



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Silence of God, or the Significance of the Present Age” TRANSCRIPT

We are continuing our study of prophecy. We have concentrated primarily upon the prophetic word as it is set forth in the covenants of the Old Testament, and we concluded with the stress upon the various unconditional and conditional covenants, which in a sense brought us down to the present age. And so in the series of studies in which we are going to undertake, I want to pick up the story of the prophetic word with the present time and then move on into the completion of the program of God, dealing considerably with the church and prophecy and then on beyond the church to the ultimate completion of the program of God as set forth in Scripture in the eternal state.

Our subject is “The Silence of God, or the Significance of the Present Age,” and then we are going to move into the certainty of the second coming, a pre-millennial calendar of future events, the church and the end of the age, the resurrection of the church, the translation of the church, the church and the tribulation, the church and the judgment seat of Christ, the 70th week of Israel. We’ll spend a little time on that very important prophecy in Daniel chapter 9; every Christian ought to understand that prophecy. Then the Second Advent of Christ, the resurrection of Israel, the judgment of the Gentiles, the millennial kingdom which we have already referred to in some detail in connect with our unconditional Abrahamic, Davidic and New covenants, the resurrection

of the damned and the Great White Throne judgment, the eternal state, and we will spend a couple of times on the eternal state, and I will seek to answer all those questions that you have about heaven and the details of it.

We are looking at the subject of the silence of God or the significance of the present age, so what I would like for you to do is to turn with me to Psalm 2 verses 1-12. Let me read this Psalm and then a few verses in the New Testament. Psalm 2 verse 1 through 12. We will just read this Psalm because there is one point I want to draw from it, and then we will go on into the New Testament accounts. Psalm 2:1:

“Why do the nations rage and the people imagine a vain thing?
The kinds of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel
together against the Lord and against his anointed saying,
Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us.
He who sitteth in the heavens shall laugh the Lord shall have them
in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath and vex
them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy
hill of Zion. I will declare the decree the Lord hath said unto me,
thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I
shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance and the uttermost
parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a
rod of iron thou shalt dash them in of iron thou shalt dash them in
pieces like a potter’s vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings;
be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and
rejoice with trembling (you weren’t supposed to be turning your
pages at that point I’m reading the inspired translation of the King
James Version and the Scofield edition and I’ve already turned my
page. [Laughter] Verse 11) Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice

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with trembling. Kiss the son lest he be angry and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

Turn with me now to the 4th chapter of the book of Luke, Luke chapter 4 verse 14 through verse 22. This is the passage in which our Lord begins his public ministry of the Messiah, and we read in the 14th verse,

“And Jesus returned and the power of the Spirit into Galilee and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up and as his custom was he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the Prophet Isaiah, and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, ‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.’ And he closed the book and gave it again to the minister and sat down and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, ‘This day is the Scripture fulfilled in your ears.’ And all bore him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and they said, is not this Joseph’s son?”

And then for a final text, turn over the 23rd chapter of the Book of Luke, and we want to read verse 34. This is the first of our Lord’s utterances upon the cross, and we read,

“Then said Jesus, ‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do.’

And they parted his raiment and cast lots.”

The 20th Century has been called, man’s troubled time. God, if not dead, has fallen silent. Mum’s the word in heaven, it seems. Sir Robert Anderson, who was an outstanding policeman, the head of Scotland Yard and a very dedicated Christian who wrote a number of very interesting books on biblical topics, made reference to the fact that God is silent at the present time and said, “A silent heaven is the greatest mystery of our existence.”

I think as we reflect upon the things that have happened in the 20th Century, particularly since I have lived through most of the 20th Century, the things that keep pressing in upon us concern the control that God has over this universe of which we are a part. Is it true that God is really a loving God? Is it true that he is also a powerful God and as philosophers have frequently said, if he is a loving God, how can we explain the things that have happened? And if he is a powerful God, how can we explain the things that have happened? Is it that he is loving and powerless, or is it that he is powerful and not loving? This is a dilemma, that as an individual living in the 20th Century we must face and seek to find some solution.

In the 3rd chapter of the Book of Lamentations we read, Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. Is it true that God really knows what’s going on, and does he really control things? Is there knowledge in the most high? as the Scriptures say.

Fourteen years ago in *Time* magazine I read a very interesting article. It was the lead article in *Time* magazine. It was in the medical section, and the title of the article was “The Anatomy of Angst,” and those of you who know your German will remember

that angst means something like tension or despair or anxiety, angst. And in the course of this article the reference was made to a dream that a person had. I’m going to read the dream. It’s a very interesting account of a dream. This was actually a dream of an individual:

“The automatic elevator stopped with a jolt. The doors slide open, but instead of the accustomed exit the passenger faces only a blank wall his finger stab at buttons. Nothing happens. Finally he presses the alarm signal and a starter’s rough voice inquires from below, what’s the matter? The passenger explains that he wants to get off on the 25th floor. There is no 25th floor in this building comes the voice over the loud speaker. The passenger explains that nonsense. He’s worked here for years. He gives his name. Never heard of you, says the loud speaker. Easy, the passenger tells himself, they’re just trying to frighten me. But time passes and nothing changes. In that endless moment, the variously pleading and angry exchanges over the loud speaker are the passenger’s only communication with the outside world. Finally even that ceases. The man below says that he cannot waste anymore time. Wait, please, cries the passenger in panic. Keep on talking to me! But the loud speaker clicks into silence. Hours, days or ages go by. The passenger cowers in a corner of his steel box staring at the shiny metal grill from which the voice once spoke. The grill must be worshiped. Perhaps the voice will be heard again.”

That was a real dream of a man who lived in our society, who had a wife, three children, a fair income, according to *Time Magazine*. And furthermore, he had no analyst. He was

not a kook, but he was just a simple person who lived in the society of evidently one of our large cities. And he went on, the author of this article went on to say that what this dream does say to us is that it speaks of a God who has grown silent.

Have you ever wondered if God really has spoken in his word? Has it ever occurred to you to question as a Christian the speaking God? We do not believe, we say, that God is dead. We do not even believe that he is silent, so we say. We say – now, I’m going to use the first person because I don’t know what you say – but I say that he speaks by his word and his Spirit and that his word is God’s voice to us through the Spirit. Yet, many Christians are confused, and they wonder if God does not really wish to be silent. If God were really speaking, would he not be speaking in miracles? Now it’s evident that a lot of Christians really feel this way, because if they did not feel this way, then it’s irrational for them to rush after the charismatic as they have. It’s evident that deep down within their heart there is the kind of feeling that a real God in the present age should speak in the miraculous, and perhaps he is speaking in the charismatic tongues or the charismatic healing.

Perhaps he is speaking through Katherine Koolmann. Perhaps he is speaking through Oral Roberts or some of the others who may fall into that category. There are movements which are designed to provoke emotional manifestations, and these emotional manifestations are often identified with divine activity. If we can shout and scream and holler and raise our hands in a meeting and sing strangely and dance around the pulpit and roll on the floor – we used to do that in the South years ago, and used to come up and look in the church to see what was happening in the meetings. They were very interesting, almost as interesting as *Jaws*. But these were meetings that were designed to provoke these emotional manifestations so that you would get the impression that something is really happening, and often the deeper life movement is a similar kind of thing, because it, too, is designed to provoke such an emotional response and such and

emotional involvement that you get the impression that something has really happened, but nothing really happened except in you.

These types of movements always attract the unstable and individuals who follow this kind of thing live as, one of my good friend says, in spiritual kook-land. Often in the present day in the present hour, individuals come to me because I happen to stand on a platform often and give me these stories of these various things that have happened: dreams and visions, seeing blue lights in the parlor and things like that, and I’m not the person to come to, because I do not think that there is any reality in all of that. I am old enough now as you can tell to have some perspective on evangelicalism, and I must honestly say I have watched the charismatic movement for over 30 years, and I have yet to see any lasting good come from that movement. Maybe it does. Maybe there is something. After all I can only speak of my personal experience in that regard. But I have yet to see any lasting good come from that movement.

They tell me that they are given new insights in Scripture by their experiences, but I don’t ever hear of any of these new insights. They tell me that they are able to make prophecies that are true prophecies of the word of God, but their prophecies don’t even sound like interesting statements about what is going to happen. We are going to get a great blessing on Sunday that is to come, was one prophecy that was given me as a prophecy of the word of God. So, I must confess I am not very responsive to that kind of thing.

This weekend I was in Seattle for a series of meetings, and again, sitting down at the table between one of the sessions, the same subject came up again and the same questions about whether God was really active in the charismatic movement. But go wherever you will, you cannot find any lasting contribution to the health the spiritual health of the true church of Jesus Christ.

Does God speak in the present age? Is he speaking? The answer to this problem, I think, is found in a series of passages in the word of God, and I want to try and develop

it in the form of three testimonies, because I think it is important to understand the character of this present age as we turn our eyes toward the future, when in truth we know God shall speak again as he has spoken in the past.

Now we are going to look at this I say from the view of God’s word. Strictly speaking, if you look at history, you could not find the hand of God in history in such a way that you could prove it to anyone. Nor on the other hand can anyone prove that God is not in history. These are assumptions that we bring to the word of God. The unbeliever brings the assumption to the word of God that you cannot find God in human history, and as a Christian, and as a scientist, we would have to acknowledge we cannot prove that God has acted in history, cannot prove that. But he cannot prove that God has not acted in history. He is just as helpless as we are. He brings his predispositions; I bring mine.

As a matter of fact, if God had acted in history, and if I could prove it, that still wouldn’t do any good, because his heart is hardened and he won’t accept the light that shines most plainly before his eyes. The evidence of that is when our Lord Jesus was here and when he performed his mighty miracles identifying himself as the Messiah, they did not respond. When the resurrection took place and there were accredited witness, numerous witnesses, they did not respond. Those who were committed to him believed, but those who were not committed were not persuaded by miracles. If a person will not respond to the teaching of holy Scripture as taught by the Holy Spirit, there can be no higher testimony.

There is a set of four volumes of J. H. Thornwell’s theological writings that have been reprinted, but one of the most interesting things to me is the fact that there has been in the last ten to fifteen years a reprinting of the works of Southern theologians. It’s very interesting.

In fact it’s so interesting that I saw an article in a periodical today on that point. Robert L Dabney, one of the greatest of the Southern theologians; his lectures on

systematic theology was published about three years ago. And now Thornwell, four volumes. James Henley Thornwell was one of the great Southern theologians. The South has had some very interesting and great theologians including Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield. It’s really the only time that I want to include Kentucky in the South, [laughter] but nevertheless I will for the sake of Warfield.

Now I was reading in James Henley Thornwell’s collected works which have just been republished because Thornwell is a South Carolinian, and I came across this statement just a few days ago and it bears on the point that I am trying to make. He says, “But in no case is reason the ultimate rule of faith; no authority can be higher than the direct testimony of God and no certainty can be greater than that in part by the Spirit shining on the word. The Spirit shining on the word; that is divine testimony of the South authenticating holy Scripture. There can be no higher authority than that, and accredited revelation, accredited by the Spirit of God – not by reason, like an oath among men – should put an end to all controversy.

So we cannot prove God. We may set forth evidence, we may argue and give testimonies, such as the cosmological argument, the ontological argument, the moral argument, the teleological argument and various other arguments which have been set forth by means of which we testify to God, but that’s all they are. They’re testimonies. You can never get through the wicked, blinded, rebellious heart of man until the Holy Spirit works in his heart. Now that is fundamental theology. That’s why, incidentally, when you present a beautiful truth, you think for the resurrection of Christ your friend whom you want to win to Christ may seem utterly unmoved by what is very impressive for you, the trouble lies deeper. It’s in his predispositions. It’s in his rebellious heart.

So we can look at history, and I see God in history from beginning to end. There’s no such thing as secular history to me. God works through all history; it is his history or his story, and all that we need to see this is to climb high enough and look from the divine standpoint. But if a man does not have those predispositions, he doesn’t

see a thing. He is blind. He is like a blind man before a beautiful description of one of our loveliest sunsets. He cannot understand because the difficulty lies within.

Now the testimony of history is to the effect that God was active; that is; the history of the Old Testament; but it’s the history of the story of salvation. It’s the biblical history, it’s history interpreted by God. So Roman One [Dr. Johnson is lecturing from an outline] the testimony of history to God’s silence, God’s activity in the Old Testament.

I don’t want to say anything specific about the testimony of God’s activity in the Old Testament. You are acquainted, I know, with the general structure of the Old Testament revelation. You particularly are acquainted with God’s call of Abraham. You are acquainted in the way in which he dealt with Israel.

You may remember that the miracles or the outstanding activities of God in producing the miraculous in human history occurred at specific junctures in the history of the Old Testament revelation. For example, remember when God led the children out of the land of Egypt, he appointed Moses as the leader of Israel, and he gave Moses the power to perform mighty miracles. You read of them in the book of Exodus. Now that was a critical juncture in the history of Israel. God was speaking to the nation and the land of Egypt through their leader. He was in a sense accrediting Moses as the promised leader who would take them out of Egypt, into the Promised Land. And so Moses performed mighty miracles, but once that age of miracles passed, God fell silent again so far as the miraculous were concerned.

Very few miracles were performed thereafter until the time came when Israel had begun to backslide, and it was necessary for God to speak again to Israel, and so he spoke again through Elijah and Elisha, and you remember that Elijah performed some mighty miracles and Elisha performed some think twice as many as Elijah, because he asked for a double portion of his spirit. But at any rate it was a critical juncture in Israel’s history when God wished to speak again to the nation, and he did.

Always remember in this connection the story of the little girl who was being told the stories of the Old Testament in Sunday school and finally she looked up rather wistfully at her Sunday school teacher and said, God was much more exciting in those days. That’s the way unfortunately many people look at the account of the word of God. They think it’s much more exciting for God to be active in that way in human history. Well it may be more exciting, but it’s not necessarily more real.

No we come to the New Testament period and we read that the Lord Jesus as the Messiah comes on the scene and in Matthew 4:23 these significant words are given concerning the ministry of the Lord Jesus. In verse 23 of chapter 4 we read, in his early ministry in Galilee according to my heading in the Scofield edition of the King James Version, “And Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” Matthew 4:23.

Now it is evident from this that characteristic of the ministry of the Lord Jesus was the miraculous. Now I want you to notice that in connection with this there is no indication in the word of God that because Moses performed miracles, every Israelite was to perform miracles. Nor because Elijah and Elisiah performed miracles that every Israelite was to perform miracles. Nor because the Lord Jesus performed miracles, and as we shall see in a moment the apostles performed miracles, we should expect all the believers to perform miracles. Nor should we expect miracles to be the constant occurrence of the history of the people of God. They were given by God at specific junctures for specific reasons.

So we should not argue as Ms. Koolmann does for example. I remember her statement of this argued the same way, and many Christians implicitly, deep down within if you could get far enough down within their thinking, you would touch this spot in many of them: everything that happened in the apostolic age ought to be happening now there is not a thing in the Bible to support that.

Now will you turn over with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 12? The Lord Jesus performed his mighty signs attesting that he was the promised Messiah, for the Old Testament Scriptures had told us that the Messiah, when he came, would perform such miracles as is set forth for us in passages such as Isaiah chapter 35. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12 the Apostle Paul is reasoning with the Corinthians, and he says in the 12th verse of the 12th chapter, “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.” So again when the apostles appeared on the scene, God worked through the miraculous. Those were means by which they were accredited as the representatives of the Lord Jesus. He was accredited himself as the Messiah by his miracles, and they were accredited as his representatives of the fact that they performed their miracles.

Will you turn over to the second chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews? Hebrews chapter 2:3-4. The writer of this epistle, remember, is a kind of second generation Christian. He is a person who heard the Gospel from the apostles. It seems plain from this statement that he therefore was not an apostle and of course could not be the Apostle Paul. But we cannot really prove it from this text; I think the evidence is quite plain but I don’t want to say anything against somebody that thinks Paul wrote the Epistle of the Hebrews. After all no one really knows who wrote the Epistle of the Hebrews and there is just an outside chance that the Apostle Paul wrote this epistle. If you could read it in the Greek text I think you would have some very strong doubts that it was Paul. The structure is different, structure of his sentences is different, the vocabulary is different, the style is different, the thought is quite a bit different from Paul’s; but there is an outside chance and I don’t want to give anyone of you the joy of being able to tell me I told you so in heaven, so I’m not going to say that he did not write Hebrews, I’m just going to say it does not look like it.

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation,” the author says, “which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard

him?” So he says that he received the word from those who heard the Lord. Now notice the next word. “God also bearing them witness the apostles both with signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will.” And notice this author, a second generation Christian, who lived in the 1st Century, says that the miracles are miracles in past time. God bearing them witness—that is, when we heard him in the past, when we heard them who had heard him in the past. So he writes as if the age of the miraculous is already over with the age of the apostles, which happens to be my own personal feeling regarding that.

Now when the Lord Jesus said to the apostles, then, all power in heaven and on earth is given unto you, it was no mere shibboleth, but the God who spoke in time past, it seems, never speaks now. Let’s come to the testimony of theology. Pailey, who has written a book on Christian evidences, once said, “Once believed there is a God, miracles are not incredible.” Well of course that is true, but then we must come to a belief in the God of Scriptures.

There is a general view of Christianity that goes something like this: the Lord Jesus came to establish a new religion and the miracles authorized the new religion. I don’t think that is really true. In the first place, the Lord Jesus did not come to establish a new religion. As a matter of fact the Lord Jesus came to fulfill all the prophecies of the Old Testament, all the cultus of the Old Testament, all of the ceremonies of the Old Testament, the prophecies of the Old Testament that pointed to him as the Messiah, whether they were prophecies in prophetic word or whether they were prophecies by virtue of the types. He came to fulfill the old Old Testament and its testimony to the coming Messiah.

And the truth of the Christian religion, the truth of the Christian system, is simply the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures brought to its fulfillment. It’s not a different religion. And furthermore the miracles of the Lord Jesus were not designed to authorize or to establish that new religion. Suppose someone were to come to Dallas, and he were

to announce that he is a prophet of God and that all who would like to come and see the proof for it should come down to the city auditorium, and he would perform some miracles.

Now let's suppose some of you in this audience who are good Christians and who have some doctrinal discernment, let's suppose you go down to see this man. Now let's suppose you have some doctrinal discernment. Let's suppose, for example, you have been in this theology class for several years, and you haven't been totally unresponsive to the pure teaching that you have been getting, and you go down and you sit in the auditorium and a man comes out on the stage, and he begins to demonstrate his power and authority, and well it does appear that he does perform miracles.

In the course of conversation it becomes evident that he does not really believe in the Christian religion. He believes that salvation is by works. He believes man has a free will. He believes men can have salvation one moment and lose it the next. He doesn't believe men are totally depraved. He believes Jesus Christ only died to give us an example of the right way to live, but he is performing miracles in front of our eyes. Well what would you do as a Christian?

Well, if you had good doctrinal discernment, you wouldn't be moved at all. You would be saying that puzzles me; he's one of the greatest magicians I've ever seen; but it doesn't disturb me. You know why? Because your faith is not rooted in the miraculous. Your faith is rooted in the word of God shown upon by the Holy Spirit. That's the real substance and foundation of your faith: the Spirit of God speaking in the Scriptures. This is our first principle. This is our principium. These are technical terms. So you wouldn't be moved by him.

Now some of you, you haven't been listening to this pure doctrine, and you are unstable, and your faith is confused. You might be swayed. You might even become his follower. But those of us who have come to understand the real foundation of our faith,

well that doesn’t disturb us. It puzzles us; it does not disturb us, because you see the miraculous is not the foundation of our faith.

Now this is evident from John chapter 2 verse 23 and 24. There were individuals who believed in the Lord Jesus because he performed those miracles, but Jesus did not entrust himself to them because faith in the miracles is not a sufficient ground for Christianity. I have a good friend who studied under me at the seminary, and he’s made an interesting statement. He says the Christian religion is the devil’s masterpiece, and the Christian religion in the eyes of most people is that Jesus Christ came to establish a new religion and that he authenticated it by the mighty miracles that he performed, but that is a poor ground for our faith.

As a matter of fact, the Lord Jesus came to put an end to religion, even religion authorized by God. The religion of the Old Testament is religion authorized by God. It’s the religion of the tabernacle and the temple and the ceremonies and the priesthood. There is religion. That’s the appeal of the Roman Catholic Church to a lot of people, because it’s a kind of counterfeit that beautiful system of religion in the Old Testament in which there is the outward appeal to the eyes and to the senses in addition to the spiritual. It’s beautiful to see a man carrying out his ministry in those beautiful garments that Aaron wore. The black robe of so many Christian ministers pales in comparison with it, and those beautiful turbans, and the place in which they carried on their ministry. If you’re in religion for what you feel and what you may see, well they really had it.

But when we come to the New Testament all that’s done away with. As a matter of fact, James, he tells us that pure religion is to visit the fatherless and the widows and to keep oneself unspotted from this world. Now many people look at that text and say, incidentally, you see there is a religion in Christianity that is to misunderstand James. His point is just the opposite. He is saying we don’t have any religion in Christianity, pure religion, and there isn’t any such thing in Christianity. Pure religion, the reality is, to carry out these moral injunctions.

How can we explain miracles? Well of course there is a two fold explanation of miracles I guess. One is it’s natural for miracles to accompany God. They belong to his nature and his character ,but the essence of the miracles of the New Testament is not to authenticate the truth so that our trust rests in the miracles, but the essence of the New Testament and the Old Testament is that the miracles were designed to accredit the, in case of the New Testament apostles, to accredit the apostolic witness to Israel’s Messiah. The miracles accredited the teacher not the truth. They were in a sense the signs by which we could recognize the authoritative teacher, but it is the truth that is the important thing, and these testimonies and miracles are subordinated to the word.

And you’ll remember that this is the point of Matthew chapter 11 verse 2 through 5. He is the one promised in the word is the point of the miracles. The basic fact is the word of God. These only say he is the one who was promised in the word. Now of course if he should speak contrary to the word, then we would know immediately in spite of these signs that he’s in error. That’s why it would be so easy for him to delude, and he will perform mighty miracles so that if it were possible, he would deceive even the very elect.

Sir Robert Anderson in his book *The Silence of God* – it’s a very interesting book, I wish it were available; perhaps it is available – but Sir Robert Anderson speaks about the difficulties of accrediting an envoy. For example, suppose a government has a secret message that it wishes to give to another government. Now let’s suppose that we wanted to send a message to another government by one of our agents, but it was very secret and very important, and Sir Robert Anderson who was I said the head of Scotland Yard, he knew about these things. He said it would be very difficult to carry this message to another nation in a secret way. Very difficult; there are so many ways by which this kind of arrangement might be upset.

But he said one way that it might be done is to just take a piece of paper and tear a piece of paper in half and give half to the man who is your agent and then see that the

other half got into the hand of the man who was the accredited representative that he was to meet and that simple little device would be a means, not totally scientific, of course, but a means by which he could be reasonably sure that the message was being delivered to the right person. The miracles were a means of accrediting the messengers of God. They were not designed to be the basis of faith.

Well when we look at the New Testament, we notice capital B under Roman 2, that the miracles ceased when the great amnesty was proclaimed and refused by Israel. The Lord Jesus came. He died upon the cross, and he was resurrected on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came. The apostles proclaimed the saving work through the Lord Jesus on the day of Pentecost. They preached again in the third chapter of the Book of Acts. And finally in Acts chapter 7 through Stephen, a final testimony was given the Nation Israel, and it is a striking fact that there is no later miracle in Jerusalem after the stoning Steven. The purposes of God with references to Jerusalem are over. Then as the message went out, there was further accreditation as the message went to the Gentiles. And the Book of Acts ends with a message to Israel now closed, and the message has gone out to the Gentiles and the apostles are carrying the message to the four corners of the earth and working a signs of an apostle, as Paul says, through his leadership throughout the apostolic age.

Now what is the significance of the fact that men are not performing miracles today? If there is any test of this all we must do is to say how many people have you raised from the dead? None of your tricks—how many people have you raised from the dead? A lot of our Christians were fooled by the way because books came out about people being raised from the dead in the East Indies. That is now shown to be false, and even some well known Christians were taken in by that. There are a lot of people who think because something is written in a book it’s therefore true. Let me assure you that’s not true. You can write something in a book and it doesn’t make it true. It only means that the publisher has been taken in.

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Now we have this silence of God. What’s the significance of it? Well the silence of God is the silence of long suffering love. The death of the Lord Jesus is the crisis of the world, which took sides with Satan, and now the message of the finished work of the Lord Jesus is going forth to the four corners of the earth and the world is called upon to declare itself through the preaching of the message. Of course, many ignore the message. Others compromise it by religion, but the Bible makes, it seems to me, exceedingly clear the fact that God does not speak now by the miraculous because he has spoken. The message has come, and we are called upon throughout this whole age to respond.

Now I want you to turn with me to – I read the passage in Luke chapter 4; you may remember the Lord Jesus cites the passage from the 61st chapter of the Book of Isaiah. He says, in effect, that this Scripture has been fulfilled which pictures these Messianic events that have taken place, but he stops in the middle of the statement and does not say anything about the day of vengeance of our God, because that day has not yet come. We are living in between the day of vengeance which is to come and the day of the good pleasure of God which is the present day.

But turn to Luke chapter 23 in verse 34. This is a text which I have often said is misunderstood. The text says that the Lord Jesus said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Now any thinking person – and you’re a thinking person; incidentally, that’s the purpose of theology, to get you to think – any thinking person would realize there must be some problem here because ignorance is no excuse. If forgiveness really takes place because people do not know, then what we should do is to shut down the missionary enterprise and not have a single person dare breathe a word of the Gospel, because then they could be forgiven because they don’t know what they are doing.

This word translated, forgive, also means other things in the New Testament. I’ll only make a reference to a couple of places. You can look them up for yourself. In Luke chapter 13 in verse 8, John chapter 18 in verse 8, the word means “to release,” “to

let go.” Our Lord is not praying for the forgiveness of that crowd on the basis of ignorance of what they have done, but he is praying for a postponement of the judgment that is to come upon them. Father, release them. Now ignorance is no basis for forgiveness, but ignorance is a basis for postponement of the judgment to give people who have not known the chance to change their position.

That’s what’s meant in 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9. Remember we have looked at this text several times we did in the spring, where we read, Peter giving the answer to the question about the mockers and how they’re going to say where’s the promise of his coming, and he says, “Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years is one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to you,” with reference to you.

Now that you is interpreted by the 8th verse where he says, “But beloved” that is, you beloved ones, you elect ones. The Lord is not longsuffering, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to you, that is to you beloved people, you elect people, willing that any—any what?—any of you, any of you elect should perish, but that all—not everybody—but all of you elect should have room for repentance. That’s why we have been having two thousand years of silence on God’s part. That’s the reason why he has not spoken and intervened physically in our universe, because the message is going out, and he is gathering his sheep into the fold.

That’s why he doesn’t speak. He has spoken, as Hebrews says, in the Son. Now’s the time to gather the saints into the fold, and he is doing it by the preaching of the word of God. That’s why we proclaim the message. We’re seeking to gather the sheep into the fold. Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them I must bring the Lord Jesus said. That’s why God is silent. That’s why he hasn’t been speaking, and I’ll tell you another thing I’m glad he has not been speaking in visible ways. Why?

Well I’m just about at the end of time, so I will simply refer to the 2nd Psalm. You may remember that the 2nd Psalm states that when God speaks, he is going to speak in his wrath. “Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath and vex them with his sore displeasure.” God is going to speak again. He has not fallen silent permanently, but the Scriptures tell us when he does speak again it’s to speak in judgment. But we’re living today in the period of time in which our Lord’s prayer from the cross, Father release them for they don’t know what they do, is receiving it’s answer from God.

Incidentally, if the Lord Jesus really prayed, Father forgive them, then they would have been forgiven. He doesn’t pray any prayers contrary to the will of God, and his prayers are always answered. So he prayed that we might have a period of time, a day of grace, a day between the vengeance of our God and the will of his good pleasure in which the gospel should go forth and the whole church should be built up by the salvation of the saints, such as you are, I hope. In other words, you are the answer to our Lord’s prayer, and all in this age who have been saved, right on down from the thief who hung by his side, to the last seed gathered into the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the absence of the miraculous it’s not the sign of God’s abdication of his throne, nor is it of our unbelief. This is the most terrible thing that these charismatics do. They like to say that the reason that you have not experienced some of these miracles is because perhaps you have not believed. May I remind you that not a single charismatic teacher who talked about the charismatic gifts and talked about these mighty miracles and talked about lack of belief in them—not a single one of them that was alive so far as I know and teaching this when the charismatic movement began in 1906—is alive today which is a reputation it seems to me of their own teaching.

So the silence of God is the silence of grace. It’s the silence of the suspension of judgment. It’s the silence of the offer of salvation the freedom of anxiety, but one day the silence is going to be broken by thunderous judgment at the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, at the tribulation period which shall intervene and lead up to that great event. So I

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must say that I’m happy God is not speaking today in that sense. But he hasn’t fallen silent. He is speaking as the Spirit shines upon the word in hearts of the saints. Lets close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ, and we thank Thee for the Scriptures. We know, Lord that the sufficient answer is found in the inspired word, and we acknowledge that it is our first principle. Enable us to love it, to read them, to ponder them, to live them, for they are sufficient for life, for thought, for practice.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.