



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 5:39, 41-47

“Revelation in Scripture and the Son”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the Apostle John, and for the things that he has contributed as an agent of the Holy Spirit in the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ to us. We thank Thee for the love that Thou didst put in his heart for the Son of God and for the desire to communicate the message to others. And we thank Thee for the clarity with which he has unfolded his experience of the eternal life that he himself came to know so personally. And we thank Thee that through the present ministry of the Holy Spirit to us, we may experience some of the same things that the Apostle John experienced. And we ask, Lord, that in all of our reading of Scripture, we may read it in order to know him better; the one of whom the Scriptures speak, the only begotten God who was in the bosom of the Father, and is in the bosom of the Father at this very moment. We pray, Lord, that through our studies there may be communicated to each one of us a deeper desire to know Thee through the Lord Jesus Christ. So, Lord, we pray deepen our Christian life, deepen our experience of divine things through the Scriptures tonight.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We are continuing our study of “Revelation in the Scripture,” and we are looking at some of the things that the apostle has been writing with reference to that. We want also tonight, to look at “Revelation in the Son.” So this is really the second of a two-part mini-series on Johannine theology. There are some of you who were not here last week, and let me just briefly review what we have on the outline here. I began last week by pointing out that the subject of divine revelation or the communication of truth from God to man is one of the really important theological subjects of our day. Now, when we say it is one of the important subjects of our day, we do not mean to suggest that it is not been important all along. It’s really one of the greatest of all the theological themes.

Modern men have viewed divine revelation in several ways. They have located revelation in man’s growing enlightenment, thinking that by man’s growing enlightenment, we were really coming to a knowledge of the eternal being, who is behind the experiences of this life. Others have said that revelation was located in the divine events of history, and that by looking at them, we can learn something about the being who lies behind human history. And then also, there is a large segment of modern thinkers who have located revelation in the living personality of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christian circles, this has been particularly prominent in recent years. Men have thought that we learn of God pre-eminently through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures often take a second place to the person of Christ in this neo-Orthodox kind of thinking.

What does the Bible have to say about these theories? Well, the Bible does give us an account of man’s developing experience according to them and in a sense, it does give us an account of the developing experience of men. In the second place, the Bible is a record of God’s revelatory events in history. Think, for example, of the Exodus or of the cross of Jesus Christ. These are events of history that do reveal God to us. And the Bible is also witness of the revelation in the personality of Jesus Christ. Usually associated with these theories, however, is the idea that we are not to look at the Bible as a book of

propositional truth, but we are to look at Jesus Christ as a person. The tendency of that has been to downgrade the study of the great doctrines of the word of God, and last week I tried to make the point very briefly that there is no other way that we can learn of Jesus Christ than through the Scriptures, and so it is really foolish for us to talk about a revelation of God in Christ as if we may lay aside the Bible and find revelation in him apart from the Scriptures. It is only in the Scriptures that we have a revelation of Christ, and therefore, the Scriptures must always be predominant in our thinking.

Just for review, we took a look at revelation in the Bible and I tried to say simply that as far as the Bible is concerned, it is a book that has two volumes; a Book of Revelation, and the Bible tells us that there is a general revelation of God in nature, and history, and providence, and that we are justified from the Scriptures in looking out at the natural creation about us and learning things about God. In fact, Paul tells us in Romans chapter 1, “We can learn of the eternal power and deity of God from the Scriptures.” But we, of course, do not look at the world about us with eyes that are absolutely clear. Because of human sin, we see things in a strange way. The kind of view that we take of the things about us, is a warped view and, therefore, we cannot really know exactly the things about God until we come to God’s special revelation in the Scriptures. General revelation is addressed to men as men, and we can learn some things about God from it, the scriptures say. Special revelation is addressed to men as sinners, and, therefore, it is particularly designed for those who realize that they need a Savior, and in the Scriptures we do discover that there is a revelation of God that is designed to be the means for our salvation from sin. I made the point that human religion was really man’s attempt to ignore the special revelation of the word of God; the special revelation being God’s plan of salvation.

So revelation so far as the Bible is concerned is the story of one book that has two volumes. The title of the book is Revelation Volume One, general revelation; the knowledge of God that we can obtain from nature, and history, and providence, and

conscience. And then Volume Two, special revelation; the revelation of God addressed to us in our sin, by which we can be delivered from the guilt and penalty of sin. That special revelation is the story of the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation he provides by his work on the Cross at Calvary. Human religion arises from below, not from above, and it is generally, man’s attempt to ignore the special revelation. All human religions, apart from the truth set forth in Scripture, are attempts to tell us how we may save ourselves. It has often been said by Bible teachers, and I think correctly, that all religions outside of Christianity may be summed up in the one little word, “doing”, whereas Christianity may be summed up in the one little word, “done”. Every other religion is a means by which we may work our way to heaven. Inevitably, all of those religions depend upon human works for man’s justification.

You’ll find this evident in all of the false cults too. The false cults, such as Mormonism, the false cults, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, almost all of the false cults very clearly come, ultimately, to salvation through human endeavor. And the larger religions of the world are large systems based upon that. Christianity directs us to the nature of man as sinner, his lost condition, his inability to save himself. Then it turns us to the Cross and the means by which the Lord Jesus has provided, whereby, we may have as a free gift, justification before God.

Then we looked at revelation in the Scriptures, and we were looking at John chapter 5, verse 39, and verse 41 through verse 47. I made a few comments concerning that particular passage, John 5, in general. And then we were looking specifically at the fact, that in this section, beginning at verse 39, and then verse 41 through verse 47, the Lord Jesus makes three claims. First, the Scriptures are fulfilled in him, and then secondly, that unbelieving Jews have perverted and misunderstood them, and third, the Scriptures themselves are going to be the judge of these individuals. Now, of course, the first is the most important statement, and that’s the one that we want to look at particularly, “Revelation in the Scriptures.” So take your New Testaments and turn with me to John

chapter 5 in verse 39. John chapter 5 in verse 39. The Lord Jesus is speaking and in verse 39 we read.

“You diligently study the Scriptures, because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” Verse 41, “I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me, but someone else comes in his own name, and you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God? But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”

Now, near the close of the hour last week, I was commenting upon the fact, that verse 39 begins with, “You diligently study” or “You search the Scriptures.” Now, some of you have authorized versions, or King James versions, and the word appears there in the imperative mood. “Search the Scriptures”. And the Greek word may be translated that way. It can be both an imperative or an indicative. In other words, it could be rendered, “Search the Scriptures” or it could be rendered, “You search the Scriptures.” In the light of the words that follow, it seems that the indicative is preferable, because he wouldn’t say, “Search the Scriptures, because you think that by them you possess eternal life.” If they think, that by them they possess eternal life, it would be more likely that they are reading the Scriptures, and so that I think, is what our Lord means and the New International Version has rendered it, I think, correctly. “You diligently search the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

So he points out what, of course, we would have suspected; that the men to whom he was speaking were exemplary in searching the Scriptures in their own way. They were readers of the word of God, but they thought that in those Scriptures themselves, they possessed the source of life. In other words, they read the Scriptures as an end in themselves, and anyone who has read the comments that were made by the men of that time concerning the word of God, would see immediately what our Lord was speaking about. What they did not do was use those Scriptures as a means of coming to understand the one of whom they spoke. They read the Scriptures as an end in themselves. They did not read them with a view to finding Christ. So he says, “You think that in them you have eternal life.” By the way, it is clear, that when our Lord writes to them here, he’s talking about the Scriptures in their written form; not simply the events that are portrayed in the Scriptures, but it is the things that are found in the word of God, the word of God itself that points to him. “You diligently search the Scriptures, because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”

So if we are to know our Lord Jesus Christ, it is the Scriptures through which we shall know him and Scriptures in their written form. He’s not saying, “You can find the knowledge of me in the events of which the Scriptures speak” but, specifically, “through the Scriptures themselves, you can learn of me.” He says, “Those Scriptures testify of me.” Notice the words, “These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” Now, the Lord does not say they testified about him, as if that’s only something in the past, but they testify of him; that is, that’s their function, and their function is still being carried out in our Lord’s time, as he was speaking about them in their presence. It is not stretching the word of God to make the further application that these Scriptures still are the way by which we come to know the Lord Jesus. They are still carrying out their ministry of testifying to him. Now, notice, he does not tell them to stop studying the Scriptures. He doesn’t say, “You’re studying the Scriptures, and you’re not finding me. Lay the Bible aside and pay

attention to me.” He never says that, but he asks them to go beyond the page itself that they are studying, to that of which the page speaks.

Strachan says, “Jesus does not say, that intensive study of the Old Testament must take a subordinate place in the lives of those who are disciples, but that such study properly understood, actually should lead such to come to himself and to tell men more of himself.” Now John Calvin, and I mentioned this last week, John Calvin makes several points in his comments here. He first of all says that, “Those who imagine that what they like about Jesus Christ will, ultimately, have nothing but a shadowy ghost in his place. We can only learn Christ from the word of God.” Any kind of idea that we can learn about Christ apart from the Scriptures will lead us to the concept of an individual who is not our Lord or as Calvin puts it, “it will only be a ghost.” And further he says that, “The Scriptures should be read with the aim of finding Christ in them. Whoever turns aside from this object, even though he wears himself out all his life in learning will never reach the knowledge of the truth.”

You can see that so clearly, in much of the things that are said about the word of God today by scholars. I have to read scholarly literature constantly, and one of the things that will impress a Christian as he reads scholarly literature is that there is a great deal of effort expended on the text itself. Some of it is worthwhile for an evangelical, orthodox man to read, but the one thing that comes through most clearly is that the Scriptures are not studied with a view to learning about our Lord and the ministry that he would have to us in the forgiveness of sins, and the communication of eternal life, but Scriptural learning is an end in itself. And, consequently, it is the same kind of study that one undertakes when he studies some particular area of ancient history; a reformation scholar, a renaissance scholar or a student of modern European history or something like that. The Bible is that kind of object for such men. So Calvin says that leads to uselessness, even though man wears himself out in that, he will not reach the knowledge of the truth. And further he says that, “Our work will not be fruitless if we do seek the

Lord through the Scriptures, because those Scriptures are Scriptures that testify of him.”

Now, that's a great encouragement. That means, that if we do study the Scriptures, and if we do study the Scriptures in order to learn of him, we have the assurance that we will learn of him.

Now, all Christians deep down within, would like to know our Lord better, and the way in which we come to know him better is through the Scriptures, and we have the assurance that these Scriptures testify of him. So this is quite an encouragement to the study of the word of God; to know that when I read the Scriptures, I'm reading things that testify to the Lord Jesus Christ. “The thing that hinders us most of all,” Calvin says, “is that we look at them only carelessly, and as it were in passing, and that part of our problem is simply, that we are lazy.”

Well, this same essential thought appears in verse 45 through verse 47. Let me read these verses again. Look down at John 5, verse 45 through verse 47. “But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” The one they trusted points them to trust in the Messiah. Isn't that a striking thing, the way he puts it? He says, “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set.” Well, their hopes were set on Moses. Their hopes were set on the Scriptures themselves. Moses authored those. “Your hopes are set on them, but actually, Moses is a person who calls upon you to set your hopes on me. You rather, have set your hopes on Moses' words, and on Moses' words as and end in themselves. But Moses, on whom you have set your hopes, is one who points you to me, that you may put your hopes upon me. Don't think that I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is the one on whom you have set your hopes.” Isn't that striking, that the very thing on which they hoped was the thing that pointed them to the true object of hope? But their hopes were set on Moses and, consequently, they would perish.

He said, “If you were believing Moses.” This by the way is in the present tense. I was a little disappointed, that the New International Version translated this, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me” because I don’t think that, quite as clearly, though it does get over the idea if you ponder it a bit, it doesn’t quite as clearly get over the idea, that he’s saying, “If you were at this moment believing Moses, you would be believing me.” So in effect he says, “You’ve set your hopes on Moses, but you’ve set your hopes on Moses wrongly. If you’d set your hopes on Moses correctly, as one who pointed you to me, then you would have believed me, but you set your hopes on Moses as an end in himself, his writings, and you did not look beyond his writings to the one of whom Moses was really speaking. So if you were believing Moses, truly you would be believing me, because Moses wrote of me.”

Now, what do you think of when you read a statement like this, “Moses wrote about me?” What do you think about that? Well probably, most of us in this room would at least have these things in our minds. We would think, “Well, think of all of those illustrations of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ found in the Law of Moses.” For example, take the life of Abraham; Abraham offering up Isaac. What a beautiful picture of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Go on a little further in the word. Come to Exodus chapter 12. Think of the Passover account. Think of the requirement to put the blood on the door post. Think of the benefits of the blood on the door post, in the deliverance of the children of Israel from the judgment of Pharaoh, or think of the tabernacle with its wonderful testimony to all of the phases of our Lord Jesus Christ’s ministry. Think of the brazen altar where the animals were slain. Think of the brazen laver where the hands and feet were cleansed. Think of the pieces of furniture in the tabernacle, which spoke of certain aspects of the Lord’s ministry; the table of shew bread, the candlestick, the Ark of the Covenant, the altar of incense. Think of the Ark of the Covenant where the blood was to be sprinkled on the Day of Atonement. Then think of the offerings of Leviticus; the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, the trespass

offering. Think of the offering on the great Day of Atonement. All of these typical pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry. The Lamb of God. The two goats on the Day of Atonement. Two different aspects of his suffering; that is, the aspect in which he gives his life up; the other, the goat that was sent off into the wilderness that was uninhabited, picturing the forgiveness of sins, and the taking of the sins away forever. And you would think of all of these things that are found in the Mosaic Law, but you know, I think there is probably something more here, that was even more important.

What was Moses' Law designed to do? Well, when we think of the Law, of course, one of the things that stands out is the Ten Commandments. Part of the Law was the Ten Commandments; those great moral words. Now, what was the purpose of the gift of the Ten Commandments? Well, Paul tells us in Romans that by the Law comes the full knowledge. So the Mosaic Law was not only designed to be a great picture of the coming ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was not designed to be a giant object lesson, so to speak, of all that he would do, but in its moral law, it was designed to prepare the people of God for the coming of a redeemer. It was designed to bring them to the conviction of their sin. Anyone who's ever attempted to keep the Ten Commandments, if he honestly tried to keep the Ten Commandments, he would have to come to the conviction that he was a sinner, and so when the Lord writes here, "Moses wrote about me," I am convinced in my own mind that John does not mean when he writes these words, that we have in the Mosaic books, a superficial foretelling of the coming ministry of the Lord Jesus alone. He means that in the Law of Moses there is a condemnation of human sin. That's the function of the Law, and it's designed to bring men to the conviction of their sins, and I think that is probably also what was in Nathaniel's mind when he had his first contact with the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember back in John chapter 1, we read these words in verse 43 of the first chapter.

“The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip he said; ‘follow me.’ Philip, like Andrew and Peter was from the town of Bethsaida.” In verse 45, “Philip found Nathaniel, and told him; ‘we’ve found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and about whom the prophets also wrote; Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ ‘Nazareth? Can anything good come from there,’ Nathaniel asked. ‘Come and see,’ said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching he said of him, ‘here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false.’ ‘How do you know me,’ Nathaniel asked. Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.’ Then Nathaniel declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.’”

So Nathaniel was told, “We found the one of whom Moses wrote about in the law.” And Nathaniel, when he finally comes to him he says, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.” Well, I think, there is more lying back of this than simply, “We saw him in those typical of the Old Testament, and now we see him.” I think, those individuals searched the Scriptures, and they came to the place where they realized, that they were going to have to have a redeemer, and so they were looking for the redeemer. They were looking for someone who would be the answer to the sin problem that they recognized in their heart, and that, I think, is what is involved when we read, “If you believe Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.” Not only did he give us those beautiful pictures of me in the types and illustrations, but he also brought home the necessity of moral preparation for the reception of the Lord Jesus as Savior. No man is ever saved, who does not want to be saved, and no man ever wants to be saved until he comes to realize his lost condition before God. As has often been said in this auditorium, “The church of God today is full of the nicest, sweetest, kindest people who have never really known what it is to have despair because of their sin, because of their guilt, and because of their condemnation, and have heard through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the way back, and have fled to him, and found deliverance in the blood that

was shed.” “He wrote of me” not simply in the pictures, but in the moral law which condemned us and pointed us to the need of a Savior.

That’s the reason, of course, they couldn’t believe in our Lord. They had not been morally prepared. They searched the Scriptures as an end in themselves. They did not see that the Law was given that we might have the full knowledge of sin. And, therefore, when the Redeemer stood before them, they felt no need. It’s like preaching to people today, even in this auditorium in Believers Chapel. You can tell from preaching the Gospel that there are many of us gathered in this auditorium that have no real sense of need. The Gospel is preached. It doesn’t really have any affect because they don’t sense their peril. They don’t sense that they are lost. They don’t sense they need the forgiveness of sins. They really don’t sense, that they are one step from eternal separation from God, and, therefore, the sense of urgency, the sense of need, the sense of peril is not there.

To sum it up then, John 5, indicates that the apostle regarded the Scriptures as revelatory of Jesus Christ and, further, that response to the revelation determined a person’s destiny. There’s some other related texts and if you have a piece of paper with you, I suggest that you jot down John 10:31 through 39, John 14:16, John 16:12 through 15, Revelation 1: 1 through 3, and Revelation 19:10. These are passages in which the Scriptures are set forth in various ways, as means of divine revelation.

Now, with reference to the use of the Old Testament in the Gospel of John or in John’s writings specifically, you notice as you read through the Gospel of John, that John’s use of the Scriptures is not so totally designed, as say Matthew’s, to point to the fulfillment of messianic passages in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, from time to time he does do that. He does point out, that certain things transpire in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, but he tends to look a little deeper than simply the citation of Scripture. Let me point you to one place where he does say that the Scriptures are fulfilled in certain actions of our Lord. Let me ask you to turn with me to John

chapter 12, verse 37 through verse 40. This is one of the climactic sections of the Gospel of John, in which he reaches the point of summarizing the ministry of the Lord to the multitudes, and in verse 37 of John 12 we read, “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. ‘This was to fulfill,’ John said, ‘the word of Isaiah the prophet; Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ For this reason, they could not believe, because as Isaiah says elsewhere, ‘He has blinded their eyes, and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn and I would heal them.’” So John, reaching the climax of the ministry of the Lord in his signs says, “Well, though he had done all these wonderful signs, they didn’t believe in him. That was to fulfill what Isaiah said. Lord, who’s believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” And this is why they couldn’t believe, and then he cites Isaiah chapter 6.

So he does take the Old Testament and apply it to specific situations in the life and ministry of our Lord, but what John particularly does in the use of the Scriptures in the unfolding of the ministry of Christ is to use the typical terms. For example, he points to the tabernacle of the Old Testament, and he says, “The Lord came and tabernacled in our midst.” So he was like the tabernacle. He points to the Temple, and suggests that he’s the true Temple. He calls him the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”. He speaks of Jacob’s Ladder. What a magnificent type of Christ, Jacob’s Ladder was; this ladder that was set up on the earth that went to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. And then in the Gospel of John, when the Lord Jesus Christ refers to Jacob’s Ladder that Nathaniel had been meditating upon evidently. He said, “You’re going to see greater things Nathaniel, than the things that you’ve been thinking about. You’re going to see, let me just read those words, you’re going to see the heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” So he evidently knew that Nathaniel, when he was sitting under that fig tree, the fig tree

incidentally was the place for meditation, and Nathaniel had been sitting there and that's why he was surprised when the Lord knew who he was. “How did you know that I'm an Israelite in whom there is no God?” He'd probably been having a close time of fellowship with the Lord and had been meditating on that experience of Jacob, possibly also asking the Lord to give him some kind of experience like that too.

And so the Lord says to him, “I'll tell you the truth. You're going to see the heavens open, and you're going to see the ladder all right, but it's not a ladder as Jacob saw it” because for the ladder now, he substitutes the Son of Man. He said, “You're going to see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” And so by the substitution of “Son of Man” for “ladder”, the Lord Jesus says, as plainly as you can say, “I am the ladder. I'm the one by which a person may move from earth to heaven. I'm the mediator between God and men, and Nathaniel, that's what you're going to see. That's the real thing. Jacob saw the picture, and probably didn't understand everything that I'm telling you about it, but the real true picture is; I'm the ladder, and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be the mediator, so that men who are on earth may have touch with heaven.”

John speaks of the Lord as the brazen serpent, as the fiery pillar, as the smitten rock, and other things. They are things that testify of him. So John is a Christian user of the Old Testament, finding in the Old Testament, the riches of the revelation concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let's come to “Revelation in the Son” and the normative text is John 1:18, so let's turn back to John 1, verse 18. Revelation is found in the Scriptures. Revelation is found in the Son of God. The relation between revelation in the Scriptures and revelation in the Son, of course, is so close, that Augustine is right in saying, “Indeed, O man, what my Scripture says, I say.” And when the Scriptures speak about the Lord Jesus Christ, it is God speaking about Christ, and God speaking through Christ. But here in John 1:18, we read these words. Now, I'm reading again the New International Version, and there is a

very interesting textual difference here seen in the various translations of the English text, and I'll have a word to say about it in just a moment. But in John 1:18 we read this, “No man has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.” Now the Authorized Version reads something like this, “No man hath ever seen God.” Well now, I've been reading this one, and I've just forgotten the other, but it reads, “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.” This has, “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.”

Now, let's take a look at this statement because it's a really important statement, and we ought to look first briefly, at the context. In verse 14, we had read these words, “The Word became flesh, and lived for awhile among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace and truth.” So John says, “The Word became flesh. We have seen the glory the one and only Son, who came from the Father in him, and that glory is a glory of grace and truth.” Then in verse 15, 16, and 17, he expounds grace, but truth is expounded in verse 18. “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.” So that truth is found in the knowledge of God through the Son. Now, in the Greek text, in the original text, he lays a great deal of stress on the fact that no one has ever seen God. In fact, he throws the word “God” forward, and in effect says, “Such a person as God, no one has ever seen.” The idea lying back of that, of course, is the Old Testament idea that no one can see God and live. What about all those passages in the Old Testament that speak about seeing God. We do have a passage in Exodus, in which reference is made to seeing God. Moses saw the Lord; saw his back parts. Well, those are all place where we have theophanies, appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ. No one can see the unveiled glory of God. We are creatures. We would be destroyed by the glory of God. No one has ever seen God. In fact, Paul says, “No one can see him,” in 1 Timothy 6:16. In the Old Testament, the statement is made also that, “If we see the Lord's face, we shall die.”

So when we read, “No one has ever seen God,” he’s using it in the sense of the absolute sight of the essence of deity.

But now, the manuscripts of the New Testament at this point, vary significantly. Some of the manuscripts read, “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” Some of the manuscripts read, “No one has ever seen God, but the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father; he hath declared him.” So some of the manuscripts speak about the “only begotten Son.” Some speak about the “only begotten God.” Now, if this is a text that should be translated “only begotten God,” then, of course, we have a remarkable testimony to the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. We don’t need this testimony to his deity. There are many passages in the Bible that speak of his deity, but this would be a rather interesting one. It certainly would lay great stress on the fact that our Lord possesses the essential deity of the Godhead. It probably could be said to be the more difficult reading because you would expect perhaps, John to say, “The only begotten Son” rather than “only begotten God.” This is the only time you would have this expression, and so since generally, the scribes tend to change something that’s very difficult to something simpler, something more in accord with what is found elsewhere, you could argue that probably, originally he did write, “the only begotten God.” On the other hand, “only begotten Son” is very suitable for the context because he talks about the “only begotten Son” being in the bosom of the Father. And that sounds as if it is more likely to be the text, than “only begotten God” who is in the bosom of the Father. Son and Father. Son in the bosom of the Father. That sounds as if that would be what John wrote, rather than the other. Well really, it doesn’t make a whole lot of difference, except in the exposition of the text. It’s possible that he wrote, “only begotten God.” If he did, we have a strong testimony to his deity, and it would be interesting in this sense too; that in verse 1 we have, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” There “God”. And then in verse 14, we have, “the only begotten Son” or we have “the only begotten” so

putting those two together, “God” and “only begotten,” “God” from verse 1, “only begotten” from verse 14, in the climactic verse of the prologue, “only begotten God” would simply be the climactic combination of the two. “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, the “God” of verse 1, “the only begotten of the Father,” verse 14, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.” That would make excellent sense and be a beautiful kind of summary of what was said.

The reason that this confusion exists in the manuscripts, is that the word for “Son” is the Greek word *uios* and it would look like this because this would be a word that would be abbreviated, and so we would have, this is the epsilon, and this is the sigma, and the line above is a signification of an abbreviation. And the word for “God” would be, here is the theta, and here is the sigma, and you can see this is the same as this. This line would be the same as this line. The only difference between the two would be the difference between this letter and this. So you can see how a scribe might easily, instead of writing “only begotten Son” write “only begotten God” because God occurs so frequently and vice versa. That’s how mistakes like that occurred in the transcribing of ancient manuscripts.

Well, let’s drop that for a moment, and let’s just think about what he says here, and fortunately, “only begotten Son” is an expression of the deity of the Son because if he’s the son of the Father, who is God, he, therefore, possesses the nature of the Father, and thus he is possessed of deity. Let’s just forget that and look at what he says. He says, “No man has ever seen God at any time.” This is the limitation of man in spiritual perception. And the next clause, “No man hath ever seen God, the only begotten Son or God who is the bosom of the Father.” That is a clause that expresses the qualifications of the Son. Now notice what he says about the Son. He says that, “he is in the bosom of the Father” and he uses a little word that comes from the verb “to be,” a participle which again expresses continuous action; “who is,” Luther said, “Who is ever and ever, is in the bosom of the Father.” This clause expresses the eternity of the Son, and it expresses the

intimacy that the Son has with the Father. It's what's found in verse 1, when we read, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God.” He was with God in the sense that he was in the bosom of the Father.

So here we have the eternal intimacy of the Son with the Father. That's why our Lord is qualified to reveal the Father to us. He is, ever and ever is, in the bosom of the Father. All of the ages of eternity past, were ages in which the Son and the Father lived in the most intimate relationship that one can live in, and the very words that John uses emphasize that, “is in the bosom of the Father.” I must confess, I again do not particularly like the statement in the New International Version, “but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side.” Well, that's not nearly so intimate to me as, “in the bosom of the Father.” “In the bosom of the Father” suggests that he is the intimate confidant of the Father; the most intimate relationship that can possibly exist. No secrets are there that the Son does not share with the Father.

I think of the passage, the great passage in Matthew chapter 11 and about verse 27, where we read these words, “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father. No one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” There is a relationship that is so intimate, that in the fullness of knowledge only the Father knows the Son and only the Son knows the Father and, furthermore, only those know the Father whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father to. “The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father.”

You know, if you wanted to write a biography of an individual, all things being equal, the best person to write a biography is the son of the person; the son because the son would know the father in the most intimate way. The son would be able to speak to the son's generation, but he would know the father in the most intimate way. No one, ideally, could know an individual like a son could know a father, and so the one who reveals the father, the Father, is the eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ who is and ever is with God, with the Father in his bosom.

And the final words speak of his interpretation of the Father. In going back to John 1:18 now, “He has made him known.” This verb, “has made known” is a word that is very interesting because from it we have the English word “exegesis.” You’ve heard people speak of exegesis; interpretation. When men speak about exegesis as a general rule, they talk about interpreting a text in the original languages. If, for example, I’m speaking about this English text and someone is seeking to explain it, I might say, “He’s interpreting this text.” But if I were to say, “He is exegeting a text” just by common usage, although the terms mean the same, you would naturally think of him as looking at an original text, and interpreting it in our language for us.

For many years I served in a theological seminary as Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis, and my task was to interpret the Greek text of the New Testament for students; so we studied with the Greek text before us and only the Greek text before us and I expounded the text, dealing with the grammar and syntax, and then with the relationships of sentences and clauses, and with the thought of the author, and occasionally dealing also with some of the theological consequences of the text.

Exegesis. *Exegeomai*. This verb, that word *exegeomai*, from which we derive exegesis is the word that is here translated as “made him known.” So the Son is the exegete of the Father. That verb means, literally, “to lead out.” Now, it never has this meaning in the New Testament, “to lead out” but that’s its root meaning. As you look at it, you would say, “lead out.” What it comes to mean in the New Testament, if you look up all of the references to it is, it means to explain. It means to interpret. It means to report. In fact, it means to rehearse the facts about something, and it’s used most frequently in that way in the New Testament. In the Book of Acts, for example, the Jerusalem Conference, when Paul and others stand up to tell how the Gentiles have responded to their message, this word is used. They “declare” how these things have happened. Later on, Paul again speaks about things that happened on one of his missionary journeys, and this was the word used. They “rehearse the facts”.

So here, “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father; he has rehearsed the facts about him,” John says. So it is in the Lord Jesus Christ that we have the true interpretation of the Father. In Josephus, this word is used of those who interpret the law; the rabbis. So the rabbis were the interpreters of the law; the Lord is the exegete of the Father, and he says what he hears from the Father, and he reveals to men, the things about the Father that we need to know. In the mystery cults, it was used of the *mystigog*, the individual who interpreted the ritual to the initiates. In other words, it’s used of the explaining and publishing of divine secrets, sometimes by the gods themselves. That’s John’s usage. What he’s simply saying is that, “The Lord Jesus Christ is the one who publishes, explains the secrets about God. He doesn’t tell us everything about God, but he tells us things about God as Father, and so the invisible God is seen in his unique image, the Son.” And by the way, he says, “The only begotten Son has exegeted him.” He’s talking about his earthly sojourn.

So John and the apostolic company, when they saw the Lord Jesus Christ, saw the revelation of the Father, and they saw that it was the glory of perfect redemption, and the glory of a perfect revelation; grace and truth found in him; perfection of redemption in the sacrifice of the Cross; the perfection of revelation in the unfolding of the truth about God. The breast of God is laid open in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Could there be any greater incentive for the study of the word of God than that? The breast of God laid open through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, found in the Scriptures. I don’t think there could be any greater incentive to the study of the word of God than that.

There are other related texts. John 12:45, where the Father is seen. John 14:9, where the Lord says, “Ye that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” John 17:6, where the Lord Jesus says, “He’s given them the word of the Father, and they’ve come to understand the attributes of the Father, revealed to the elect.” In 1 John:1 and 2, he is spoken of as, “the eternal life, who has been revealed.” In 1 John 3:5, he’s seen as the “sin-bearer”, then later in verse 8 as, “the one who annuls Satan’s works”. In 1 John 4:9, he’s the

“revelation of the love of God in what he has done.” So he has laid the breast of God open. I wish I had time to read a few things that John Calvin said with reference to this but we’ll have to put that off, for our time is up.

Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous truths that are found in Holy Scripture. How blamable and culpable we are in not availing ourselves of the opportunity to see into the breast of our great triune God through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, found in the Scriptures. We know, Lord, that every need that we have as human beings finds its solution there. Deliver us from the arm of the flesh. Enable us Lord. Sustain us. Motivate us to learn of Thee through him in the word.

For His name’s sake. Amen.