israob, and he combined the two words Jacob and Israel for Jacael and Israob. He combined them also in order to illustrate the fact that throughout the rest of the book what we have is a combination of Jacob’s supplanter and Israel, God’s fighter.

Now, the third step backward is described in the last few verses and I would like to spend the remainder of our time on this. “So, Esau returned that day on his way to Seir and Jacob journeyed to Sukkoth and he built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock.” Therefore, the place is called Sukkoth, which means tabernacles or tents and

then we also read in verse 18 that he came to the city of Shechem and then noticed the last clause and “camped before the city.” Then in the 19th verse it is said that he brought a piece of the land that he had pitched there and finally in verse 20, it said that he erected an altar.

Now, I want you to notice the several steps here that emphasize that Jacob has forgotten all about the vow that he had offered at a place named Bethel. Back in chapter 8 and verse 21, we read these words when we were expounding the section in which Jacob at Bethel had the vision of the ladder and the angels ascending and descending upon it. Jacob had replied, verse 20, “He made a vow, saying if God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take and will give me food to eat and garments to wear and I return to my father’s house in safety then the Lord will be my God.”

Now, Jacob has forgotten all about that vow. Furthermore, he has forgotten that when God called him back in to the land, he had said to him “I am the God of Bethel.” Where Jacob should have gone was Bethel; instead he goes to Sukkoth and then he goes over near the city of Shechem and he camps outside the city and takes up a relatively permanent residence there because Dinah, the young girl who has the terrible experience in the next chapter, was just a little girl of about seven years of age about this time. So, he must have stayed near the city of Shechem for sometime. So, you can see that these steps emphasize that he has forgotten all about his vow now and forgotten that Yahweh is the God of Bethel; that was the goal.

He has taken these significant steps. He has bought a house or he has built a house, he has built some barns. Now, there is one characteristic of the patriarchs, they were to be pilgrims. The New Testament says that Abraham was a man who went around living in tents, confessing that they were not citizens of this world but here is one of them who is confessing, by his actions, that he is very much a citizen of this particular sphere. He is not living like a pilgrim. He is living like a permanent resident and so he has built

himself a house and he has barns for his animals and furthermore he has camped before the city.

Now the city was a heathen city. What do you think was the kind of conversation that Rachel and Jacob had as these things were going on? I think I can imagine Rachel saying something like this, “You know Jacob, Joseph is getting along in few years now and he is up at the age where he likes to be around all the kids and furthermore, after all, Leah has children and Bilhah has children. So, we have got about a dozen children and they need some relationship with other children and this constant moving around with all these flocks out in the country; that is not too good. We have to get near the city. We have to give the kids an opportunity to have fellowship with other kids after all and that is the way you build up proper personality, isn’t in it,” and so you can just imagine the kinds of conversations they had, social fellowship for the children and so when Jacob comes outside the city of Shechem and camps there, it is the attraction of compromise in the Christian life.

Now, there are many things of course that indicate to us that children ought to have fellowship with other children. But to have fellowship with the world, that is an entirely different matter, because the world always wins when we have fellowship with the world. We never win the world. The world always defeats us. Now, of course, there may be some individuals in the world who have won but the world remains the world. It is an enemy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is an enemy of our Lord.

He had to buy land. So, he buys the very land that God has promised him, and then in order to impress others perhaps that he was a religious man, he built that altar. Now, I would imagine from the tenor of this narrative here that that is an attempt to counteract his disobedience by ceremony and how often that happens. When we are in the midst of disobeying the Lord God, we are very careful that we do things that make others think that we really are quite spiritual and so we engage in spiritual exercises, which are not really one we wish deep down, but we do them in order to make an

impression on other people. So, we attend church or we attend the Bible study or even go to a home Bible study or even come to the Lord’s table but at the same time we are not obedient to the words that are said forth in the Holy Scripture. The Lord God is not nearly so interested in our sacrifices as he is in the obedience of the heart and I think that when Jacob built this altar, it was not to truly worship this Lord God in the sense that he may have from time to time but he is counteracting his disobedience by the ceremony and the reason that I think that this is bad as because of what follows.

Because it is in Shechem, in the very next chapter that the rape, and the reproach, and the massacre takes place and so it is obvious this is a place, it seems to me, that he should not have been. The idea that our children must have society, that they cannot be recluses is correct to a certain point, but to be a worldling is something else, for the world is an enemy of the Lord God. James has said that the person who is friendly with the world is at enmity with the Lord God. One cannot love the world and love the Lord at the same time. What is worldliness in the final analysis? Well, I think one of the major features of worldliness is the desire to appear to be or to impress others and Jacob is living on the edge of the world and the person who lives on the edge of the world is going to have difficulty. Someone has said, “He needs a long spoon who sups with the devil.”

I wonder what Jacob was thinking when he bought that land too. Was he thinking “a bird in hand is worth two in the bush.” The Lord has promised me this after all; but I sure would like little of it now. So he does. But you cannot blend worldliness with godliness. You cannot blend society with Christ. You cannot mix mammon and God because world always wins out on those occasions.

Now, I would like to, just in the remaining moment try to draw our attention again to the chief lesson. We have seen these three steps in Jacob’s backsliding when he meets Esau, the conversation that follows, and his deception, and then finally in the kind of life

now that he begins to live. This illustrates, of course, that conversion and consecration is no guarantee of an abiding faithfulness in the spiritual life. What we need is continuance and you can see this illustrated I think throughout holy Scripture, Let’s think for a moment of David. David is a person who had a tremendous revelation from the Lord God. He was told that from his seed there would come a ruler who would rule over the whole of the face of the earth that is that the Messiah would come from the seed of David and those great Davidic promises are given to him in 2 Samuel chapter 7, but it is not long after that he is responsible for the great sin with Bathsheba.

Or let’s think about the Apostle Peter. After Caesarea Phillipi, there on the mountain at Caesarea Phillipi, the Lord had asked the apostles, “Who do men say that I, the Son of man, I am? They had given some replies and then the Lord turned to them as a true preacher and says, “But whom say ye that I am? And Peter, in a flash of illumination from the Lord God, said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of The Living God.” In a few moments the Lord Jesus takes Peter, James and John upon the Mount of Transfiguration and there the Lord is transfigured before them. Later on he speaks about beholding the power and the glory of the coming king, but it is just a few days after that that he denies that, he even knows the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or think about those exhortations written in the apostle by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews about the awful possibility of believers who have been in the life of Christ so long that they have passed from freshness in spiritual things to the place where they have need for someone to teach them again the first principles. Spiritual senility; it is as if they begin as a child, they reach maturity but now they are backward children. It is awfully possible for Christians to reach the stage of spiritual senility where we need again to be taught the things that we were taught many years before.

You see, spiritual experiences, though they are true and rich, do not exempt us from the danger of degeneration. The grace of perseverance is perhaps the greatest need of all of us. Haven’t we all heard of some servant of the Lord or some well known

Christian whose testimony was outstanding but who nevertheless at a point in his life, after being honored and blessed by the Lord and by men, has fallen into sin and shame? We think of some who have commenced their Christian life and their ministry full of hope, full of promise, people have said, “Oh! What a great future,” but now because of failure to stick to the principles of the word of God, they are what someone has called “unfulfilled prophecies” by reason of disobedience to the heavenly vision.

They virtually cease to pray. They cease to be unworldly. They have adopted unworthy methods in their ministry or in their witnessing. They have pandered to worldliness and earthly ambitions, and the result is a deadness and a darkness and a dryness and a dullness in spiritual things. Souls not being saved through their testimony, believers not being encouraged; everything stale and unprofitable, as Paul says, cast away, discarded as useless. Not that they are not believers but useless in the Christian life, rejected because of loss of relationship to the Lord God, the danger of degeneracy.

We are not talking about men who are preachers. We are talking about all of us in the family of the faithful. It is possible for all of us to have a bright beginning, a glorious time in life when we are growing spiritually, when there is a vitality in our Christian experience. May be you have never stood by an pulpit like this but nevertheless you have studied the word of God and things have begun to come to be in place and you have been thrilled and you have grown in the knowledge of the Lord, and you have had a Christian testimony with your friends and the people with whom you have come in contact, but now, well, the reading of the Bible -- that is a good thing, but I don’t really do much of it. To get down on your knees and really agonize before the Lord in the sense that you are earnestly petitioning him that you might grow in grace and for the specific interests of the Lord in your life – well that’s long gone if it ever was there. You don’t have any experiences like that and consequently the whole of Christian life has settled down into the drudgery of having to attend the meeting on Sunday morning or may be on a Wednesday night or even a Sunday night. You have lost the love that was

there in the beginning. Moody once said to one of the leading religious men of his day that the one thing that he feared most was loss of testimony for Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday morning, I preached in a little chapel in Toronto both in the morning and in the evening and one hour or so there, I, at this little chapel, Bridlegrove Chapel in Toronto, I went in at 9:30 AM for the Lord’s Supper. They have the Lord’s Supper every Sunday morning at 9:30 AM and a meeting like we have here on Sunday night. I would imagine in that chapel no more than 40 people there at the Lord’s Supper although at the meeting later on there were 125 or perhaps 150.

It is not a large auditorium but they had been given some property, which is now worth a million dollars right in a beautiful location. I don’t imagine they have more than an acre of an acre and a half of land but it is a very valuable land in Toronto and they have a testimony and it is a nice testimony. When I came in and I sat on the second row upfront near where the elements were set before us and just about a minute before the meeting began, an elderly man came in and I was sitting just about 10, well, probably only 5 feet from him.

He came in and he sat down right by the aisle and he had, it looked like a small suitcase about 18 inches long and about 14 or 15 inches wide and it was about this thick almost 6 inches. Well, when he sat down, he put that down, and I wondered if that was his pair of pajamas that he had slept in the night before, but no. He reached down in a moment and he picked it up and he took the top of it and by the way it was so old. This thing that he had it in, I think it was made in the reign of Queen Victoria. It was graying with age or browning with age. The leather was rotting away but anyway he took out his Bible and the Bible was about as big as Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary, great big thing and he opened it up and I looked over on the pages and his pages were filled with notes, every page and they were written in a beautiful handwriting, all orderly down the margins and had wide margins.

Later on, I found out this was a Newberry Bible. He had had it for 60 years and others had commented on the fact that he wrote in it with hand that was so beautiful, small just like script almost. So, he sat down, he opened that Bible upon his lap and I looked and that man is at least 80 years of age. That was great he could come in and have his Bible there.

The meeting started and we sang a hymn or so and someone prayed. It was an open meeting like we have here in which the Holy Spirit is free to move on the men to participate and then suddenly I heard him speaking out. He was still sitting down and he read a chapter 5, verses 1 and 2. He just said, “Will you turn to Ephesians chapter 5 verse 1 and verse 2?” And everybody did and so he read those verses, which have to do with the sacrifice of Christ. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” And after he had done this, he folded up his Bible put it on the side and stood up.

He put one hand on the front pew in order to steady himself and then he turned around to the audience and began to expound. He had an amazing number of facts in his mind. He said now in the Epistle to the Romans, the word righteousness or the roots occur 58 times and he mentioned some other thing that occurred 6 times. I remembered he asked, “What is the glory of God?” He said that is the perfect harmony of the 42 attributes of God, 42 -- I never have known of any theologian who got more than about 30 attributes of God -- but he has got 42.

But then, I said he is old, it is possible he has had longer time looking than the rest of the theologians, [laughter] but he began to expound and it was a beautiful exposition of the Old Testament. He turned to the offerings and he spoke about the bird offering and the peace offering and the meal offering, and he was exalting the Lord and then he began to preach and he got fervent and I remember that he finally said, “You know if these things really gripped us,” and his hand was going and by the way, he was

92-1/2 years of age, 92-1/2. I saw a picture afterwards of him when he was 75 and it was published 16 years before that. He was 92-1/2 years of age and he stood up and he began to get fervent and I remember this last statement he said, “Now if these things really gripped us,” he said, and this is the way his hand was going [Johnson gestures], “our meeting would be lively and vital and not like a funeral service.”

And I noticed everybody in the audience was looking at him and smiling. They were listening. They knew him. I didn’t know him but he had been there for about six weeks from New Zealand. Well, it turned out it was Mr. Charles J. Rolls who was educated at Cambridge. He was a missionary in India. He was a home director of a faith mission many years. His forebears had real prominence in England. He was named after Lord Llangattock’s third son, the honorable Charles Rolls who in 1906 with Frederick Royce formed the Rolls Royce Company and his name was Charles J. Rolls.

This Newberry Bible he had had for 60 years bulging with all of his study notes, now it lies in this meticulous engraving like script of his. And incidentally after the morning meeting, Shirley Mimms, Dr. Mimms wife came to me and said I believe that that is the same Mr. Rolls who was here about 20 years ago who spent a week in our home and she said furthermore, he likes to bake bread and I said that’s right and he still bakes bread. He bakes bread for his family right at this moment and even in Toronto when he was visiting, we went into the kitchen and baked bread. He wants to be doing something all the time. He has written several books on the attributes of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I couldn’t help but think, if God should enable me to live to be 92 years of age, I would want to be a man as fervent in spirit as Mr. Rolls was. What a tremendous testimony to remain fervent and spirit and not have the experience of the danger of degeneration.

Now, the rewards of clinging instead of cringing before men and the world are very evident. The fear of men brings us snare but whosoever putteth his trust in the Lord is safe. While the light that God gave to Jacob at Peniel would have given him protection from all the disasters that faced him afterwards, would have protected him and kept him

and encouraged him; there is no reason why we should not have the assurance of the presence and power of the Lord with us no matter what we face. May the Lord deliver us from degeneration. What a terrible thing it is to grow cold in spiritual things, to avoid the reading of the word of God, to avoid the time by your bedside, and the pouring out of your heart before the Lord, to avoid the fellowship with him. Life does become dull and drab and dead and it is, no wonder, that some of the things have to happen to us by the way of discipline. May the Lord God speak to our hearts, delivering us from the danger of degeneracy.

If you are here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, your responsibility of course, is to recognize that He has offered the all-atoning sacrifice and to flee to the shedding of the precious blood for the forgiveness of sins. May God help you to come and then when are come and you have the vitality of the forgiveness of sins, don’t lose the joy. Make the word of God your food, have a time of prayer regularly with the Lord God, get down on your knees, pour your heart out before him, learn what it is to truly pray, might even shed a few tears by your bedside, it won’t hurt, and when you face the trials of life, you will face them with the Lord. Let us stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are grateful Lord for the lessons that are found in the Holy Scripture. Deliver us from spiritual senility. Deliver us from the peril of degeneracy in our Christian life. What a reproach to the Lord God to lie and cheat like the world? O God, by Thy wonderful grace uphold us, make us different. We know that in ourselves we are like Jacob, crooked. Glorify Thy name in Thy blessing to us and magnify Thy grace in our lives and father, if there should be some here who have never believed in Jesus Christ, bring them to Him whom to know is life eternal for His name’s sake. Amen.