



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 34: 1-34

“Worldliness: Its Character And Cure”

TRANSCRIPT

We are studying as you know in the Book of Genesis, and we are at chapter 34 in the exposition of that book and our subject and the message that will follow later on is, “Jacob at Shechem or worldliness, its character and cure.” Jacob is now on his way back to Bethel. He should have gone right to Bethel but he did not. He was fearful of his meeting with Esau but that turned out much better than expected; however, it was evident that he acted with a little bit of deceit toward Esau because he told him that he would follow him to Seir to the southeast but as soon as Esau passed over the horizon, he went to the north and west, the exact opposite direction.

Then he went down to Sukkoth and there at Sukkoth, he built himself a house. Now, the patriarchs were pilgrims and dwelt in tents, the Scriptures like to remind us, because that is the kind of faith life to which God called them, not to make a settled home and abide here or to settle a home on this earth because after all we are heavenly citizens. We are not citizens of the earth ultimately but Jacob made himself a house and made barns for his livestock and then he moved from Sukkoth to Shechem and there it is stated in the 18th verse of the preceding chapter that he camped before the city. So, he is moving even closer to the pagan world that was about him and as the separated servant of the Lord God that is a very dangerous position to be in. It is not surprising then that

we read in the next chapter the thing that we read concerning Jacob’s child Dinah. So, in verse 1 we read,

“Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land and when Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her by force. He was deeply attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, ‘Get me this young girl for a wife.’ Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in. (It is rather strange what Jacob did; we will make a comment or two about that later.) Then Hamor, the father of Shechem, went to Jacob to speak with him. Now the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved, and they were very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.’ (So, important that you notice that expression, ‘Has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.’ That indicates that the brothers knew something about their special separated position so far as the world was concerned. They understood that this was a sin against the calling of the nation.) ‘But Hamor spoke with them, saying, ‘The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage and intermarry with us; give your daughters to us and take our daughters for yourselves. Thus you shall live with us, and the land shall be open before you; live and trade in it and acquire property in it.’ Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, ‘if I find favor in your sight, then I will give whatever you say to me. Ask me ever so much bridal payment and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; but give me the girl in marriage.’ But Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor with deceit and spoke to them, because he had defiled Dinah, their sister, and they said to him, ‘We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us.’ (You see they do

recognize their position as a nation called of God for special service.) ‘Only on this condition will we consent to you: if you will become like us, that every male of you be circumcised, then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people. But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go; now their words seemed reasonable to Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son.’”

That is rather striking because, of course, what they were doing was using an ordinance of believing people and applying it to unbelieving people in order to deceive them. It was, of course, an evil thing for the sons of Jacob in an evil situation dealing with evil people in this way and it sounds it was like saying, “be baptized and you will be one of us apart from any true spiritual relationship to the Lord God,” and it is not surprising that their word seemed reasonable to Shechem, Hamor’s son because the world doesn’t understand spiritual things. If you say to them, be baptized and you are one of us, well, that makes sense to them. The imperative of a spiritual relationship to the Lord God does not grip the world at all for they do not understand.

If you should be in the audience this morning and if you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, the Bible says, the natural man, that is what you are, receiveth not the things of the spirit of God. They are foolishness unto him. Neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned. In fact, the very fact that you don’t understand what I am talking about may be the sign that you are not one of us and it also may be the way the Holy Spirit would want to prick your conscience so that you might really discover where you are and respond in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. So, it is not surprising this seemed very reasonable to men of the world but it was very unreasonable in reality. Verse 19,

“And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now, he was more respected than all the household of his father. So

Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, ‘these men are friendly with us; therefore let them live in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters in marriage, and give our daughters to them. Only on this condition will the men consent to us to live with us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised. Will not their livestock and their property and all their animals be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will live with us.’ (You can see of course the spiritual frame of mind that these pagans have. They are interested in the property and in the intermarriage, but the spiritual relationship with the people, who have the Abrahamic promises, does not grip them at all.) ‘All who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and to his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city. Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went forth.’ Incidentally, that verse together with the previous one indicates that the relationship that Shechem had to Dinah was not simply that of rape but was probably more like seduction. ‘And Jacob's sons came upon the slain and looted the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that was in the houses. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ‘You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I shall be destroyed, I and my household.’ But they said, ‘Should he treat our sister as a harlot?’”

May God bless this reading of his word.

The subject for this morning in the exposition of the Book of Genesis is, as I mentioned in the reading of the Scripture, “Jacob at Shechem, or Worldliness, its Character and Cure.” It is not so easy to define worldliness as we often think. The result is that the concept of unworldliness is often ridiculed and we find ourselves sometimes a little speechless in defending the doctrine of worldliness. Worldliness is often equated with narrowness of mind, straight-lacedness, a critical legalistic bent of mind. Those that think that the concept is a scriptural concept often refer to caustically as bitter people, even as ugly people, self-righteous people, and in the media, often they are pictured as mean -- in fact the word mean is often used. In kindlier notes by the believers, they are put down as out of touch with the realities of the world.

Yet the Apostles speak of worldliness. There is such a thing as worldliness. The Apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 12 and verse 1 and verse 2, after expounding the mercies of God, says, “I urge you Therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world.” So the apostle does know that there is such a thing as a doctrine of worldliness.

It is taught in the word of God and we are warned against worldliness. It is a real danger that faces not only the church but it faces individuals within the church. Church history will show you that worldliness has been one of the reasons why the church, at certain periods in its history, has been weak. Some students of church history, for example, have pointed out the striking difference between the church of the first two centuries after the days of our Lord and the apostles and then the church in the 4th and 5th Centuries and some have identified the causes.

One man has traced the causes to three words; Constantine, patronage, and worldliness, and one also, he goes on to say can see it in congregations where sensational or other unworthy methods have been used to attract people with the result that the ministry is robbed of power, prayer meetings, and Bible classes yield to concerts and we

could add to bizarre and various other types of so called churchly activity. The hungry sheep look up and are not fed by the word of God and the church becomes indifferent and lethargic and finally dead.

The word of God is simply now a kind of little brief sermonette in which a certain principle drawn from some passage of the Bible is expounded. You can see it in individual Christian lives, individuals who were converted were full of vim and vigor spiritually in the early days of their Christian life, to use Paul’s words in the Epistle to the Galatians, they have ran well but something has hindered them, and in the meantime, they have become dull and dead and criticize others who are too narrow minded, straight-laced and all of the words used to describe the kind of life that is not very comfortable for them. The worldliness may be difficult to define, but it is rather easy to feel and see and I mean feel in the sense of to understand when it is there. It is an atmosphere. It is a kind of an enervating, poisoning, luring, and deadening atmosphere in which churches often fall.

Now, when you look at Jacob’s life you can sense that it is likely that that is the reason why Jacob’s life at this particular stage of his life is on a low level. Peniel had been a high watermark. He had wrestled with the Lord God and had prevailed, the scripture says. He had struggled and then finally in that awful reserve of strength, the second person of the Trinity as the angel of Jehovah had touched his hip socket and dislocated it with a simple touch; Jacob was lame forever afterwards.

There was marked in his body, the struggle with the Lord God and the defeat, which really was a spiritual victory, because Jacob, realizing the person with whom he was struggling, began now, instead of resisting, to cling. And when he was clinging, he was also, the Scripture saying, weeping and praying for deliverance for the blessing of the Lord God and finally when the Lord God said, “Let me go because morning is coming.” He said, “I will not let you go until you bless me,” and he had been blessed. It was a high watermark. But then Esau appeared over the horizon and the faith and trust that

characterized Jacob seem to vanish with the appearance of his brother who had frightened him that he would kill him when he saw him.

Now, after he has been a little deceitful with Esau, Jacob moves down to Sukkoth and there he builds for himself a house. Now, that, it seems is out of harmony with the kind of life that the patriarchs lived. In the New Testament, great stress is laid upon the fact that the patriarchs lived by faith and dwelt in tents but now Jacob is building himself a house. He is building himself barns for his livestock. He is going to take up a settled abode at one particular place. He buys land in the place where God has given him the whole of the land and then we read he comes down to Shechem and camps before the city of the unbelievers, right on the edge of the place, very similar to Lot who dwelt in Sodom and reaped also the results of that unhappy move. So, the prevailer, the one who prevailed with God now has been prevailed against by the world and spiritual leakage has constantly appeared in his life now until, well someone has said spiritual leakage always leads to spiritual loss, and so Jacob now attached to the world, nearby the Gentiles, under their influence.

It is not surprising that we read in Genesis chapter 34 of this tragedy that happened to his family. In verse 1 and verse 2 of Genesis chapter 34 we read of the seduction of Dinah and it seems as you read this that this is directly related to his proximity to the city of Shechem. “Now Dinah the daughter of Leah whom she had borne to Jacob went out to visit the daughters of the land and when Shechem, the son Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land saw her. He took her and lay with her by force.”

Dinah from the chronology of this account appears to have been a young girl of about 13 to 15 years of age but mature. In the East, in those days, the ladies matured much more quickly than they do in the West today. The results are what one might have expected. One of the commentators describes it very vividly. He says, “Poor girl, a moth fluttering about a flame, a foolish fish nibbling at the bait. Was she lonely being the only girl that she wants to show off some piece of jewelry or dress, did she long for more

admiration, a fascinating society than she could find at home? Was there a secret drawing to the young men of the place? She went along a path that seemed to her girlish fancy ever so much more attractive than the dull routine of home. She took no heed to the warnings that may have been addressed to her and it all ended as it has ended in thousands of cases since in misery, ruin, and unutterable disgrace.”

That is something that still happens today. That not only happens in the world. That is common in the world. It happens in evangelical circles. It even happens in evangelical churches where the gospel is preached very strongly and powerfully, and it even happens in churches where the sovereign grace of God is proclaimed. It is said it was a case of a poor young girl. She was received well in Shechem. In fact, the world always receives us well. The world loves to have Christians around so long as we keep quiet about Christ. They welcome us but once we begin to speak about Jesus Christ, then things change. The world crucified Christ. The world is in enmity with Christ. It is impossible for a true servant of Jesus Christ to find a home in the world. If it hated him, it will hate us if we give a testimony for him but if we clam up, if we say nothing, if we do not make our colors known and our stand plain and clear, the world welcomes us. Someone has said, “what evil have I done that yonder worldling speaks so well of me!” It is something for Christians to think about.

Now, I don’t know and the text does not tell us why Dinah wanted to be in Shechem. Was the society, there something that attracted her? Was it because of the men that were there? We are not told. You know it is possible for Christians who are in evangelical churches to think like this. They think of course about different matters. It is possible even to come to a place like the city of Dallas and say, incidentally, this is not an attempt to have you unite with Believers Chapel -- as you well know we do not have a membership roll although we have membership -- it has always been interesting to me to see the principles by which people unite with churches.

Some unite purely for social reasons. Some even say, “They dress well at that particular church; that is where I want to be.” Other men will say, “It is there I want to be because they are many business contacts that I could make with nice people who will help me.” Still others come and say, “I am interested in a church in which my children may have friends or in which there may be fellowship meetings, dinners, concerts. I am interested in a church in which there is a strong emphasis on music.” Very rarely have I ever heard anyone say to me, “I would like to know what church follows the teaching of the word of God most closely; that is the church I would like to become a part of.” That is rather interesting to me because it would seem to me that that would be the basis upon which we would want to be in a Christian fellowship and I know that if I had children I would think, my children are grown, I do have children, but if I were in a condition in which I had young children, I would want to be the kind of person who would say, Where is the word of God proclaimed? Where are the principles of the word of God followed insofar as we are able and then I would not say to my children would you like to go there. I would say that is where we go and they would go. That’s the way you are to choose a church. You should seek from the word of God to discover just exactly what the word of God says about a local church and seek to be in as close conformity to that as possible. What others think and what your children think, of all things, that is not really of great significance. That same principle is the principle that we find here. We often act on worldly principles. Our decisions are made on worldly principles.

Dinah probably was fascinated by the city of Shechem. She probably was fascinated by the males there. She was at that age. Shechem seduced her. Perhaps it was rape. The Bible does not make that very plain because he took her home. But one thing you can be sure about as you look at this, you will notice that the Scriptures say that he humbled her, he defiled her and in that you can see the stark biblical view of unchastity. The Bible has some very strong words to say about unchastity and you can

see while this is not a lecture on that particular doctrine, here in Genesis chapter 34, it is evident that the attitude that holy Scripture gives to unchastity.

It was the old, old story of, on the one hand, a young man of rank, wealth, unbridled appetite and on the other beauty, weakness, dallying with temptation; whose fault was it? Well, of course, it was Shechem’s fault and of course it was Dinah’s fault but it was also Jacob’s fault. Jacob should never have been near that city. He should have been in Bethel. It is not surprising that that happened here and I would imagine that Jacob forever reproached himself because of this and later on, in the 49th chapter, he speaks about Simeon and Levi and speaks about the violent deed that was brought about by virtue of this whole situation.

Let me very quickly run through the remainder of the chapter. One thing you can say that seems to be true in spite of the fact that this was a seduction and perhaps a rape. It also was a love story because it is clear that Shechem was deeply attracted to Dinah. He said that his soul clung to her. He loved the girl. He spoke to her heart, spoke tenderly to her, and he asked his father to get the young girl for a wife for him and the result was that Hamor approached Jacob and his sons and sought to get them to intermarry with them. He proposed intermarriage in order that the two people might be united.

But, of course, this was a crime against the calling of Israel. They were called to be separate from the world. They were selected out of the world. They were given a holy calling and great promises and they were to be different for they had come to know the Lord God. That is incidentally the nature of the Church of Jesus Christ. That is exactly what we are. We are called out of the world. We are in the world but we are not of the world. We are not motivated by the world’s values, by the world’s aims, by the world’s goals, and our lives are not operated according to the principles by which the world operates. We are of the Lord. Our citizenship is in heaven. We are different.

Now Shechem didn’t understand that. Hamor did not understand it as well and when they proposed intermarriage in unity they were proposing something that was a crime against the calling of Israel as a nation. Now, when the sons of Jacob heard about it, they were not so generous as Hamor and Shechem and they realized that since they were in the minority the only way in which they might get the best of this community by which Jacob was camped was by deceit. Now they were right on one thing. They were right in believing that Israel should not unite with the Shechemites and they were also right in condemning the act of Shechem.

But, of course, they were wrong in the way that they carried it out. It is a case of two extremes and so after the offer of marriage and union by Shechem’s father and Shechem, they made a counteroffer and their counteroffer is, and in this of course they were wrong, for they took a religious rite and made it the means by which they would ultimately murder the men of that city. They said, “If you will be circumcised, all of the male circumcised, then we will unite with you, we will take your daughters for ourselves, we will live with you and we will become one people but if you will not listen to us to be circumcised then we will take our daughter and go.” They were right but they were also wrong.

One might ask at this point how is it possible for them to fool the Shechemite so. Perhaps it was for this reason, circumcision was not simply a Jewish practice or an Israelitish practice, it was also practiced among other peoples at that time and it signifies that a person had reached marriageable status and so consequently, the proposal of this to the men of the city might well have been understood as simply a cultural thing.

But, at any rate, we do read that they accepted the terms. Shechem very quickly, we read in verse 18, “Now their words seemed reasonable to Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son.” Of course, they were reasonable to them for they were men who did not understand spiritual things at all and the young man did not delay to do the thing because he was delighted with Jacob’s daughter, and so he and his father then went to the city

gate and persuaded the men of the city to have the males circumcised in order that they might unite with the Israelites and become one people. It was a very human kind of thing and the covenantal sign of circumcision marking them out as the children of Abraham is used carnally in order to unite people who have no real inner harmony at all and then follows the treachery of the sons of Jacob. This is a crime that Jacob never forgot. When he prophesied concerning the future of the sons he singled out Simeon and Levi for special mention of the violence that they committed upon this occasion. We read in verse 25 and 26, “Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain;” crudely performed circumcision could incapacitate a man and they evidently were incapacitated all of the males, and it was possible for the two men Simeon and Levi to come into that small village, no doubt it was a small village and murder all of the men of the village and then the other brothers came also and looted the city because they have defiled their sister, they took their flocks, their herds, their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field, they captured it all, they looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives and everything that was in their houses. They made a total catastrophe of the city of Shechem.

Jacob, all this time, so far as the record goes, has been silent. He has not said a word. Now he speaks and notice how he speaks. It’s very revealing. He says, “You have brought trouble on me. You have made me odious among the inhabitants of the land. My men are few in number and they will gather together against me and they will attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household.” What was his real motive in saying you have brought trouble on me? You have made me odious among the inhabitants of the land. Was it because he felt that this would be dishonoring to the Lord God? No. He is interested in himself.

Jacob has not recovered yet. Did you notice the first person? He said, “you have brought trouble on me.” He said, “My men are few in number. They will gather together against me and attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household.” He does not say

anything about the sin of camping near the city of Shechem. He does not say anything about the fact that I am to blame perhaps for what has happened. He has no repentance so far as we can tell. No regret. No remorse for what has happened. He has no sense even of God’s promises to him and how this action is a contradiction of that, but on the contrary, the only thing he can speak about is Jacob. Jacob whose name has now become Israel, God’s fighter, is living like Jacob again. No sense of the divine blessing and the divine calling.

It is a sad fact but it is true that people who live on the boarder land of the church and the world are never happy. Do you know why? Because the world attacks them and the church does do. In Great Britain, they have a part of Great Britain that is called “The Borders,” the Scots speak of it as “The Borders” and the English speaks of it as “The Borders.” It is in the Northern part of England where Scotland and England touch. Scotland and England have fought constantly. There is only one good thing about the fights over there and that is the Southerners generally defeated the Yankees. The English have generally defeated the Scots. But they call that The Borders, down by the border. It is the border for the Scots, it is the border for the English, it is the border country, “The Borders.” They just use the term “The Borders” and the people who live in “The Borders” borders are subject to the attacks of the English and they are subject to the attacks of the Scots. They are on the way and so they have suffered through the years from both north and south.

The man who has one foot in the church of Jesus Christ and one foot in the world can never be happy. He is subject to attacks from the church and from the world. Now, the sons of the Jacob have the last word, “Should he treat our sister as a harlot?” Now, it might seem that that is an ideal thing to say but just remember this that Hamor and Shechem have agreed that what they have done may be sealed by marriage and furthermore, they were willing to give the Israelites anything that they ask and so what we

have here is the two extremes really, fearfulness on the part of Jacob and fury on the part of Jacob’s sons.

Let me say a few final words. The major lesson of Genesis chapter 34 for who would try to sum it up is the peril of degeneration into worldliness and the violent wrongs that occur as a result of it. Jacob, you see, as we said a moment ago, has become Jacob again. The Bible speaks of the world in several different ways. The Bible speaks of world as the physical world, planet earth, we might say. The Bible also when it speaks of the world, speaks of the world of men, they are called the world, and then the Bible speaks of the world in the sense of the spirit of the age.

The world system and the things that dominate it, the kinds of goals, the kinds of values that the world possesses, that is called the world, and we are told not to love the world, and in that sense, there is a great deal of admonishing in the word of God against the world. Listen to what John says in his first epistle, verse 15 and 16 of the 2nd chapter. He says, “Do not love the world, not the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life is not from the father but is of the world.”

So what is the world like? Well, the world is characterized by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. Does that remind you of anything? Well, I am sure it reminds you of the Fall in the Garden of Eden, for it was there that we read in the 3rd chapter, this very Book of Genesis, that when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, the lust of the flesh, and that it was a delight to the eyes, the lust of the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, the pride of life, and as a result, she fell. Now, she had already fallen in heart, but in the actual falling she took off the fruit and died. Those three lusts are characteristic of the world, the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, the pride of life.

Now, there is nothing wrong with desire. Something that is just a desire may be our servant, but a lust is a desire that has become our master. The lust of the flesh means

to be dominated by your physical appetite, hunger, thirst, the need for sleep, the desire for sex or for physical exercise. Obviously, physical appetites are wholesome, necessarily part of us and generally they are meant to be satisfied, but we live in an age in which eating and drinking and the great sexual experience are presented to us as goals in themselves. People bow down and worship them. They don’t eat to live; they live to eat or to copulate instead of accepting food and the other blessings of life as gifts of God. They make the principle goal in their life often the pleasures of an epicurean palate. If that is true then you can say that person is a worldly person.

C.S. Lewis, in one of his works, points out, “To lust for food does not mean merely to overeat, it can equally well manifest itself in the spirit of the dilettante who discriminates against any food that offends the susceptibilities of his finely tuned palate.” In the same way, any bodily appetite for sleep, for physical recreation, yes jogging, jogging, it’s right; it can be lust of the flesh. Or for sex becomes a bodily lust to the point where to satisfy them interferes in the smallest degree with serving and glorifying Jesus Christ. It is possible, it is very possible, in fact it is likely to have happened many times that the desire for physical recreation, for jogging is worldly because there is no question but that in the lives of some it has interfered with the place of Jesus Christ and the life of the individual. Often, it is not recognized but nevertheless it is sadly true.

I was reading a book this week in which there was an interesting story and because I know that it is so true to life. Speaking about the lust of the eyes, the desire for things that are beautiful. Well, that means, this morning, I mentioned this and someone came up to me and said, “Dr. Johnson I agreed with everything you said until you said this, the lust of the eyes, beauty. You can conceive a beauty in the terms of a Maserati.” That is where he objected. He said it with the smile on his face because he didn’t mean it, he was joking but nevertheless it is true.

It is possible for people to have such a love for an automobile but it is a sin, a black tulip or an original Picasso. There is nothing wrong with liking a beautiful

automobile or a beautiful picture or loving flowers, but the passion to possess and hoard beauty can become a lust that destroys the Christian living of an individual. This author went on to say that he had lunch with a Chinese businessman, not long ago, who was in his 60s. This man had a beautiful house. It was so beautiful. He called it breathtakingly beautiful; a tree whose leaves were semiprecious stones dominated the foyer. They sat down in the dining room and they ate with not silver, [but] gold utensils. He said his host revealed a profound knowledge of biblical doctrine. Do you know what his ambition was? His ambition was to have enough money to preach the gospel without being a burden to anyone. His spiritual activity at the time was nothing and his heart was as dry as dust. And he was a worldly man. He was worldly man who actually used his worldly activities in order to speak spiritually about some spiritual goal that he had.

Now, when we talk about worldliness, we are not talking about separation from the world in the sense of isolation. Christians are not to be isolated from the world. They are in the world. Now, we are not of the world. Our desires, our tastes, our goals, our values are totally different if we follow the Scripture but we are in the world and we are set into the world for a specific task of being a witness and the testimony to the world. So, we are not talking about separation in the sense of isolation.

We have to be identified with the world in which we are but we are talking about separation from the goals, from the values, from the kinds of activities that dominate worldly living. Monasteries and abbeys are monuments to ascetic isolation. We are not suggesting that Believers Chapel should become a monastery or any kind of abbey, which there are too many in ruins today but we are suggesting that there should be something different about a Christian wherever he goes.

Now, Jeremiah has an interesting word. He says, “Seeketh thou great things for thyself, seeketh not.” What is he talking about? Well, he talking about pride of life? Ambition, what is wrong with ambition? Please Dr. Johnson, don’t tell us there is anything wrong with ambition. Is not it important that we excel? Isn’t it important that

we really reach the top of our profession? As an insurance man, should I not be the best insurance man that I possibly can be? As a lawyer, should not I have a brilliant legal mind and the experience to go with it to be the kind of man who stands out in his profession? As a real estate man, should I not be the best in the business? A doctor? Whatever it may be. Even a preacher. Should I not be the best preacher, the finest teacher of the word of God that I can possibly be?

Ambition; truly there is nothing wrong with ambition. Do you know where the ambition comes from by the way? It comes from the Latin word *ambitio* which means to kind of move around, to walk around. It refers to a circuitous method. In fact, ambition is perfectly all right so long it is ambition directed toward a specific task that glorifies God. That is in the interests of the Lord God, but the endeavor to obtain some great thing for personal advantage; ah! That’s different.

If my ambition to be the finest insurance man is for the glory of God and not for the glory of Lewis Johnson that may be different and further if it does not mean that God does not have second place in my life, but if it means that really what I am talking about is in order that I might be known as the best lawyer or the best doctor or the finest insurance man, and if at all so means that the Lord God has second place in my life, then ambition is not only wrong, its deadly, deadly; deadly for you and deadly for your family and deadly for your children sitting by you. It is pride and self exaltation under the good name of ambition.

It is folly. That’s what it is. It is folly. It is folly because in the first place what you are aiming for is never really attained. You say well, “I don’t want to make a million. I have got a friend who wants to make a million, I just want half a million. If I can just make half a million and have it all laid aside, that is all I want.” Ever noticed men who want half a million? There was a time when I wanted half a million. In fact, I wanted more than that. I wasn’t satisfied with half a million. I wanted to be the best insurance

man and also the wealthiest but I have noticed this about us, men, when we get half a million, that’s not enough, so million, and when we get that it is not enough.

In fact, it becomes a game. It is kind of a test you know and that is what makes it exciting. It is not really the money we say. It is the thrill of the activity. It is the competition. It is exciting and so we spend all of our activities. In the meantime, the interests of the Lord God are wasted and finally the effects so touch us, we cannot do the things that we ought to do. We cannot. Our minds have become blinded. Our wills have become rebellious and blunted and dead and consequently, we cannot even change. We chase the horizon and we think we have caught it and there is another one. We try to jump off on our shadow and there it is with us.

Look at Alexander, one of the greatest illustrations of this. He conquered the whole world and he sat down and cried, “There are no more worlds to conquer.” You can never be satisfied. You can never attain what you are seeking for and furthermore if you did attain it, it will ruin your soul. Think of a man like Hitler, Napoleon Bonaparte; Bonaparte started as a poor little Corsican boy, simple minded, simple goals. The closer he came to doing what he hoped to do and that was to control the world, the more of a mad man he became. And Hitler; who cannot remember Hitler?

You see, the character of a man worsens the more he obtains the things of this world. It is always true. As is a matter of fact, most men who attain great wealth attain it accidentally. They look back and they say, I it just happened to be in the right place at the right time. It was the providence of God really.

Another thing, if you have got some great ambition, when you don’t get it, there is great sorrow. There is only one kind of aspiration that is really worthwhile and that is the aspiration the psalmist speaks about in Psalm 42. This is what he says about his own ambition. “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

Goethe, remarkable man, a man noted for presence of man with an equable man; the kind of person that if you looked at, though you knew if you are Christian, he was not a Christian, an enemy of Christianity and reality. He said, when he reached I think the age of 80, he said, “There has never been one moment in my life when I have had repose.” Men don’t have repose in seeking the things of the world. So, the sinfulness of ambition, have you heard people talk about holy ambition? It is like talking about holy adultery. Ambition, in which the aim is to build up myself is not holy. It is unholy. There is no such thing as holy ambition in that sense. There is no such thing as holy pride or the blessedness of those that are free from the selfishness that characterizes a great deal of what is called ambition.

May God give us the ambition to possess the one thing that is worthwhile and that is the Lord God. “As the heart pants after the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God.” Give me that ambition. Give me that goal and I will be happy, and not only I will be happy, but my children will be happy too and the chances are that my grandchildren are also be affected by it.

So, my dear Christian friends in Believers Chapel, let me, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, warn and admonish you in the sense of Scripture, those children sitting by your side under your care, their lives are often ultimately dependent upon your own attitude to the things of the Lord God. May He deliver you from worldliness, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life and may you give yourself to seeking the face of the Lord God. If you are here and you have never believed in Jesus Christ, well, your first responsibility is to look after the cross where the blood was shed that you may have the forgiveness of sins and have the assurance of everlasting life. Come to Christ. Put your trust in him. Turn to him who shed his blood that sinners might live and be delivered from the sins of the flesh of the eyes, the pride of life, and worldliness. May God speak to your heart. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the words of the admonition that come to each of us, parents and children, from the holy Scripture. Deliver us Lord from worldliness. Deliver us from isolation. Enable us to move in the world as genuine lights whose holy ambition is for the face and the possession of our great God who loved us and gave the son of God as a sacrifice for sinners. How wonderful it is Lord to belong to the family of God! But, if there are some here who do not, O’ God work in their hearts. Draw them to Jesus Christ and the atoning sacrifice. May the grace and mercy and peace of our triune God go with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.