



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Importance and the Pitfalls of Prophecy”

TRANSCRIPT

This is the first in a series of studies in prophecy, and we are going to look at the study of prophecy from the standpoint of theology. We want to look at the theology of the future, or sanity in prophecy.

Now I hope that through our series of studies that we will be able to traverse the whole of the eschatological program of the word of God. We are going to look into systems of eschatology in our next hour and continue that for some time. I want to deal with the postmillennial system which is not dead. There are some today, outstanding theologians, who have turned again to the postmillennial system.

We want to look into the amillennial systems which is probably the most popular system of prophetic interpretation outside of the premillennial system, the system that is taught in many of our conservative theological seminaries throughout the world, and we want to look at it not only as a system to be avoided, but we want to try to analyze the system and ask ourselves why some very intelligent men follow this method of interpreting the prophetic word. We hope to look at their strong points, and we also hope to indicate the weak points, and my personal aim is that when we get through you will understand better the amillennial system.

The same thing we want to do for the premillennial system, dealing not only with its strong points but with its weak points – if it has weak points – and seeing thereby to bring ourselves to an understanding not only of the systems but why, the wherefore of each one of them. Then we want to deal with the hermeneutics of eschatology and try to ask ourselves, ask for ourselves the question, how should we study the prophetic portions of the word of God, and also deal with the principles by which we should read the prophetic Scriptures.

We want to deal with the covenants beginning with the everlasting covenant, the eternal covenant, then we want to look at the historical outworking of the everlasting covenant in the Edenic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Palestinian covenant, the Davidic covenant, the New Covenant; each one of these covenants we want to try to handle in the length of time, and the amount of discussion that these great topics deserve.

We want to deal with the kingdom and the church. We want to deal with the church and prophecy, and we’ll try to deal with this in some detail.

We want to deal also with the problem of the rapture. We want to try to point out the strong points and the weak points of various interpretations concerning the rapture of the church – not only the pretribulation rapture, but the posttribulation rapture – so that you will understand the weaknesses the strengths of each of these views, so that you will have sufficient material to make up your own mind as you read the word of God. Of course, I’ll try to give you a little help, but nevertheless, I want you to be able to be brought to the place where you can think through these great topics for yourselves and know why you and your friends believe certain doctrines.

We will of course deal with the Great Tribulation, the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the resurrection or resurrections. We want to deal particularly in and in a little more detail with the nature of the millennium, with the conclusion of the millennium, the doctrine of the judgments, the eternal state or the new heaven and the

new earth. So our series of studies is going to traverse a great portion of God’s word and particularly deal with God’s plan of the ages.

Our subject is “The Importance and the Pitfalls of Prophecy.” First a few words by way of introduction. Hardly anyone doubts that the world, and I think that we can use this with great accuracy, the world has become interested in prophecy. We not only have people like Maurice Woodruff and Jean Dixon who are making so called prophecies—some of which come true and some of which do not come true; the latter indicating of course that both of these are false prophets rather than true—but this interest in the prophetic word is truly a worldwide kind of interest.

I think that for evangelicals and for the United States or the Western world perhaps the most significant catalyst for stirring up interest in the prophetic word or in eschatology was the Six Day War of June 1967 which brought on, of course, a renewed interest in the Nation Israel. Strikingly, this interest in Israel has penetrated even the liberal theological seminaries and many of the liberal theologians, who do not really believe much about the prophetic word at all in their lectures are referring to the problem of Israel, asking themselves, is God trying to say something to us through the events that happened in the land of Palestine in 1967. And of course the conflict that has waged since that time has further increased interest in the events in the East. Now we have had the oil crisis, and all of our eyes, all over the world, are turned to that part of the world, because it is truly the key area of this globe upon which we live today.

Now in the United States we have had very significant interest in the prophetic word, and some of course that is not too significant. The sales of books that have to do with the prophetic word have sky rocketed. *The Second Coming Bible*, an old, warmed-over chestnut, first issued in 1924 was put out and sold fifty thousand copies in six months. We know of course that the work of Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* has now sold approximately four and a half million copies. On the outside of our automobiles we have the bumper stickers that read Guess Who’s Coming Again? or on the

inside are the dashboard stickers, If I’m Raptured, Take the Wheel and various types of things like this.

Now this has not only appeared in everyday life, but I say in our scholarly world we have also had a tremendous return to interest in the prophetic word. A liberal scholar who has written a commentary on the Book of Revelation, G. B. Caird in his book on the Book of Revelation, refers to the 20th chapter of that book “as the paradise of cranks and fanatics.” Well if that is so, and I think there have been lots of cranks and fanatics who have camped on Revelation chapter 20 and have stayed there, many, there must be many cranks and fanatics around, because many are perusing with great interest and great pleasure the chapters of the apocalypse, and that 20th chapter is one of the favorite chapters.

Now it is true that wild statements are made about the prophetic word. It is true that many evangelicals constantly make wild statements about the prophetic future. Many are attracted to the vivid scenes of the Book of Revelation, but we must not think that all of the extravagant statements are made by evangelicals. There are extravagant statements that are made by the detractors of interest in prophecy as well as by those who are promoting interest in prophecy. “Jesus wrote that book, the Book of Revelation, when he was senile,” commented a Dallas minister. Now that I think is just as extravagant a statement as any of the extravagant statements that fanatics and cranks have made about the Book of Revelation.

So we have a great deal of interest in the prophetic word. We have much interest in evangelical circles, and we do have within evangelical circles in my opinion, interest coming from weirdoes who sit on their watchtowers, feverishly, frenziedly, fluttering after the future. These future snoopers – that happens to be my term, you may not like it [laughter] – these future snoopers, agape over Armageddon, are thirsting after the trivialities of prophecy and slighting the spiritualities. For them the moral appeal of the word of God is largely lost. They are curious over what kind of furniture one is going to

have in the mansion of the future, and not so interested in the moral appeal that the prophetic word addresses to us in the 20th Century.

And I think this seductive spell of unhealthy speculation has really cost us some progress in spiritual life. That is why I hope – I am not sure that I’ll be able to do this of course – but that is why I hope through this series to introduce a little more sanity into the study of the prophetic Scriptures. That’s one of the purposes, one of the great purposes of this series of studies to introduce sanity into the contemporary study of prophecy. So if we accomplish that, I will be quite pleased. Now I hope accomplish some more than that, but that is I think a very needed thing.

Well let’s look now at our outline, and first of all, the nature of prophecy or what is it? I believe that this is the place where we should begin. We should ask ourselves just exactly what is prophecy. In this series I will be using two terms somewhat synonymously. That is, prophecy, eschatology. But there is, strictly speaking, a difference between the two, and so I want to define them. And first the term prophecy.

Characteristic of all men with the exception of one class is abysmal inability to predict the future. Now you can think of you in your own mind of many beautiful illustrations of failure in attempt to predict the future. One that stands out in my mind is one that was made by one of our great admirals during World War II, just before the explosion of the atomic bomb in Japan. Admiral William Leahy, a very respected man said, “This is the biggest fool thing we have ever done. The atomic bomb will never go off, and I speak as an expert in explosives.” Now he made that statement in 1945. Now that proved at least one thing: that Admiral Leahy was not a prophet. [Laughter]

Prophets do not make mistakes in prophecy. They are prophets because they are infallible in their prophecies of the future. Now there was one prophecy that I would like to have believed, but it, too, failed and I was disappointed. The week before the Dallas Cowboys played the Baltimore Colts in the Super Bowl at Miami [laughter], the *Dallas Morning News* on the front page ran an article with the headline, “Cowboy Triumph Seen

It’s Written in the Stars.” The article went on to say, an unexpected change in the planet Uranus Sunday is expected to bring about a rare astrological happening. The Dallas Cowboys should win the Super Bowl about twenty-four or twenty-one to seven.

Now you can see a man who would say something like this doesn’t know much about football. He would have said about twenty-one or twenty-four to seven, I’m sure, instead of twenty-four or twenty-one to seven. Anyway that was astrologer John Sismak or Zimak, and he said, it’s definitely in the stars. But of course the Cowboys lost. That only proved that this astrologer was only an astrologer and not a prophet.

There is a Chinese Proverb, and I went up to Cincinnati, Ohio about a month and a half ago to speak to some Chinese Christians who were having a conference, and I quoted this Chinese Proverb, and they denied that it was a Chinese Proverb [laughter] but nevertheless, I had read this Chinese Proverb, and I quoted it to them and the proverb is, It is very difficult to prophecy, especially with regard to the future. [Laughter] The one accepted class of men who are able to predict the future is the class known as the prophets of God. They were spokesmen for God.

The word prophet comes from a Greek word *prophetes*. Now I don’t have time to put it on the board here, and if you want to, if you want to spell it out in your notes, it would be spelled P-R-O-P-H-E-T-E-S. *Prophetes*. Now this word *prophetes*, which means prophet, comes from the little preposition *pro*, or pro, which means before, and *pheme*, which means to speak and the result is “to speak for or before another.” “To speak for another” is really its common meaning. So a prophet is a person who speaks for another. Now of course, in the word of God, a prophet is one who speaks for God.

Now I’m going to ask you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 7 and verse 1 and verse 2 where we have the normative text for prophet and prophecy. Now this text I think is of the greatest importance for understanding the term, prophecy, and I think it will also deliver you from a great deal of error, and it will prevent you, if you understand

these two verses, from being misled by those who say – and there are many who say today – we have prophets in our church and they make prophecies when we meet.

Exodus chapter 7 verse 1 and verse 2. This, by the way, is the first occurrence of the word, prophet.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: (now notice God is speaking to Moses) I have made you a god to pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. So Moses is to speak of Pharaoh through Aaron. Moses is the god to Pharaoh, Aaron is his prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land.”

Now it is evident from this particular application of the term, prophet, to Aaron, that the prophet is a person who speaks the message of God. The message comes from Moses. Of course ultimately, it comes from God. God give the message to Moses. Moses acts as a god to Pharaoh. Aaron is the prophet, who takes the word from the god to Pharaoh and brings it to Pharaoh.

Now to thing that is stressed here and which it is important for us to see is simply this, that prophecy in the Bible is revelation from God. Prophecy is revelation from God. Prophecy is not teaching. Prophecy is not illumination upon the written word. Prophecy is revelation from God. New truth from God—that is prophecy.

Now when a person says that he is a prophet, he should be expected to give us new truth from God. That of course is why we do not have any prophets any more. We have the word of God. We have a closed canon. We do not need any new messages from God. Now we need a great deal of illumination upon the message that we have, the revelation that we have, but evidently we do not need any new revelation. We have not

been given this. The prophet, then, is a person who speaks for God and gives divine revelation new truth.

Now these prophecies of the word of God, of which, for example, the Book of Isaiah is one, or the Book of Joel or the Book of Revelation. These prophecies, prophecy has a two-fold stress. First, prophecy is predictive revelation. Prophecy is predictive revelation. That is, it is revelation that comes from God, but it has to do with the future from the time that the prophet gives it. We have Old Testament prophets. We have New Testament prophets. The thing, however, that was true of both the Old Testament prophet like Isaiah and the New Testament prophet was that they both gave new revelation.

Now I want to turn to a passage in the New Testament in which we have a New Testament prophet who gives new revelation. Turn with me to Acts chapter 11 verses 27 and 28. Acts chapter 11 verse 27 and verse 28. Here we read:

“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

(In the early days of the Christian church there were prophets who gave new revelation. We were still or the church was still living in the day of the giving of revelation new truth.) These prophets came from Jerusalem unto Antioch and there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great famine throughout all the world: (Now notice that next clause)

which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.”

Agabus was a true prophet. What he said came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Agabus was a New Testament prophet; Isaiah an Old Testament prophet. They both gave new revelation and their prophecies come true.

Now it is often said that prophecy is history written beforehand. That is not altogether true. I would say, I would certainly agree that that is generally true, that prophecy is history written beforehand. However, in the fulfillment of prophecy, often the fulfillment, while it perfectly fulfills the Old Testament prophets in their sayings, usually goes beyond the Old Testament prophecy and additional information is given. So it is not strictly accurate to say prophecy is history written beforehand. It frequently is that with a plus added to it.

Now Webster is straighter on prophecy than many so-called evangelicals today. In defining prophecy, Webster’s Dictionary says, prophecy is “prediction of the future under the influence of divine guidance.” Prediction of the future under divine guidance. That’s not a perfectly accurate statement, but nevertheless it’s not a wrong statement. He adds, “or any prediction.” There is then this side of prophecy. It is predictive revelation.

But prophecy may not only be predictive revelation. Second, prophecy is also moral revelation. The prophet was a person who not only told the future, but he also gave other revelation from God that had to do with spiritual living. He gave moral truths.

Now these moral truths that the prophet gave were designed to support the faith of the saints. To put it popularly, as it is often put, the prophet of the Old Testament and the prophet of the New Testament was not only a foreteller, he also was a forth-teller, in the sense that he gave out God’s word which may have to do with the present or it may have to do with the future. The essential character of prophecy is that it is new revelation that may pertain to the present and to the moral lives of those to whom it is addressed, or it may also pertain to the future and predict certain Messianic events. The prophet possessed both foresight and insight.

And I’m going to ask you to turn with me for a moment to a passage in the Book of Isaiah in which we see this interplay of foresight and insight. Isaiah chapter 2, Isaiah chapter 2, and I’m not going to read all of these passages, but this illustration begins in Isaiah chapter 2 and does not conclude until Isaiah chapter 4 is finished.

Now in this prophecy which is given in Isaiah chapter 2, 3 and 4, we have a beautiful illustration of the two aspects of prophecy. It is predictive revelation; it is moral revelation. Notice, for example, how the Prophet Isaiah out of the foresight that is given him as a prophet of God, speaks about the millennial age that is to come. In Isaiah chapter 2 verses 1 through 5,

“And the word the word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many peoples: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.”

Now you can see from these first five verses that God’s truth is, it is said concerning God’s truth, that his truth shall overflow to the whole of the world, and all of the world shall be touched by the Messianic salvation in the last days.

But beginning in verse 6 in this same prophecy to concerning Judah and Jerusalem, we suddenly move from tomorrow back into today, and the prophet speaks

about the heresies that have penetrated Israel. In the first part, we have God alone worshipped, but here the city is crowded with all kinds of idols and Israel is bound up in the worship of false gods. So against the background of the glorious vision of the future, the prophet now addresses Judah and Jerusalem and seeks to drive home to them the implications of the heresies that have entered into the city of man. The city of God is to come, but the city of man is polluted with idols and inequity and rebellion against God.

If we had time, going through these chapters would be a kind of analysis not only of the situation in Judah and Jerusalem, but an analysis of the society in which we live today. For almost all of the evils that fill our society are found in the society of Jerusalem and Judah in the time of the Prophet Isaiah. So he manifests foresight in looking into the future, then manifests great insight as he analyzes the wickedness, the moral degradation, the conditions that exist in Judah and Jerusalem in his day.

But then having finished that in chapter 3, again in the 4th chapter, in this brief 4th chapter, in the same prophecy we read, “And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach. In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious” – the branch of the LORD of course is a title for the Messiah – “In that day, the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and splendid for those who are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he who remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem.”

As there is no need for me further to analyze this section. He speaks about again the future and speaks about the glorious deliverance that God is going to accomplish. In other words, he moves from foresight into insight and then concludes again with foresight of the future. So he moves from the last days into this day for him, and then concludes with the last days again. This is characteristic of biblical prophecy. It is a prophetic message which is predictive in character but almost always has moral application.

Now if we read the Bible, if we study the prophecies of the word of God, and if our only response to them is the tickling of our minds by curiosity, if we are only concerned with what is going to happen and the word of God concerning the future does not have a tremendous moral application to our daily lives, then we have missed the force of the prophetic word, and we are exactly as I have described in my introduction, these in evangelical circles, we are just like them those who feverishly, frenziedly, flutter after the future. And in being so interested in the trivialities of the details of the future have missed the message of the spiritual significance of the fact that God controls the affairs of men. So prophecy is predictive revelation, prophecy is moral revelation.

Now I’m going to use the term prophecy primarily as we go along in the sense of predictive revelation or I’ll use it like the term eschatology, but I don’t want you ever to lose the force of the fact that prophecy may also be moral revelation.

Now the second term that we want to be sure that we understand is the term eschatology. E-S-C-H-A-T-O—now I say that not because you in this audience would ever misspell that word—but many of my theological students over at the seminary spell it E-S-C-H-A-T-A-L-O-G-O. Eschatology. I know you wouldn’t misspell it. So I’m not talking down to you; thinking about my students. Eschatology.

The Greek work *eschatos*, E-S-C-H-A-T-O-S means, last. It means utmost. It means extreme. But the usual meaning associated with it is “last.” So Eschatology, *eschatos*, last plus *logos*, speech, discourse, means “speech or discourse about last things.” Therefore eschatology is the doctrine of the future, not the doctrine that we’re going to believe in the future, but doctrine about the future. So that’s what we’re going to be talking about. Eschatology – the doctrine about the future or sanity in prophecy.

Webster says concerning eschatology, “It is that branch of theology that deals with the last things, such as death, resurrection, judgment, immortality. He could also have added a lot of the other last things. Everything that is future is eschatological. The

doctrine of the rapture, the doctrine of the Tribulation, the doctrine of the Second Advent the doctrine of the millennium – all of these things are also eschatological.

But eschatology also includes, as Webster has rightly suggested it includes, human death. It includes life after death. It includes the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. It includes the doctrines of the judgment. It includes the question of immortality. There is a worldwide side to eschatology and there is also an individual side to eschatology. All of this is eschatology, so we don’t want to lose the breadth of the doctrine. We want to be studying eschatology.

Now Romans 2, the importance of prophecy, or why should we study it? Why should we be concerned with the prophetic word? If I had my way, I think because so many of my friends have been fanatical about the study of prophecy, I think I would want to forget it. I don’t want to be known as one of these rabid students of prophecy, because it has such a bad connotation now in many circles, because so many of our friends have made wild and extravagant statements about the future.

Some have identified the Common Market, for example, as the ten nation confederacy of the Western world in the future. Now I think that, of course, is a suspect doctrine in the first place, as you will see much later on in our series of studies, but where are all these Common Market preachers now that the ten nations are no longer ten but nine? Where are they? So you see, we must be very careful in the study of the Scriptures and not make wild and extravagant statements.

But once we’ve said that, when we look again at the Bible, we cannot avoid the study of the Scriptures. If I were to simply give you a common piece of statistical information, this would be enough to mean that we must study the prophetic word vigorously and assiduously. It has been said, and whether it’s precisely accurate or not I do not know, I have not bothered to check it up, but it has been said that one-fourth of the Bible concerns prophecy or eschatology. I wouldn’t be surprised at all that it was more than one-fourth of the Bible, and I’m not trying to make a wild and extravagant

statement. I’m trying to be very careful about what I say. I would not be surprised at all if more than one-fourth of our Bible concerns eschatology. All of the Bible – almost all of the Bible as it was originally written was prophetic in its significance.

We could also, if we have any further motivation for the study of the prophetic word, we could also mention that the apostles taught newly organized churches prophecy right from the beginning. Now what would you do if you had a new congregation or if you were evangelizing a group of Jewish men with the gospel of Jesus Christ, telling them that the truths of the Old Testament revelation had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth? What would you tell them?

Well you probably would tell them what Paul is said by Luke to have told the Thessalonians in Acts chapter 17. Luke says, “And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, (that is the synagogue in Thessalonica to speak to the Jews) and three Sabbath days (three Saturdays) he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. He opened the Scriptures and he alleged that Christ must needs have suffered, the Messiah must suffer, must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead ,and so he’s teaching according to the Book of Acts, centered upon these two great doctrines, the Messiah must suffer. He undoubtedly went to the Psalms and particularly to the prophecies of the suffering servant of Jehovah in Isaiah, and there he pointed out that the Messiah must suffer, for this you see, was a doctrine that the Jews were not really prepared to accept. They had been taught a great deal about the glories of the kingdom, and the glories of the Messiah, but they had not been taught much, evidently, about the sufferings of the Messiah. So Paul stressed the Messiah must suffer.

Then he also stressed that he must rise again from the dead. Now the Jews evidently sat there listening to him as long as he kept it on that plane. As long as it was a theological question, well they were prepared to listen, because there were those in Paul’s day who were curious about Bible doctrine and always looking for some new kind of doctrine to think about in their minds just like we are today.

People in our evangelical circles who like to study the prophetic word, primarily because they are curious about certain details of the prophetic Scriptures, and they want to be sure that they can find the atomic bomb or various types of other things in the word of God. Whatever is going on at the present time, they want to find in the Bible. And any kind of thing that tickles their curiosity and excites it is something that they are interested in. Is the United States in the Bible? Let’s see. No. This kind of thing.

So evidently it was all right as long as Paul kept it on that plane. But then Paul said, “And this Jesus, and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Messiah.” When he said that, of course, that meant that the whole nation was guilty because they had been with the Romans involved in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And when he said that, when he made the personal application, their patience was at an end and they ultimately drove him out of the city. So he preached to the synagogue the sufferings of Messiah and the glories that should follow.

Now that of course was reference in the Old Testament, to the prophecies of the death of the Messiah and prophecies of the resurrection of the Messiah. But we know from the study of the New Testament that Paul stayed at Thessalonica probably more than the little over two weeks that that statement “reasoned with them for three Sabbath days” suggests. Three Sabbath days is just one day over two weeks. It seems evident as you reconstruct the life of the Apostle Paul that he must have stayed there well, perhaps as long as six weeks. It could hardly have been any longer.

Some were converted. He gathered them together and began to teach them the Scriptures. What would you teach them? Well now, if it was the 20th Century, you’d bring out the Four Spiritual Laws and hope that by the end of six weeks they would understand the Four Spiritual Laws and perhaps 1 John 1:9.

Would you instruct them about the Antichrist? Would you instruct them about the rebuilding of the temple? Would you instruct them about the Second Advent and how the Lord Jesus was going to come and was going to destroy the Antichrist with the breath of

his mouth? Would you teach them about apostasy that is to come? No, that would cause too much trouble in the churches. You get a people a group of people converted and send them back into the churches from which they’ve come talking about false doctrine and apostasy and the Antichrist and the Second Advent and the kingdom and things like that—well that’s what causes church splits. Fortunately, Paul didn’t have to put up with what we have to put up with. I think that was one reason he had such a victorious Christian life. [Laughter] He didn’t have to live in the 20th Century and put up with the kinds of things that we have to put up [with] in Christendom today.

Now I’m going to turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Now you think I’m trying to be funny—well I am [laughter]—but I’m not really trying to be funny. I’m trying to show you exactly what the apostle did teach them and how it is so incongruous with the situation that exists today. Now if you turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul tells us here a few of the things that he taught them. He says in the 2nd chapter of 2nd Thessalonians:

“Now we beseech you, brethren, (these are the ones who heard his message concerning the Messiah his sufferings and his rising again and that that Messiah was Jesus and they now have come by the grace of God to faith in Jesus Christ) we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present.”

He evidently had taught them about the day of the Lord. How many of you know the doctrine of the Day of the Lord? Well I have a hunch that some of you would really not

be too certain about the doctrine of the Day of the Lord. You’ve only been a Christian forty years. That’s something you haven’t come to yet, perhaps. [Laughter] They were taught this.

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come the falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; (Now he’s talking about the man of sin; he’s talking about the apostasy) Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, (he talks here about the rebuilding of the temple in the city of Jerusalem shewing himself that he is God.) Now Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

So you see all of this was things was doctrine that he had taught them in his four or five, at the most six weeks that he spent among the Thessalonians. Well now I think that should be enough incentive for us to study the prophetic word. If we want to catch some of the flavor some of the disposition of the early Christian church, and who would not want to catch some of the flavor and disposition of the early Christian church? You can only do that if you are acquainted with the preaching of eschatology.

Now some of us love the doctrines of grace. Those are great doctrines. Calvin loved the doctrines of grace. If there was one part of Calvin’s ministry in which there was a lack, it was this lack of stress upon the prophetic word. He fought a particular battle in his day. But that is no excuse. We should be acquainted with the prophetic word.

Let me be specific. First of all, prophecy produces purity of life. In 1 John chapter 3 verses 1 through 3 we read words that I think state this quite plainly. We’ll just read them, make a comment, move on for the sake of time. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God:

therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him (that is, every man who has a hope regarding the second coming) purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” The hope in the second coming is a purifying hope. Prophecy and purity are twins, and they should never be parted. The New Testament reflects this teaching in many places. This is one of the outstanding ones.

Second, prophecy produces stability of life. One text from 1 Corinthians chapter 15 stresses this. In the great chapter on the resurrection of the body, the resurrection of the believer’s body, Paul, after concluding his discussion states in verse 58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” Stability is balance and poise. Poise is a very good word. It means stability and balance in the Christian life.

Prophecy provides us with a kind of world view by which we can face what comes to us. It enables us to cope with today’s rationalism. It enables us to cope with today’s false intellectualism. It enables us to cope with economic materialism. It enables us to cope with inflation with stagflation or whatever we want to call it. It enables us to cope with all of the problems of life knowing the future brings stability. Be stedfast, unmoveable, in the light of the hope of the resurrection of the body.

One of the prophetic interpreters has called this “psychological stabilization.” Well that is of course what it is in the world’s language. If you worry about your health, if you worry about your job, all of these little practical little details assume an entirely different kind of appearance against the background of the blessed hope of resurrection and the future life with our Lord.

Third, prophecy produces comfort in sorrow. We all know the passage in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13 through 18, in which Paul speaks concerning the rapture of the believers. We’ll deal with this in detail much later on in our series of

studies. But after unfolding the details of the rapture of the believers, he states in verse 18, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words,” the Thessalonians evidently had experienced some sorrow and bereavement since the apostle was there, so he unfolded to them here that those who had died were not going to miss the rapture about which he had spoken to them. They actually were going to be resurrected first and then the believers who were living were going to be caught up together with them to be with the Lord, and they were to comfort themselves with these words. Prophecy produces comfort in sorrow. It produces comfort in death. It produces comfort in persecution, comfort in slander, whatever it may be. Prophecy produces comfort in difficulty.

The Thessalonian materialism had inscribed on their tombs, you can find this in the inscriptions, “After death, no reviving. After grave, no meeting.” And the Apostle Paul’s doctrine counteracts that and contradicts it and was designed to lift up the Thessalonians and comfort them in their troubles.

I had a interesting experience on Monday. I don’t think I’ll ever have this experience again. The mother of a very fine Christian woman died, and I was called upon to conduct the funeral. I had, many years ago known this woman. She was a member of at one time of the First Congregational Church here which later became the Scofield Memorial Church. She was a member of the Scofield Memorial Church, but did not live in Dallas at the present time. She was one hundred years old.

Now this woman was a Christian woman, a very fine Christian woman, and she had a hope concerning the second coming. Her daughter spoke to me before the funeral over the telephone, told me something about her, about her teaching Sunday school class, as I say I had known her many years ago, and she specifically mentioned that she had this hope of the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and she often spoke about it, and then my friend said, of course, well she hoped that she would take part in the rapture and would not die. But of course God now has seen fit that this should not come to pass.

But I reminded my friend that while that is true that she would not be caught up as a living believer, she would still not miss the resurrection, for that is the point of this passage, that the dead in Christ shall rise first. They have a kind of superiority in the resurrection. So, she did have her hope, and she will realize her hope, and I was able to stand by the grave and point that out to the family and friends that her hope would be realized.

Fourth prophecy, produces concern for service. We spoke about being steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord, but in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verses 9 and 10, where we have reference to the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, it is stated here that this judgment seat of Jesus Christ is incentive for good works. Verses 9 and 10 read, “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” So here, the judgment seat of Jesus Christ – this prophetic fact of the future – is the reason why the apostle labored in order that he might be acceptable to God.

And finally, fifthly, prophecy produces conversion. The preaching of the prophetic word, we should never apologize for it. It produces conversion. In Acts chapter 3 verses 12 through 26 the apostle preached one of the earliest sermons preached, and it is almost wholly a sermon about prophecy and the Second Advent. As a result, conversions took place.

I was converted through the preaching of prophecy. The book that was published after Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse’s death, about God’s plan of the ages, represents the series messages which I heard over thirty years ago in Birmingham, Alabama where he was preaching and there in the South Highlands Presbyterian Church. I was converted through the preaching of prophecy. I think it was the first time I had ever heard anything about the prophetic word in the Presbyterian Church after twenty-six years of Presbyterian and hearing the prophetic word I was converted. I’m not blaming it on the church. I

know enough good Calvinistic doctrine to know that that was the precise moment that God intended to bring me to faith in Jesus Christ. But it was through the prophetic Scriptures that I came to know the Lord Jesus.

I want to conclude with just a comment or two concerning the pitfalls of prophecy or what we should avoid. We mentioned just a couple of obvious points due to the fact that prophecy is heady stuff, and it’s hard to escape the temptation to be sensational in handling it. Dr DeHaan told us thirty-five or forty years ago that Mussolini was probably the Antichrist. He regretted it for the last twenty-five or thirty years of his preaching ministry. Whenever anyone mentioned it to him he got mad in the later years of his life. I fully understand why he did. He had made a mistake in identifying uh Mussolini with the Antichrist. There are many good reasons why he thought that he was probably the Antichrist, but he made the fatal mistake of the equivalent of setting a date.

I know a person who preached a very good sermon just after the Six Day War and affirmed that Jerusalem was no longer trodden down of the Gentiles, and it was preached in Dallas Theological Seminary and this person went on to say, I do not believe that we shall have any school next fall. The Lord will have come. And then every year we remind our friend of the fact that he preached that particular sermon. [Laughter]

And then there are those who have preached about the Common Market and the ten nations, and now that Norway is no longer in the Common Market, I remind all of my Common Market friends about that every one that I see that I know has preached a sermon on the Common Market, I ask them about the ten nations and why there are only nine now and how one foot of the image has been cut off. [Laughter] They are unable to answer me. This is the kind of thing that we avoid. Let me just say, for time is up, and I don’t want to run over one hour. We are to avoid the arrogance of dogmatism. God fulfills prophecy as written, not as we think he should. Remember that. And second, avoid the setting of dates, yet observe the signs. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

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[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the study of the Scriptures. We pray that the truth that we study may not only interest us and make us curious concerning the future, but most of all may deepen our spiritual lives.

For Christ’s sake. Amen.