



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 1:18-25

“The Crisis of History: The First Advent of Jesus Christ”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Now tonight we have a big subject before us. And also I want to give just a word or two of review so we shall have to proceed as rapidly as possible. And I hope as systematically as possible, too.

In case there is someone present who has not been here each time, let me remind you of the place to which we have come. We started out by pointing out that God has revealed himself in revelation. That revelation is a two volume work. Volume one, the book of nature, and God has revealed himself in nature, his eternal power and divinity being the object of his revelation, or the subject of it. And that through nature we can know that he is a supreme being.

Then we went on to say that God in volume two of his book of revelation revealed himself in the Scriptures. And in the Scriptures we can know that which we cannot know in nature, we can know God's mercy and grace in his redemption.

Now, volume one is addressed to men as men, but volume two is addressed to men as sinners. And consequently it is volume two which we are especially in need of. Then we went on to point out that it is not enough to have the word of God, we must have a teacher to instruct us and the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity, is the one who has been given to teach us the Scriptures. And by illumination he, the Holy Spirit,

who wrote the Scriptures, enlightens us when we are willing to have his enlightenment and gives us through his teaching the meaning of the word of God.

Then we began to look briefly at the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. We saw that God created man and woman. We didn't say this, but it's stated in the first two chapters of Genesis that God created man in his own image after his own likeness. And, of course, he also gave Adam a wife by the name of Eve and they were given one simple prohibition. They were free to eat of the trees which were in the garden but one of these trees became a test for them, and God said that they could not eat of that tree and the day that they ate of that they would die.

Now we have considered the sad story of man's fall which is key to an understanding of human nature. And we saw that man did eat of the forbidden fruit, whatever that fruit is we do not know, but he ate of it. And as a result of it man fell. Man became dead spiritually. Not dead physically, yet, but dead spiritually, separated from God. And consequently as a result of this God pronounced some judgments. He judged the serpent who had been responsible for, or responsible as the instrumentality of the temptation and sin. He pronounced a judgment upon the woman, and he also pronounced a judgment upon the man.

And then in the midst of that he announced a promise of the seed of the woman who would come and crush the serpent's head, thus regaining for man that which he had lost in the Garden of Eden. You see, God had given man the promise that he should have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and that he should rule upon this earth in this creation that God had created. But he lost that right to rule by his sin. But God promised that through the coming of someone from the seed of the woman the serpent's head would be crushed and man would ultimately regain and fulfill the promises that God had given him.

Now I have put a simple outline or diagram on the board. In fact, I made it up just as I was standing here, so you are, I'm sure, you know that it is very, very simple.

But it's necessary for me to say this because we do not have time to deal with all of the Old Testament which is a tremendously interesting topic but, of course, in twelve lessons we have to pick the most important things. And I think we have called out from the Old Testament most of the important things, absolutely essential things, for the understanding of the Christian faith.

But now last time, you remember, that we started with Genesis chapter 3, and verse 15, the first eleven chapters of Genesis are a kind of introduction to the Bible. Many thousands of years are covered in eleven chapters. But with the history of Abraham in Genesis 12 we have history that really takes us on to the end of the Bible. But we begin in Genesis 3:15, which was the first of the promises of the redeemer. And then we went down through the Old Testament, pointing out the promises, the most significant promises, of the redeemer to come. Genesis 3:15 was the first and the broadest; the redeemer would come from the human race.

Then we moved over to Genesis chapter 9, and we pointed out from the prophecy in Noah that the redeemer would come from the Semitic division of mankind. We went on to Genesis chapter 12 and the beginning of Abraham's life. And we pointed out that the redeemer would come from the Abrahamic family. We went on to Genesis chapter 49, and verse 10, and pointed out that he would come from the tribe of Judah within that Abrahamic family and Semitic division of mankind.

And then we went on and pointed out some more specific promises such as the promise that he would be born of a virgin in Isaiah chapter 7. The promise in Micah chapter 5 that he would be born in Bethlehem. We could have gone on to Daniel chapter 9 and pointed out that he would come as the king to Israel at a certain point in time, for Daniel tells us the precise year at which the king would make his entry into Jerusalem. There were, I mentioned, about three hundred messianic promises that we know of in the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, the whole of the Bible of the Old Testament is a

prophecy of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament does not contain prophecies of Christ, it is a prophecy of Christ in its entirety. And all of its features point to him.

So we trace the messianic promises, the promises of the messiah, the promises of the redeemer, down into the New Testament times. Now tonight I want to pick it up at that point and our subject is just about as big a subject tonight as last time. For the subject tonight is the crisis of history, the First Advent of Jesus Christ.

Now the Lord Jesus was born about 27 A.D most scholars believe. We won't question that date, we'll just say that's probably correct. And so with his life we begin with the birth, the baptism, the temptation, the transfiguration, the agony, the death, and the resurrection. By the way, usually when I speak on these subjects in popular fashion ,and I hope this is popular fashion, I usually take about an hour at least on each one of these and usually, too, add a couple of more events. Such as, for example, the burial of Christ, the triumphal entry, the ascension of Christ, and all of them are very important.

Of course, the second coming we will deal with in a special way later on. So we're going to have to compress a great deal but tonight we're going to look at the passages that deal with the highlights of this greatest life, the life of the redeemer promised from Old Testament times, God's salvation for men. So I want you to now to take your New Testaments and let's look at the first book of the New Testament and we will just center our attention upon this one book, the Gospel of Matthew. Now you could look at these events in the other gospels and gain some other insights into the ministry and I'll refer to a few other points. But we will just stress Matthew's presentation of Jesus Christ.

So turn with me now, first of all, to Matthew chapter 1, and let me begin and read from verse 18 through verse 25. Now we'll just have to be able to spend about five or six minutes on each one of these points so we will not deal with all the details. But just try to center our attention upon the important facts about these highlights.

Now verse 18, chapter 1 of Matthew, have you found it? Page nine hundred and ninety-four in my edition of the King James Version, may be close in yours,

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily, (privately. That is, he would have two witnesses, he would not make it public, but he would have the witnesses and put her away privately.) But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. (Now Matthew inserts these words,) Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. (Now you see, if Matthew had been teaching this class tonight he would have said, ‘Well Dr. Johnson told you about this prophecy last week, and I want you to know that it was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ, for he was born of a virgin.’) Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not, (now that, of course, is the Hebraic expression for sexual relationships,) and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.”

Now the birth of Jesus Christ is a remarkable thing. When we think of the birth of Christ we think immediately of the virgin birth. And of course, you see it set forth very plainly in these words. Now the virgin birth is described for us, or is set forth for us, specifically in the Gospel of Luke and in the Gospel of Matthew. It is not set forth

specifically in the Gospel of Mark, nor in the Gospel of John. But these gospels, though they do not set forth this specifically, agree with it essentially. It is rather surprising, for example, to read in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus is never called the son of Joseph, though of course he is the son of Joseph legally. But he is referred to as the son of Mary. In the Gospel of John, John records statements of our Lord which set him apart from the human race. He records that Jesus said in John chapter 8, in verse 23, “Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.”

So while it is true that John and Mark do not specifically say that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin everything that they do say is compatible with that teaching. And I for one believe that they did not say that he was born of a virgin for the simple reason that it was common knowledge among Christians and perhaps, too, they, at least John, knew of the writing of others and knew that this had been adequately set forth all ready in other writings.

Now the virgin birth is described in very simple terms, some of you perhaps have read Hugh Schonfield’s *The Passover Plot*. In one of his chapters, he of course is a Jewish writer, one of his chapters he states that the virgin birth accounts of the New Testament are very similar to the accounts of miraculous births in ancient worlds. And the average person reading that would think, well then there is really nothing unique about the birth of Jesus Christ, it’s just a story, it’s just a fairy tale, as Mr. Schonfield says. It’s just a fairy tale which has been put in the Bible.

But I’m sure that if you have read any of the accounts of how ancient miracle stories were associated with great men you will see immediately a distinct difference between the New Testament accounts and those accounts. For example, this account is very simple and the story of our Lord’s birth is very commonplace. The story of a mother who was pregnant with a father who took a trip to be enrolled in a census that was called for by the ruler of the Roman world, and a child that was born in a stable. There is nothing unusual about that. But when you look at the stories that the heathen intended

about people you have, for example, Augustus’s mother visiting the temple of Apollo and while she was there she was visited by a serpent and as a result of the serpent’s union with the woman Augustus was born. Now I’m sure that as you look at a story like that you will see there is a great difference between that type of story and the pure, holy accounts that you find in the word of God.

Well, this was very simply and naturally done. A man by the name of Jacob contracted marriage for his with a man by the name of Heli and the two arranged the marriage for son and daughter. But Joseph, who was the husband of Mary, the espoused, in some way became acquainted with the fact that Mary was pregnant. I rather think that Mary told him. At any rate, it was a great puzzle to him. He wrestled with it for a considerable length of time. He apparently was deeply in love with Mary and finally as he wrestled with it he reached a conviction, a conclusion, that he must put Mary away for, apparently, she had broken the Law of Moses. And as he, tossing, perhaps fitfully in his sleep, had come to that conclusion and was just about to put it into effect he received an angelic visitation.

And the angel said to him, “Joseph, now son of David, don’t fear to take to thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.” Now twice this is stated. That which is born in Mary, that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. By the way, we often speak of the birth of Jesus Christ as the virgin birth. Now that is not strictly accurate. The Bible does not say that Jesus was born of a virgin. He actually was born in a normal way. He was conceived by the Holy Ghost in a virgin.

So his birth was normal, his conception was a virgin conception. So the doctrine really should have been called the doctrine of the virgin conception rather than the virgin birth. The reason for this should be obvious. Our Lord is to enter into all the experiences of humanity, and even in his beginning he must have the experiences that you and I have, a normal, natural birth which is what he had. Conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Ghost, born as any other child.

Now it is stressed by Matthew that he was born of the Holy Ghost. And I don't think that if we take the Bible plainly we can come to any other conclusion than that the doctrine of the virgin conception is plainly stated in the New Testament. So it seems to me that this, therefore, is something about which we should not quibble. It is here, it is here just as emphatically as any other doctrine of the New Testament.

Oh, perhaps we might say it's not spoken about as much as the death of Christ but, nevertheless, we have it in Luke and we have it in Matthew and we have it plainly stated here, reiterated, so it seems to me that this is a doctrine of the Christian faith that we can accept as a clear teaching of Scripture. Well we'll say something about the importance of it in just a moment. But the angel goes on to say that, “She shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus.”

Now let me stop for a moment and point out what that means. Jesus is the Greek equivalent of Joshua. In other words, really, his name was Joshua among the Hebrew speaking people. Joshua in the Old Testament is the counterpart of Joshua in the new. Joshua is a word that comes from the Hebrew word yesha which means to save. So that Yehoshua or Joshua is a name that means the Lord is salvation. Jehovah is salvation, or salvation of Jehovah. We're not sure the precise force but the meaning is clear.

That means that in the name of our Lord there is a sign. Every time that Mary, when Jesus was a little child, went to the back door, opened the back door, and called him in to supper or to noon meals she preached the gospel. She would say, “Jehovah is salvation, come home!” And all in the community would get the point, of course. The Lord is salvation, over and over again. Every time you looked at him, that's Jesus. That's, the Lord is salvation. That's, Jehovah is the savior.

In other words, in that very fact we are taught that our relationship to God depends upon the saving work of God and not upon the saving work of man. He is the savior, God saves. “Salvation is of the Lord,” as the Old Testament says so often.

Now Matthew says all of this is in accordance with Isaiah’s prophecy, that he should be born of a virgin. Well Joseph, when he heard these words from the angel, arose from his sleep and he did exactly as the angel told him. He took Mary, who was already pregnant with Jesus, and he took her to be his wife. Now legally she was his wife the moment that that marriage had been arranged, but that was not consummated until Joseph took the woman with the child into his home. And when he did legitimized the Lord Jesus, the woman as his wife, and the woman’s son as his son so that when he did this act, Jesus became the heir to all that Joseph possessed.

Now Joseph was the legal heir to the throne of David. And as a result of this Jesus became the legal heir to the throne of David. Now I want to stop for just a moment and point out something which is very significant and often times people do not realize this. Now they say the virgin birth is rather insignificant, the virgin conception is rather insignificant. It’s a doctrine that is not really necessary to New Testament doctrine.

Now the minute that they say that I know that they don’t know a great deal about New Testament theology for in the first place a man born as we are with a human father and a human mother would have the same nature that we have including sin. Now our Lord has the same nature that we have, for he has human nature from Mary. But he has preserved from sin by the action of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Jesus Christ could not be a substitute for us if he, too, needed someone to save him. And that he would need if he had been born with a sin nature.

So the doctrine of the virgin conception was God’s means of preserving the redeemer from sin. But that’s not the only thing. By the way, the choice that we are left with is not a choice between a person born naturally and one born of a virgin, the choice is one born of a virgin or one born illegitimately. That’s the choice that we are faced with.

But furthermore, Jesus Christ could not be heir to the throne of the Kingdom of God were it not for the fact that he was born of Mary who had been conceived, and he

had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament it is stated in the Davidic line that when Jeconiah who possessed the legal title, when Jeconiah sinned God pronounced a curse upon Jeconiah. He said in Jeremiah chapter 22, and verse 30, write this man childless, no person who comes from the seed of Jeconiah shall be able to sit on the throne of David. And yet that throne was given to Jeconiah and to his seed, that it come down through Jeconiah.

So how is it, then, that Coniah or Jeconiah can be ultimately the head of the seed that is to sit upon the throne when the curse is pronounced upon any one who arises out of his seed? Well God, you see, was able to solve the difficulty by means of the virgin conception. Both Mary and Jesus were from the seed of David. So our Lord derives his Davidic nature from, according to the flesh, from Mary. So that Paul can say that he was born of the seed of David according to the flesh but legal right came from Joseph. And so our Lord being Joseph's legal son has legal right to the throne. But since he is not Joseph's natural seed he does not come under the curse of Coniah. So, you see, as by this means of the virgin conception our Lord is able to take the legal right to the throne of David, the Kingdom of God, and by his relationship to Mary, apart from sin, is able to have this sinless human nature descended from David, and thus be himself the son of David, the legal heir to the throne yet not under the curses.

You see, if we do not have a virgin conception we not only do not have a savior, we do not have any promise whatsoever of the Kingdom of God upon the earth. Therefore, it is extremely important that we recognize the truths that are set forth in Matthew chapter 1. That's why they are set forth in this way, in this gospel. For, you see, it is by means of the virgin conception that our Lord is marked out as the king to come. The king who shall save and the king who shall rule.

So the virgin conception, then, is the beginning of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. I wish I had time to talk more about this, there is much that we could say about it. For

example, just one thing, just one thing, isn't it striking that our Lord did not have any descendents? You see, today he still is the heir to the throne.

And isn't it also interesting that when Jerusalem, the city of Jerusalem, was destroyed in 70 A.D. all of the genealogical records were destroyed. Today the only genealogical records that are accurate are those found in Matthew chapter 1 and Luke chapter 3. And they point unmistakably to our Lord Jesus as the heir of the Davidic throne.

And since he has no heirs himself, no decedents, he is still the only one who can sit upon the throne of David. And by virtue of the resurrection, of which we shall speak in a few moments, Jesus is waiting to sit upon that throne that was promised him many hundreds of years ago, many thousands now, by the Prophet Isaiah and others.

So the virgin birth or conception of Jesus Christ is very important. And, of course, is very interesting too. Well now, this chapter then describes the birth and points him out as the one who is qualified to be the savior because the Old Testament has pointed to him. Now let's take our Bibles and turn on to the 4th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. No, the 3rd chapter, and read the passage that has to do with the baptism of Christ; the baptism, beginning with the 13th verse.

Now you notice that all of the years from the time of our Lord's birth and infancy to the time of his adulthood in the beginning of his ministry are passed over by Matthew. Luke gives us an incident that occurred when our Lord was twelve years old. But the New Testament does not bother to tell us what kind of life characterized the life of Jesus of Nazareth until the time that he began his public ministry. And if you were a thinking person you might think something like this, you might say, "Well I wonder if in the meantime he did not sin. I wonder if some unguarded thought might not have slipped out of his mind. I wonder if perhaps he didn't speak one word that was spoken so sharply that you could say that he had sinned."

Well now, the baptism which records the voice from heaven gives the answer to all of these questions. For at the baptism the voice from heaven came forth with the words, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

So in other words, God has set the seal of his approval upon the so-called silent years of our Lord. But let’s read the account beginning with the 13th verse,

“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, (now we do not know, of course, why John did this, that is what caused him to do this. John and Jesus were related, as you know. But there does not seem to be any distinct relationship, or such a relationship between them that John knew a great deal about Jesus. Some of the events seem to imply that while they were related they were not able to be together much, John lived in the South and Jesus in the North. But there was something about Jesus that impressed John as being - there must have been something about his stature, there must have been something about his eyes or his face or his countenance or just his general habits, that convinced John that this person was not an ordinary person. Because when Jesus came to be baptized by John, John tried to forbid him. That’s the meaning of that Greek word in verse 14, ‘But John forbade him.’ Would have hindered him, tried to hinder him, saying,) I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?”

Now isn’t that interesting? John is the great preacher of sin in Israel. He’s the one who preaches that Israelites are sinners and that they need to come to his baptism and confess their sins in order to be prepared for the redeemer to come. But when John, the great prophet of the repentance and the forgiveness of sins, stands in the presence of our Lord Jesus it is he, the holy prophet, who quails before the Son of God.

“And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Now this is a transcendently important scene. There is the first person of the trinity, the Lord Jesus, who is being baptized. Then the Holy Spirit like a dove comes to rest upon him, the Holy Spirit the second person of the trinity. And then the voice of the Father from heaven speaks so that the whole of the trinity is involved in the baptism. Now the key to the understanding of the baptism is the voice that came from heaven. Of course, division of the dove would have given us a clue if we knew our Bibles, but unfortunately today very few of us know our Bibles.

You know what I would like to do? I would like to take all of your Bibles right up here, and put them right down on this sofa and I would like to reach in the Old Testament - into your Bible, open it up at the Gospel of Matthew and rip out Matthew through Revelation and give you back Genesis through Malachi. And then tell you, for one year you can only read the Old Testament. Now isn't that a shocking thing to say?

But I really would like to do that if you would read it. You know why? Because that's the Bible the early church had. Everything that they preached they grounded in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. They didn't say, “Now turn to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24,” they didn't have such. They couldn't turn to Revelation, they didn't have that.

Everything that they had they found in the Old Testament. And consequently they knew their Old Testaments, but we don't. So if we had been standing at the baptism of the Lord Jesus with the knowledge that we have we'd never get it. But he got it. He understood. You know why? Because, you see, in the Old Testament it had been

prophesied in Isaiah chapter 61 that the Holy Spirit would come upon the messiah, “I put my Spirit upon him.” And so when he saw the vision of the dove which was the vision of the Holy Spirit, when he saw the dove, the figure of the Spirit coming to rest upon him, he would have recognized the prophecy from Isaiah, which said, “I have put my Spirit upon him.” And, of course, the putting of the Spirit upon someone is the anointing. That is, it is the making of a person as the messiah. It would be the inauguration into the messianic office.

But we don't have to depend upon the vision. The voice from heaven comes, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Now I wish I could have you in a classroom now and I wouldn't want to embarrass you, I just want to make you feel foolish [Laughter]. But I'd like to ask you a question, what did the Father mean when he said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased?” Well of course he meant what I said a minute ago, that the Lord Jesus had completely pleased him in his life up to that point. But that's the superficial thing.

You see, in the Old Testament in one of the great psalms which is referred to in the New Testament almost as much as any of the psalms the statement is made, “Thou art my Son, I today have begotten Thee.” And that psalm, in that passage, refer to the messianic king who is to come. So Psalm 2 is a prophecy of that king, written many years before this. And so when the Lord Jesus heard the words from the Father, “This is my Son,” he knew that he was the king that David had written of a thousand years before. That was God's way of saying, “He is the messiah.” And in order to make it more definite still he had said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” And our Lord who knew the Scriptures remembered Isaiah chapter 42, and verse 1, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, (my chosen one,) in whom my soul delighteth.” “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” What the Father would say is, “This is the one of whom Psalm 2 speaks and this is the one of whom Isaiah 42 speaks. This is the king

and Isaiah 42 is the prophecy of the servant of Jehovah and all of the prophecies point to the fact that he shall suffer.

And so when the voice came from heaven at the baptism it was the Father saying, “This is the king, and his destiny is to suffer.” Plain as day, plain as day. And then what did John do? Well he took Jesus and he went down into the waters of the Jordan and he immersed Jesus in the Jordan and then they came out of the water. In other words, he did in an invisible, illustrative way what Jesus would do in his ministry. He would ultimately descend into the waters of death but he would also come forth in resurrection. And so that which the dove had proclaimed, which the voice from heaven had proclaimed, was illustrated so to speak in the actions of our Lord.

Now, of course, if you're a Presbyterian you don't have to accept the illustration if you don't want to. That's perfectly alright. As a matter of fact, now most Presbyterian scholars do accept the fact that baptism was performed in the early church by emersion. When I was studying in Scotland my New Testament professor at the University of Edinburgh, one of the great Scottish Presbyterian theologians said that baptism was by emersion. In the University of Glasgow the professor of New Testament in the church of Scotland Presbyterian church said baptism is by emersion. In the University of Aberdeen, the third of the four universities in Scotland at that time, the professor of New Testament also a church of Scotland, a Presbyterian man said baptism is by emersion. And the professor at the University of Saint Andrews did not speak to that point but I'm sure that he thought the same thing.

That's unimportant. The important thing is that the baptism is the inauguration of our Lord into his messianic office. Now let's look on to the temptation, Matthew chapter 4. Let's read this temptation through rather rapidly and I want you simply to notice that Jesus survives the tests which prove that he is morally capable of being the king. You see, he has been marked out by birth supernaturally as the savior, he has been

inaugurated into his messianic office, and of course, now that he is in his messianic office it's only natural that Satan should tempt him.

And we are going to have, now, a repetition of what happened in the Garden of Eden. Adam was the first man, Jesus Christ is the second man. Adam is called Adam in the Scriptures because he is the first man. Adam means man. Jesus is called the last Adam and he must reverse the story of the first. And so immediately after his inauguration into the messianic office we read in verse 1 of Matthew 4, “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, (and we are going to see whether he survived: Adam and Eve failed.) When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, (where did he learn that truth? He learned it from the baptism, apparently, because there the voice had said, ‘This is my beloved Son.’ So he says,) If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”

And by the way, did you notice the methodology of Satan? He does not act as you might expect. He does not come right out and say, “You are not the Son of God, just forget it.” He rather says, “If you are.” The devil always likes to attach an “if” to the word of God. He does not blatantly deny it. He could not get away with that. If I were to reach in my pocket, I don't know whether I've told you this yet or not, I probably have, but if I were to reach into my pocket and say I'd like to give you a silver dollar and I were to pull out one that was made out of wood shaped in the form of a triangle, I'm quite sure you wouldn't pay any attention to it because you would know it was a counterfeit, wouldn't you? But if I were to bring out of my pocket one that was round, most like a silver dollar in every way, you might be tempted to believe that it was. In other words, the closer my counterfeit is to the real thing the more dangerous it becomes.

Will you remember that? That is very important in spiritual things because it is Satan's duty to counterfeit, that's his task. And he loves to do it. He counterfeits, and he counterfeits very well. So, “If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be

made bread.” By the way, in the Greek text that statement of Satan is even stronger. It’s “since”, we could even render it since, but the voice has said, “Thou art the Son of God, if you are the Son of God, then,” in other words he says, “For the sake of argument we’ll just assume that, that you are; assuming that you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, (in other words, he passed the first test.) Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written.” Ah, Satan can quote Scripture too. I wish I had a nickel, that is a genuine nickel, not a counterfeit, a genuine nickel for every time somebody has come to me and said, “What do you think of so and so who’s preaching,” or, “What do you think of such and such a book about the Christian faith or about some faith?” And I say, “Well I don’t really think much about it at all.” “But there’s an awful lot of Scripture quoted in.” Well, of course there is. The more Scripture in it the more easily the counterfeit may fool you. So Satan learned a little lesson in that first test, Jesus likes the word of God.

And so he cites a text too, “He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” But, you know, it’s possible to quote Scripture and quote it against Scripture. I learned many years ago, *Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse*. [Laughter] Now you remember your Latin, don’t you? Scripture is to be explained by Scripture. *Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse*. Scripture is to be explained by Scripture. It’s not enough to quote a text of Scripture. You must compare it with Scripture to see that you have not quote it out of its context or quoted it in such a way that it contradicts another passage of Scripture.

Verse 7,

“Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” (You see, he had quoted that Scripture in such a way that it contradicted this other passage.) “Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, (notice, three times he meets Satan’s tests by the word of God.) It is written thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

So our Lord demonstrates by reason of the fact that he passes these tests that he is morally qualified to be the king. Now, from what passage in the Old Testament, from what book did our Lord quote? Some of you are looking at your Bible.

Now the minute you looked down I knew you didn’t know [Laughter]. You didn’t know, did you? Did you know from what book he quoted? He quoted from Deuteronomy. He quoted three texts from the Book of Deuteronomy. But, you see, I didn’t have your Bible and I hadn’t torn out Matthew through Revelation and so I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going to ask you a personal question now, do you know three texts from the Book of Deuteronomy?

Now some of you might remember that the Ten Commandments are repeated in the Book of Deuteronomy, but I told you [Laughter]. Some of you might remember, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” But do you know three texts from the Book of Deuteronomy? Well, I hate to tell you, very few Christians do. It’s obvious how Satan would defeat you. You don’t know the Bible. You don’t know the word of God. You can never hope to win a victory over Satan if you don’t know the Scriptures. Nor can I. That’s why we’re defeated so. We don’t know the word of God.

You know, that was a mean thing to do, wasn’t it? I did that in Nacogdoches one year when I was preaching down there in a week of meetings and this church was well

taught in the word. But just in the spur of the moment something got in me and I just stopped and asked them did they know three texts from the Bible, from Deuteronomy. And you know, everybody kind of slumped down in their seats like this and afterwards two women came up to me and said, they were lovely people, I still see them quite frequently, and they came up and they said, “Louis, you might be interested in knowing when we said when the benediction was pronounced.” Both of these were Bible teachers in the Sunday school. “When you pronounced the benediction we both turned to each other and we said right almost in the same breath, ‘I know a text which I could have quoted.’” I had said, by the way, one text from Deuteronomy. “And Louis this is what happened, we both said that,” and she was telling the story, and she said, “I said to my friend, what was your text?” And she said, “Oh my text was, ‘If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways,’” and so on, and she said, “Oh I stopped her immediately and I said, ‘It’s a good think you didn’t hold up your hand because that’s from 2nd Chronicles I think, not Deuteronomy. And my friend said, “Well what was your verse?” And she said, “Well mine was, ‘As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.’ And she said to me, ‘That’s from Joshua.’” [Laughter]

So the temptation tells us that the Lord Jesus is perfectly qualified morally to be the Son of God and the king of Israel. But we must hasten on. Let’s turn on to Matthew chapter 17. Matthew chapter 17, now this incident, the transfiguration, we’ll just have to touch lightly for time’s sake. In fact, we’ll have to touch everything lightly. You know I could talk forever on these topics but they’re just, they’re too wonderful for any one hour message.

Chapter 16, and verse 28 of Matthew says, “Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart.” Now you will notice that there be some standing

here that shall not taste of death until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. The some are Peter, James, and John. The rest of them died before the kingdom has come. “And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him.”

By the way, Luke tells us they were discussing his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. They were not discussing how the Cowboys would do in 1968, or how the Jerusalem jumbos and the donkeys would do in the World Series. They were discussing the cross which is the theme of heaven. It is the thing that angles discuss at the present moment. “Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, one for Moses, one for Elijah.” And poor old Peter, he had intended to say something else because the text says, “While he yet spake.” And I want to tell you what he wanted to say.

He really wanted to say, “It’s good to be here Lord, let’s make three tabernacles. One for thee, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for James, and one for John, and one for Peter,” but he was interrupted. While he still spoke, and the voice from heaven said, “Peter shut up.” [Laughter] Now you say you don’t like that translation but that really is precisely the force of these words, “Peter shut up, listen.” The voice came, “Which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” Listen to him, Peter, stop all of this brainless babbling that you’re doing.

The other texts say that he was afraid and he didn’t know what he was talking about. That’s exactly what they say, he was not listening to what he was saying because he was afraid. Now what does the transfiguration mean? Will you turn with me now to 2nd Peter chapter 1? What is this transfiguration of our Lord in its significance, turn on in the New Testament to 2nd Peter. Let’s just read a few verses. My goodness time flies.

2nd Peter chapter 1, verse 15. Now Peter tells us what the transfiguration of Jesus meant,

“Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease, (notice that word,) to have these things always in remembrance. For, (Peter says to his readers,) we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.”

Now Peter says in verse 16 that the transfiguration had to do with the power and coming of our Lord Jesus. He says, “We did not tell you a fable when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus, we were there. And we had this foreview of his coming in the power of his kingdom.” Now that’s what Matthew had said, “There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” Transfiguration is a foreview of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. A foreview before its time. By the way, that’s the most neglected event of all the great events of our Lord’s life and the reason is obvious, most people don’t believe he’s going to have a kingdom upon this earth. And consequently, the transfiguration account is a puzzle to them. But the birth has pointed him out as the savior, supernaturally. The baptism was his inauguration into his kingly office. The temptation was the evidence, the proof, that he was morally qualified to be the king. The transfiguration is the foreshadowing of that kingdom, the anticipation of it, in order to encourage our Lord in the light of the suffering that is to come shortly.

Now let’s turn quickly to the agony in chapter 26 of Matthew, and let me just read part of it. You know the story, the Lord Jesus, just before he suffered, went into the garden of Gethsemane. There, again, he took Peter, James, and John. They went forward into the garden, he fell upon the ground, and he prayed in verse 39 of Matthew chapter

26. We read, “And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” This was our Lord’s struggle with the will of God which ultimately led to the suffering on Calvary.

Now remember that this struggle with the will of God took place in our Lord’s human nature. And so in the garden of Gethsemane we really have the determination settled in our Lord to go to Calvary. As he came closer and closer to the suffering of the cross it became more and more of a problem with his human nature because, you see, he is sinless human being and he despises death. But now because of the sins of the human race he must take upon him those sins and he must suffer for them. And so he struggles with the will of God.

You see, he had to find the will of God just as you and I have to find the will of God. It is human nature. Now in our case, we have the problem of finding the will of God and then doing it. But once our Lord had made known to him perfectly the will of God, he obeyed it. And so in the garden he found, ultimately, God’s will for him. It is the time, now, to suffer on Calvary. And there he won the victory. And with shuddering human nature, struggling with the indomitable will of the Son of God, the indomitable will conquered. And then our Lord added to his prayer, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” In other words, he was perfectly obedient.

Now we will have to turn on. Oh, there are lots of questions we could deal with there. But let’s move to the death, Matthew chapter 27. And let’s center our attention for just a moment on verse 46, in the midst of our Lord’s sufferings on Calvary. You remember at the sixth hour which was noon, until the ninth hour there came an eerie darkness over the face of the earth. And Matthew chapter 27, and verse 45, we read, “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”

Now that is an expression that comes straight from the targum, the paraphrase, of the Hebrew Old Testament, lama sabachthani is Aramaic and Eli Eli is Hebrew. “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”

That is to say, Matthew translates it for us, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” What a tremendous puzzle this has been. I want you to notice, of course, that Jesus’ trust did not fail. He said, “My God, my God.” Even in the midst of this suffering, in the midst of this desolation, in the midst of this dereliction, his trust did not fail. It is not, “Oh God, oh God,” but, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” He was obedient perfectly to the end.

But you’ll notice that he said, “God.” Why did he say, “God”? You see, we again, we don’t know our Bibles well enough. Do you know that the Law of Jesus referred to the Father about one hundred seventy times in the New Testament as Father? Do you know that when he prayed to God he prayed and used the term “my” with reference to the deity about twenty one times? Do you know that twenty out of the twenty-one times in which our Lord prays to God he addresses God as, “My Father”? Did you know that? Twenty out of twenty-one times, “My Father,” or, “Oh my Father.” Do you know that only once did the Lord Jesus ever refer to the Father in prayer as God? It was here.

Here he said, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” Do you know why? Because, you see, the relationship that he bore to the Father on the cross was not paternal but judicial. He was here as a man for men. He was here as a substitute for sin. And so as the substitute for the human race he takes his place as a human being before God and cries out, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”

And do you know, too, why he said, “Why hast Thou forsaken me?” Because he was forsaken. You see, death is separation from God. That’s what Adam experienced in the garden. That’s what our lord experiences to the utmost. That is what a man experiences when he dies without Christ. The Bible uses figures of speech to refer to it, the blackness of darkness forever. Paul talks about it, however, as everlasting destruction

from the presence of the Lord. And so our Lord was separated from the Father. And he in his infinite person bore our infinite judgment and came through triumphant.

I remember a story many years ago of a man who was preaching the gospel in one of the African tribes. He told a story of the cross and the chief of the tribe who was there asked him to tell it over again. And so he told it over again and in the second telling of the story he was interrupted by the chief who spoke out, “Hold on, hold on! Take Jesus Christ down from that cross, take him down I say! Jesus Christ doesn’t belong on that cross, I belong on that cross!” In other words, that poor heathen mind, under the enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit, had penetrated to the meaning of the cross, that the Lord Jesus had died for others.

“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” So as a human being he was separated from God. Well the resurrection, let’s just read a verse and we’ll have to stop. Chapter 28 of Matthew is the Matthean account of the resurrection. If the death is the demonstration of the atonement, the resurrection is the evidence that that atonement was acceptable to the Father. For you see, if Jesus Christ had died for his sins, his death would not have availed. No man can die for his sins. If he has sinned his death is the penalty. And consequently Jesus would have died under the judgment of God he never would have been resurrected.

The fact that he was resurrected is evidence that he died for sins of others and that the Father accepted that sacrifice as a valid sacrifice for the sins of others. And when he raised Jesus Christ from the dead it was as if God had said on his payment for the human race it is as if God had taken up his stamp marked “paid” and marked it paid, that’s the resurrection. That is the evidence to all of us that the atonement is acceptable.

Let’s just read a verse or two and stop,

“In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. And, behold, there was a great

“The Crisis of History: The First Advent of Jesus Christ” by S. Lewis Johnson
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earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.”

In other words, the tomb was empty. That evidence for the resurrection has...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]