



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 42: 1-38

“The Persistent Power of a Guilty Conscience”

TRANSCRIPT

Now let's turn to Genesis chapter 42 for our Scripture reading. We are in that part of the Book of Genesis that has to do with the life of Jacob and Joseph. Joseph has been sold into captivity and by the providence of God, Pharaoh has had a dream or two that Joseph was able to interpret and therefore Joseph has been exalted to be the equivalent of the prime minister of Egypt. He has made preparation for the years of famine that were prophesied through the dreams of Pharaoh and now the famine is extending over all of that part of the earth. In fact, the last verse of chapter 41 reads,

“The people of the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth.’ And so Jacob back in the land of Palestine was beginning to feel the crunch just as were many others. So, chapter 42 begins at that point. Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why are you staring at one another?’ He said, ‘Behold I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die.’ Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, ‘I am afraid that harm may befall

him.’ So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.

Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land and Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, ‘Where have you come from?’ And they said, ‘From the land of Canaan, to buy food.’ But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, ‘You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of the land.’ Then they said to him, ‘No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. ‘We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies.’ Yet he said to them, ‘No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!’ But they said, ‘Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more.’ Joseph said to them, ‘It is as I said to you, you are spies.’”

He reminds us of a good communist interrogator because that is what they keep say. They keep saying the same thing over and over again hoping to convince you by the repetition of it. You can offer them all kinds of rationale reasons why a certain thing is not so, but they just keep repeating it. And so that is the way Joseph is treating the brothers now and he says in the fifteenth verse,

“By this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go out from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.’ So he put them altogether in prison for three days. Now Joseph said to them on the third day, ‘Do this and live, for

I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die.' And they did so.

"Then they said to one another, 'Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, they are referring to Joseph because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, they refer all the way back to the time when they put Joseph in the pit, twenty years before this and heard his cries from the pit because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.' Reuben answered them, saying, 'Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood.' (They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them.) He turned away from them and wept but when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. (Evidently, he turned and went off into a small room by the side, because it says he returned to them, and he went and he wept in the room and then he came back.)

"Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey and thus it was done for them. So they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed from there and as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack. Then he said to his brothers, 'My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack.' And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, 'What is this that God has done to us?' (They realize that now they were laid open to the charge of theft and that is why they are so concerned. When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying,) 'The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us, and took us for spies of the country. But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are

not spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.'

“And the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me and take grain for the famine of your households, and go. But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.' “Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks that behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. Their father Jacob said to them, ‘You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me.’ (And the Hebrew text of that part has a great deal of stress resting upon Jacob. ‘Me, ye have bereaved of my children, Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin, all these things are against me and even in the position of the words in certain of the clauses stress rests upon the fact that Jacob is thinking primarily of himself, so his remark is self-orientated. And of course it is very, very irrational for a believer to ever say, ‘All these things are against me.’ We shall see he was terribly wrong right at this point.)

“Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, ‘You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring them back to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you.’ (That was an extravagant strange kind of thing for Reuben to say, Why would the death of two grandchildren more console Jacob for the loss of his son?) But Jacob said, ‘My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

The subject for today in the exposition of the Book of Genesis is the persistent power of a guilty conscience. Chapter 42 records the first visit of Joseph’s brethren into Egypt and that of course is not an especially notable matter. On another score, however it is a very notable chapter. It is one of the Bible’s greatest on the overwhelming power of a nagging guilty conscience. One of man’s greatest punishments comes from guilt, from past sinful deeds, as most of us who have experienced this know.

These very ordinary events of chapter 52 the visit into Egypt, the appearance before the lord of the land, and then the return to the land are just ordinary events but they combine to recall with great intensity an old sinful deed on the part of the brothers of Joseph. I think even the very name of the land to the south, Egypt, must have spoken fear into their hearts and then when they went down into the land and the lord of the land spoke harshly to them no doubt that had an influence upon them also. When they were put in prison, they can hardly help but remember the events of 20 years before when they had so shamefully treated their brother Joseph.

The Bible says, be sure your sin will find you out, and God gives us guilt and the guilty conscience. because well, be sure your sin will find you out, and therefore we may expect that when we have sinned and if there is no reconciliation we may expect that God will continue to deal with us until there is a resolution of that particular problem.

They came finally to the conclusion that it was retribution for this great crime of their lives. And so they expressed that. Now comes the reckoning for his blood. Therefore is this distress come upon us, they say. It is rather interesting to observe in the Bible what is said about conscience. Now conscience is something that hardly appears in the Old Testament at all, but it suddenly appears in the New Testament. Someone has said conscience does not tell us what is right and wrong, but whether what we are doing agrees with the principles we know. Now since we do know a great deal of the principles of right and wrong, conscience does at times speak of that which is right as

over against that which is wrong but primarily it tells us whether what we are doing agrees with the principles that we believe are correct.

The Bible speaks of a weak conscience. The Bible speaks of a defiled conscience. The Bible speaks of an evil conscience. The Bible speaks of a sacred conscience. The Bible speaks of a pure conscience. It speaks of a good conscience, and it even speaks of the beautiful conscience. The last part, I think is something special. There is a conscience which while intrinsically good is not very outwardly attractive to other because it is filled with scruple. We all know individuals who are in bondage to certain little scruples. They are not taught necessarily in Scripture but they are things that we have thought are in Scripture. But the Bible speaks of a beautiful conscience; that is an individual who is guided by the principles of the word of God and not by a handful of scruples which he himself may have interpreted as being scriptural principles.

The Bible speaks of a conscience being seared, and so it is possible for the conscience to speak wrongly to us. Therefore, it is not an unfailing guide. So perhaps it is true to say that conscience does not really tell us what is right and wrong primarily but it rather tells us what we are doing agrees with the principles that we know.

Now there are other lessons here in this chapter besides that one, the persistent power of a guilty conscience. For example, that is again taught here with very great emphasis. This continuing lesson that we see in almost every chapter, the providence of God. God is interested in bringing the nation of Israel down into the land of Egypt in order to preserve the nation from the evil of the land of Canaan, but when they come down into the land those eleven brothers and Jacob they must come down there as a unified family, because if they enter into the land of Egypt not unified, then disintegration will follow and there will be loss of racial identity and absorption into the Egyptians and consequently Israel will not remain a people that are alone and separate from others as they had done bowing to this person by the providence of God and the one thing that might disturb their unity and cause disintegration is this great sin of which the brothers

are guilty against Joseph and so this family shattering sin against Joseph must be settled by reconciliation and so that is what seems to me what God is doing by bringing the brothers down into Egypt, bringing them into contact with Joseph who is now the prime minister in order that the questions that remain between them may be settled.

Therefore, we see not only the persistence of the divine purpose that is the fulfilling of the decrees of God but we also see some other lessons as well. I don’t want to pass by that fulfillment of the decrees or promises of God because you can see how in all of these events he is working out his purposes.

Griffith Thomas has written a rather helpful little book on the Book of Genesis and he has said, “In these days when law is said to reign supreme, when science can only speak of cause and effect, and when Christian people are up to concentrate attention on methods, principles, and laws rather than on the source of all these things, it is particularly necessary to hold fast the old foundation belief that there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will.” It is important we remember that it is God personally who is controlling all of these events and making them ultimately conformed to the purpose that he has in the life of Joseph and in the life of Jacob and in the life of those brothers.

One of the lessons that you learn is that true repentance involves not only the recognition of our sin but a conduct in accordance with it. The repentance is the change of mind, but the change of mind is manifested in the forsaking of the evil works.

Mr. Thomas goes on to say that, “In our childhood days, many of us learn what are still the very best definitions of repentance. One is in the church catechism (he speaks of the Anglican church), repentance whereby we forsake sin.” And he said the other was in our hymn book, though it is not often found in children’s hymn books today. It is not enough to say, “I am sorry and repent and then go on from day to day just as we always went. Repentance is to leave the sins we love before and show that we in earnest grieve by doing them no more.” So repentance is not simply awareness of sin.

Repentance is awareness of sin, confession of sin, conviction over our sin, and then the forsaking of that particular path of life.

And I guess the last lesson and the one I want to emphasize in the conclusion is the bland irrationality of a believer’s human reasoning. Jacob says, “All these things are against me,” but oh how wrong Jacob was as we shall see.

Let me remind you of the situation. Joseph is in the land of Egypt. He is living in lavish circumstances. We know from archeology that the Egyptians at this time were great people, the walls of Egyptian palaces still exist, and they attest the magnificence of the life of the Pharaohs of Joseph’s day, even the furniture which exists shows that it was an elegant kind of life in which Joseph has now found a place, with the choirs of musicians who were singing everywhere, and rare perfumes that rose from vases of gold and bronze, and alabaster and they had very thick carpets that the feet sank deeply into as they walked upon them. They lived in very luxurious times.

Jacob of course was in the land and the famine was beginning to touch the land and the brothers were brothers who now twenty years after the time that they had put Joseph into that pit nevertheless still deep down within their hearts, are feeling guilt over what they had done. They have never told Jacob their father what had really happened. So far as he knew, Joseph was dead. So far as they knew, he may well have been dead, but they did not know it definitely. So here we have Jacob thinking that things were going against him, the brothers who were hiding guilt over their sin, and Joseph now living in very lavish circumstances in the land of Egypt, a very important man in one of the greatest kingdoms of that time.

Well, when the famine begin to touch the land, Jacob having heard the report that there was grain in the land of Egypt said to the brothers as they were standing around evidently in perplexity, “Go back and buy us a little food.” So he said to them to do that. He referred to the fact that they were standing around perplexed and looking at one

another and said, “Why are you looking at one another? Go get us something to eat.”

Still Jacob is a man of decision, and so he tells them to go down to Egypt.

Egypt -- that word must have struck terror to their hearts because it brought back all the memories of what they had done to Joseph. Jacob specified, now don’t take Benjamin with you, so it is clear that after all these years he still distrusts these brothers.

Dr. Barnhouse in his commentary on the Book of Genesis says the word Egypt -- like the word rope -- must have sounded like the word rope in the house of a man who hanged himself. So when he said to them, go down to Egypt that is this sinking feeling that came into their hearts.

One of the ways in which God deals with us is to touch the point that we need it most. The thing that we tried to hide and cover up from him is the thing that he will touch and so occasionally he just comes in and he just shakes the mess. And the thing that really was the controversy between the Lord God and those brothers was what they had done to Joseph, and so now after all these years he is going to speak the word and the men are forced now to deal with the problem of their lives. It is the way that he deals with all of us and he afflicts us when we refuse to confess our sin and to make it right.

The psalmist says, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word.” Afflictions are God’s ways of bringing us to obedience when we will not obey through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. When the brothers come down to the land of Egypt, there is Joseph. I wonder -- the Bible does not say as far as I can tell anything about Joseph’s mind -- but I wonder if Joseph had really planned this.

I wonder if he had said to some of his servants, “Now when Hebrew men come down, I want you to tell me, because I want to be there when the Hebrew men come to buy grain.” He knew that ultimately they were going to have to come down to the land. So it may well have been he planned all of this and so when those brothers appeared, a word was sent to the prime minister, some Hebrews are here and you said that we should

notify you when they are here. If you want to see them they are going to meet with us at 10 o'clock this morning and they are going to make arrangements for buying grains.

And so Joseph is there. Now whether it was because he had planned it or whether it was simply the providence of God that he happened to be there that morning the Bible doesn't say. And it may well have been just that he happened to be there that morning and there the brothers were but at any rate he came into touch with the brothers and we read in the sixth verse of chapter 42, "And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground."

Now remember he has had those dreams earlier which he had told to his brothers and their sheaves of grain had bowed down to him and they had interpreted it, and so had he, as a time is to come when you are going to bow down and worship me. And so here we have unconscious fulfillment on the part of these men of those early dreams, but so far Joseph was concerned those early dreams were of all the brothers bowing down before him. One of them is missing here, and so Joseph remembered those dreams and he may have remembered there are only ten here, but all of the brothers were to bow down. What about the 11th? And so that may have brought to his mind the question of Benjamin.

At any rate when he sees them he recognizes them, they don't recognize him because he was only a young boy of 17 when they put him in the pit and they were grown men. Grown men don't change a lot between the ages of 25 and 50. Now when they get beyond 50, the change is fast [laughter] and also when they are below 25, the change is fast too. We all have seen young boys 15 and when you see them at 20 you would not recognize -- they look so bad when they are 20 as over against 15 -- but at any rate there is a lot of change in the early part of the life, not much change in the middle part of the life, a lot of change later on.

So when Joseph now a man of 37 years of age, met these men, they were much older, he remembered them, because they have not changed that much but he has

changed a great deal and so when they look at him they don’t recognize him. Joseph is speaking to them by means of an interpreter too and he is speaking the Egyptian language and in addition he was dressed like the Egyptians, he was clean shaven, and they had these long beards because they are men who came from the land of Canaan. So you can understand then this interview. And as he saw them he recognized them, he saw to it they would not recognize him by continuing to speak to them, and he spoke to them harshly.

Now we should not feel sorry for these brothers because Joseph gave them some rough handling. The first place it is not vengeance on his part. The context makes it plain that he has a great deal of warm affection for them and much mercy is exhibited to them. He doesn’t even charge them for the grain. He moves out of the room and weeps over his feelings for them and then we should remember that they were hard men, these are the men who had massacred the whole village. And not only that they are the men who had put Joseph in prison and sat down to eat a meal, tantalized him, sitting down to eat a meal while he is in the pit crying to let him out, to show some mercy to him. So we shouldn’t feel sorry for them.

And in addition, no doubt Joseph whether intentionally or whether guided by God is going to test the mettle of these brothers to see if there is any change in them since 20 years when they put him in that pit. The methods that he uses with them, Luther says, are the same methods that God uses when he deals with us to bring us to repentance. He must deal roughly with us at times, and so Joseph is dealing roughly with them from that standpoint. He tells them that they are spies. You have come to look at the undefended parts of the lands. They said, “No we have come to buy food. We are the sons of one man. And that was true. They were the sons of more than one woman, but they were the sons of one man, and furthermore the youngest is with our father today and then they say and one is no more.

Now their honesty tails off into vagueness here. Because of course that is a reference to Joseph. And when they say one is no more, that is all they never said evidently to Jacob. They never told him the truth and they do not tell Joseph the full truth here. They say one is no more and the impression one gets is well he must be dead, but they are not telling the truth.

John Ruskin has some very good words about truth. Mr. Ruskin points out that a person can lie even by saying nothing, because the essence of lie is in deception not in words. A lie may be told by silence. A lie may be told by equivocation. A lie may be told even by an accent or a syllable or lie may be told by glance of the eye that attaches a peculiar significance to a sentence. All these kinds of lies Mr. Ruskin goes on to point out are worse and baser by many degrees than a lie plainly worded. So the essence of lie is not in the words that we knew. The essence of lie is in the deception that we practice. Now they are practicing deception. They say one is no more. That is true as far as they go. As far as they know, one is no more but that does not tell the real truth and they have never told Jacob the real truth since that time.

Now Joseph in a stroke of genius says I think that you boys need to be confined and so he confines them and again God uses this confinement because this is precisely what they have done to Joseph so many years before and therefore they have three days in which to remember their crime.

Now Joseph is a very merciful man because he himself spent through years in prison. They spent three days and so every opportunity is given for them to reflect upon the fact that they are in Egypt, this is the place to which they sold Joseph, and they are in Egypt, and they are in prison, and as far as they know, Joseph is a slave in the land so they are getting an opportunity to think over their past.

But Joseph comes on afterwards and makes a new offer to them. He had made an offer, “Now I am going to put all eleven of you in prison and let one of you go back and get your younger brother and if you bring him down well then that will show that you are

honest men and you are not spies.” You can sense his excitement in this situation even in the account because you see him wavering in what he is going to do. He comes back after three days and says, no we are not going to do it that way. We are going to put one of you in prison and we are going to let the rest of you go home and then you bring the brother down and we will release the one. And he takes Simeon of the ten brothers and he binds Simeon right before their eyes. So again they are called to reflect upon what they did to him twenty years before. He thought evidently three days was enough to start their conscience working. So he makes this new offer.

Well their conscience has been awakened, and so they say to one another, truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen therefore this distress has come upon us. So their conscience is awakened which incidentally so far as we know is the only acknowledgement of guilt in all of the Book of Genesis. This is not an interesting thing. The only persons who have acknowledged their guilt in the Book of Genesis are these men who say, we are guilty concerning our brother because we saw the distress of his soul. So their conscience was awakened, their memory recalls their deed, and their reason explains why all of this is happening. Therefore, this distress has come upon us.

Well, Reuben speaks up at this time. Now Reuben is a very weak one, and so weakness reproaches badness, which is always not so good. So Reuben’s statement which is to be a fact, “Didn’t I tell you, I told you so, he had 20 years in order to wipe the wrong and he has done nothing about it, and so he reproaches the others. Well, as they leave, they leave with their grain and Joseph has the money put back into the sacks. Later on, a day or two later when one of them goes to one of the sacks in order to get some of the grain, he opens it up and there in the mouth of his sack is the money that he had paid for the grain. That strikes terror into his heart because now he says the man down who is the lord of the land is going to think that I am a thief, and so they all trembling look around at one another and they say what is this that God has done to us?

That by the way is the first mention of the Lord’s name by these brothers here in this chapter.

Well, when they get back they tell the story to Jacob, this is the first time that they are ever honest with Jacob. So far as we can tell, and it is not surprising that Jacob has had a hard time believing them because he has had twenty years of dealing with these brothers, and he has been suspicious the whole 20 years that they have not told him the full truth about Joseph, and so he listens, but he listens very suspiciously to the things that they say while they are finally being genuinely honest with him. Well, as they speak and record what has happened they open up their sacks and they discover that every single individual who went down there has their money in their sacks, and then they are truly dismayed, because all of them now face the charge of thievery and they realize that this may mean even direr punishment for them. You can see that they misunderstand the intentions of Joseph. They do not understand that this is really something that is a reflection of the mercy that he has for them.

This past week I was reading about a preacher who went to a ministers’ conference. That was his first mistake. But anyway he went to this ministers’ conference and that morning they had four long hours of unproductive discussion and finally he arose in the meeting for the first time and the man who was the moderator said the chairman recognizes the standing minister and he said, “Brother Chairman, I am not standing for recognition. I am standing for recreation.” Intentions are often misunderstood and they did not understand the good intentions that Joseph had, and so Jacob when he hears the story says I am bereaved of my children. Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. I am in danger of losing three of my sons. I am not going to do it. So the courage fails. And so he says all these things are against me. That is most irrational and it is not surprising now that Jacob refuses for the moment because he is not in a very good state of mind.

Let me close by just pointing out two or three of the lessons that stand out here in this chapter. The first is the one that I have used as the title of this message and it is the persistent power of a guilty conscience. You can see it in the mention of the word Egypt, they have to go down into the land, they are in prison, they must face Joseph -- all of these things are designed by the Lord God to bring on to them their guilt even when they speak and have to say, one is no more, they pause to reflect upon the story of Joseph and their relationship to him. “Bring the youngest to me,” is also a reminder to them of their guilt and the return of the money exposes them to further difficulty with this man in Egypt. So the whole situation has become very, very difficult for them.

It is not surprising then but in the midst of it they blurt out, not having been asked about this, truly we are guilty concerning our brother because we saw the distress of his soul and yet we would not listen. Therefore, this distress has come upon us. It reminds me of King Herod. King Herod had a feast and at his feast Salome danced and in the midst of it, in the midst of his cups, he said to Salome, “I would give you anything you ask up to half of my kingdom.” She rushed home to mama and the mother said, “I want the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” And so John the Baptist’s head is brought on the platter because Herod says he must keep his word. That was a very evil thing and something that is against the will of God one should never keep his word. It is more important to keep God’s word, than man’s word and nevertheless John the Baptist’s head was brought and Herod didn’t like it, but nevertheless in order to be faithful to his word, he had John’s head cut off.

And it wasn’t long after that the reports reached King Herod of a man who was going about in the land and performing mighty miracles and preaching with great power and conviction. And he said, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead.” His conscience spoke before his mind has had an opportunity to marshal arguments against the resurrection of Christ.

I remember the story of a man who was debating with another man about the existence of hell. They had this long lengthy discussion. He kept insisting no there is no such thing as a fiery hell. And as far as he was concerned he had won the argument. That night he went home to his hotel room and in the midst of the night, about 2 o'clock, and he was on the front of the hotel and there was a street and then some buildings on the other side. One of those buildings caught on fire and in the middle of the night he was awakened from his bed, and he saw the windows just covered with flames. He said afterwards my first thought is, I am in hell. And again, his conscience had spoken before his mind has had a chance to marshal all of those good arguments with which he had won the argument the night before and the conscience the persistent power of a guilty conscience. And I want to say to you, ladies and gentleman that there is nothing that is more of a divine punishment for our sin than a guilty conscience. Be sure your sin will find you out.

Now the next thing that this chapter stresses to me is the nature of true repentance. They have confessed their sin but confession of sin is not repentance. The acknowledgement of guilt is not repentance. Judas himself said, “I have betrayed an innocent man,” went out, and committed suicide. Judas never repented. He regretted what he had done but there is a great deal of difference between regret and repentance. And the nature of true repentance is such that it is more than the confession of sin. True repentance is manifested in works of repentance that follow as John the Baptist said, “Bring forth works meet for repentance.” It is not enough to say, I had sinned. But there must be the forsaking that follow. That is the evidence of genuine repentance.

Repentance is a change of mind with respect to the Lord, with respect to our form of life, but if it is true it will manifest itself in fruit. This past week, I read a very short treatise on the life of Thomas Chalmers. He was one of the greatest of the Scotts in the 19th century in the preaching of the word. Mr. Chalmers was not a great theologian,

although, he was a professor of divinity at New College in Edinburgh but he was a man who was used of God in a remarkable way.

He had been in a little country parish in Fifeshire the little town by the name of Kilmany and there he had been as many of the Scottish ministers in the early 19th Century he had just been going through the motions. People were coming to church, the glory of the Church of Scotland had departed, they had many ministers but most of them were moderate and liberal. Mr. Chalmers himself said that the ministry was a great thing to be in because all you needed was a couple of hours of preparation on Saturday night for the sermon on Sunday morning and you had the rest of the week to yourself. And he also was extremely interested in science and in other matters and became rather expert in some of those things during those days.

I can remember years ago at Dallas seminary after the fall semester began at the end of about 10 days or 2 weeks a young man came up to me and said, “Dr. Johnson, I have a question I would like to ask you.” He said what does a minister do? Well, that really floored me. I thought that a man who is coming to seminary might have some idea of what a minister might do? I said, “What do you mean?” Well, he said you are responsible to preach a sermon on Sunday morning which will last about an hour the total service, but what do you do the rest of the week? And I remember saying, “I don’t think you are going to be very long here at Dallas Theological Seminary. [Laughter] In fact I am wondering exactly how you happened to get in.”

Well I tried to answer him as best I could and two weeks later he was no more, as the brothers said about Joseph. [Laughter] Where that fellow is today I don’t know but I hope he has got a better idea of what it means to attempt to minister the word of God.

Thomas Chalmers has had a very interesting experience. He came into deep relationship with the Lord God. Finally, he became very much disturbed about his own spiritual condition. He later spoke about how he had thought about eternity from the standpoint of science, but now came to think about eternity from the standpoint of the

word of God. He became one of the outstanding ministers in Scotland with a great personal relationship to the Lord God and communicated that to many people. He was not a great theologian but he was a very learned man that he was an extremely influential man in the Church of Scotland and many of the greatest of the preachers in the 19th Century studied under Thomas Chalmers.

One man who also was at New College in Edinburgh the same time that Chalmers was there was a man by the name of John Duncan. He taught Old Testament and they called him in Scotland, Rabbi Duncan and he was a very influential man. When I was studying at the University of Edinburgh and some of the faculty members occasionally would quote John Duncan or Rabbi Duncan. A man once went to Mr. Duncan and asked him how he got along with Mr. Chalmers who was very influential in the Church of Scotland. He said, “Oh nobly, though very inferior, I took the liberty of differing with him sometimes about doctrine. One day when he came down to my house for little refreshment that means tea among the Scotts, I found fault with his definition of faith. ‘Ah, my doctrine about faith is better than his but he went for prayer and his faith was better than mine.’” It is possible that I have a better doctrine of faith, but not have a better faith and Rabbi Duncan acknowledged that Thomas Chalmers had a better faith, and Mr. Chalmers has a great sermon on 1 Corinthians, chapter 2, in which he talks about the importance of moving from dead orthodoxy into living faith and he speaks about congregations such as this congregation right here that begin to bear under the ministry of a man who teaches the truth of God.

He comments upon the fact that there are often congregations that love to comment, hear the exposition of the word of God, they agree with the things that they hear because the things are orthodox but at the end of the year, they are no different from that state in which they began to hear. They are not seeking to know the Lord God in a deeper way at the end of the year. There is no real earnest, humbly produced by the

word of God. There is no growth imparted, no growth in the understanding of the word of God in an experiential way. That’s a great challenge.

You know that’s a great challenge to our congregation and a great challenge to an individual. Is it true that we finished last year listening to expositions of the word of God that are orthodox and true and genuine to the word of God but we are no different? Is it possible that after all of these Sundays together hearing the word of God and the days in between thinking about the things of the Lord that we are no better, no farther along the road of a relationship with the Lord God that is experiential in growth imparted and worship and love for God and love for the lost. Is it possible in the Chapel where we hear the word of God that that is true? True repentance involves the forsaking of our sin. It is possible that we are convicted of our sin, convinced concerning things in the word of God but the effects are missing? May the Lord God give us those effects.

I must say one last thing. Jacob was a very irrational man when he said all these things are against me. Now Joseph he took for dead, Simeon was a prisoner in Egypt, mysterious hands were trying to clutch Benjamin and drag him from the sheltering of home. In this long and tortuous life of Jacob, he truly has reached a low point, so he thought, the loss of Joseph when it stood alone was perhaps not enough to overthrow him completely, after all he had a noble heart produced by the grace of God, that is, was the coming together of these many things.

Joseph, Simeon, and now Benjamin and it is when all things seem to press down upon us at the same time, the simultaneous dark concurrence of incidents of the things that causes us to cry out all these things are against me. And so in this dark hour, Joseph looked around and said that everything seems to be pressing down against him. Now mind you, this is the person who knows the Lord God who will later say, that nothing can stand against him, that when we have him we have everything. What shall we say to these things, if God be for us, who can be against us? the Scriptures say.

Now the delightful thing about this from the standpoint of the believer is that Jacob is so utterly mistaken. It is a matter of fact when he said all these things are against me, all these things really were for him. He just didn’t know the end from the beginning. He took it for granted that Joseph had been slain, but Joseph is the prime minister in Egypt. He took it for granted that Simeon was now in an alien prison and while he was detained, the most important man in Egypt was his own brother who was longing to make himself known to him, and when he shrank from horror for the loss of Benjamin, his full blood brother, for they had not only the same father but the same mother, Rachel, was yearning over Benjamin and longing to bless him if he could just get him down to the land of Egypt.

And Jacob thinking of the famine, and thinking of the harm that was working in the midst of his family, we are to realize that he now had entre into the source of all of the supplies of the land of Egypt built up by Joseph as a result of the sovereign providence of God. Things never seemed darker to Jacob and so in the agony of despair he calls out all these things are against me, but at that very moment he didn’t know it, but at that very moment everything was brightening toward the sunrise, and it has almost as if the Lord God was on right at this very moment just about to say, “Beloved, it is the morning time now.”

That is not an unusual experience for a believer. Take the Apostle Paul, he had been called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, to the Gentile world, and they laid hands upon him and put him in a Roman prison. Can you not imagine Paul? Lord, you said I was an apostle to the Gentiles. There are many Gentiles that I have not reached yet. I have got to write letters, sincerely written letters, not thinking about that Great Commission, which would be fulfilled by those very letters which he poured out from his warm heart in the midst of his imprisonment. And so we have Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians and Philemon. We have those great epistles which have ministered to the

Gentiles over the face of the earth brought out by the imprisonment, that he wondered how it could possibly be in the will of God.

You know when we get to heaven; we are going to have some very interesting experiences. I love the thing that Mr. Moody said, “When he got to heaven, he was going to spend one thousand years in the presence of the Lord Jesus and then he was going to say, where is Paul?” [Laughter] Well there are lots of things that I want to do when I get to heaven. I can imagine that Paul and Jacob occasionally went into each other in heaven. You know what I think they will say? We sure were stupid when we were down here on the earth. You said, Jacob, all these things are against me and all these things were really for your good working by the will of the father who works all things together for good to those who love him, to those who are the call elected according to his purpose.

And then Jacob said, yes but what I ought to. You were in prison and you wondered about that commission to the whole word and you were writing letters which God has used since that time. We truly were stupid and if I was listening to that conversation, I would say, I would like to tell you how stupid I am, then, too and I am sure you want also, because for the saints of God, if God is for us who can be against us.

There is never a time when all these things are against us unless we have a guilty conscience and then God works for our good even then to bring us to face the fact of our iniquity to confess it and to forsake it. If you are here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then why don’t you put your trust in him, pass from death into life, receive everlasting life, the forgiveness of sins, and join the happy company of the saints as they make their way toward the city of God. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are so grateful to Thee for the lessons that come to us from Holy Scripture are wonderful to realize that all these things are really for us. Deliver us

“The Persistent Power of a Guilty Conscience” by S. Lewis Johnson
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from our sins. Bring conviction when we have sinned against Thee and give us O God the grace to confess and to forsake our sins.

And for those who may be here who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, O God at this very moment may they lift their voices in Thanksgiving for the blood that you have shed that they might have the forgiveness of sins, apart from works, apart from any good thing that we might do.

May grace, mercy, and peace be with us. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.