



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 3:21-26

“Israel’s Second Chance”

TRANSCRIPT

Now, let’s turn to Acts chapter 3, and our Scripture reading today is the entire chapter; chapter 3, verse 1 through verse 26. The subject for today, and the message that follows will be “Israel’s Second Chance.” In fact, it’s not simply “Israel’s Second Chance,” but “Israel’s Continuing Chance,” but since so much is devoted to it, that’s the title of the message this morning. The Day of Pentecost has just occurred. There has been daily worship of the Lord in the temple area, and from house to house, and Luke picks up the story and says,

“Now Peter and John went up together in to the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.

Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John said; Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said; Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood and walked and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.

And all the people saw him walking and praising God. And they knew that it was he that sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people; Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this, or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness, we have made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers”—you notice the great stress here on the covenants—“hath glorified his Son Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you. And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know. Yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.” (Now you see, those apostles were southerners; “presence of you all.”)

“And now brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

Later in the message—because I’m telling you this now, I won’t tell you then—but this word “times of refreshing” is a word that, in its root, is related to the Exodus experience, because the same word is used—same root is used in that connection in the Old Testament Greek translation. So what Peter is offering, is something like a “new Exodus” for them, and of course, the prophets repeat that theme, too.

“When the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you. Whom the heavens must receive until the times of

restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

You know, back in chapter 1 in verse 5 I believe, the apostles had said to our Lord, “Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Some have sought to make of this far more than should have been made of it, and have even insisted that our Lord is denying there will be a restoration if the kingdom to Israel. Actually, all he says is, “It’s not for you to know the times or seasons.” He doesn’t say that the kingdom will not be restore to them, and that term “restore” is again, of the same root as this expression “times of restitution of all things.” So Peter tells us—now he knows better, you see—that the Lord will restore the kingdom to Israel, but it will take place at his Second Advent.

“Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers; A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me. Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

“Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham; And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” (It’s obvious that Israel is the key to the salvation of the world.) “Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee that we are able to open the Scriptures and study them. We are thankful for Believers Chapel and its elders and its officers and members who still desire to hear the exposition of Holy Scripture. And we are grateful because we know, Lord, that our spiritual strength and well-being is related to the study of the Word of God. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

O God, deliver us from indifference to the Scriptures, indifference to the exposition of them, indifference to feeding upon them personally. And we ask that Thy hand of blessing may be upon our elders and deacons and members and friends and upon all the ministries of this particular work. And we pray for the whole body of Christ as well, and pray that Thou wilt, through the Scriptures, build us up, and prepare us for the times of restitution of all things which the prophets have so brilliantly and beautifully spoken about.

We pray for the whole body of Christ. We pray for our country, and we would especially, Lord, pray for those who have spiritual and physical needs, and who are either among us, or are related, or have friends among us. We pray, O God, for them. We ask that there may be responsiveness to the needs; physically as it should please Thee, and spiritually. Lord, we are grateful for the promises of forgiveness of sins and all of the other promises that go with our salvation; the promise that Thou wilt be with us; the promise that our future is secure, and that, in the meantime, we can be confident that Thou wilt meet our needs, and at the same time give testimony to Thy greatness through us. We pray Thy blessing upon each one gathered here this morning, and may we, as we study the Scriptures, be built up in our faith.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] As many of you know, both Martha and I love Scotland, and so it was a enjoyable, restful time for us to travel to Scotland and spend over two weeks just wandering around in the northeast and northwest, seeing some sights that I had never seen, and—and of course, some that Martha had not seen, too. We had some interesting experiences. One of them I—when I had this

experience, I thought of the Chapel. When I got to Aberdeen, which was the first Sunday that we were there, I looked in the telephone book for a church that might be something like Believers Chapel, and we might remember the Lord and the Lord’s Supper on Sunday morning. And it was very difficult to find any such church, although I knew that there were probably twenty-five in the city, but they don’t believe in advertising the fact.

And finally I located one church that looked like it might be the kind that I wanted to go to, and I intended to go to one of the churches of Scotland on Sunday night, because the minister there is a well-known evangelical, and for many years—about forty years—has preached the gospel, and also has been responsible for a number of young men staying in the Church of Scotland and preaching the gospel. The Church of Scotland is largely liberal now, but finally at ten o’clock on Sunday morning I called this place that was called I believe, “Bethel Gospel Hall,” right downtown. And I got somebody on the phone, and I asked him, “Is this a Christian Brethren Assembly?” And he said, “Well, yes.” I could tell he didn’t want to acknowledge any name, believing that they were just Christians, and that was all. And anyway he told me that the meeting began at ten thirty. Well, it was already ten o’clock, and I was on the edge of town, and Aberdeen has become a pretty large city now. So we immediately rushed to get down to ten thirty, and I arrived at the building at ten thirty-two, and tried to open the door, and it was locked. When ten thirty comes, they shut the doors and they lock them.

And that’s when I thought of Believers Chapel. I thought, if we locked the doors at eleven o’clock, we might have about a third of our congregation standing outside in the parking lot. But I know that some of them find that from Scripture, and particularly the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, because they are aggrieved, that when the wise entered into the house, the door was shut, and some churches that I know of have made a point of that; that when the time comes, shut the doors. And so they did, or fortunately, the church was just around the corner from the church that I was—intended to see Sunday night, and I went there, and William Still, who is a man in his seventies, but preaches the gospel, gave a very good gospel message that morning.

The next Sunday we were in Ulapool, which is way up in the northwest of Scotland, and we arrived there on Satur—or Friday night, and were going to be there through Sunday morning, and so fortunately the Church of Scotland was just down the way from the motel. It’s a small town; about five thousand people. And we wandered around, and I thought, “Well, I’d like to go to the Free Church of Scotland,” because it is more conservative, although somewhat dead. And so down a block from it is the Church of Scot—Free Church of Scotland, and then as we were walking back, I came to a little church called the “Free Presbyterian Church.” Now of course, I’m familiar a bit with Scottish theology, and all of these at one time were together, but they’re all separate now. You know, they have a saying about Scots that, “Everybody is a theologian, even if he’s not religious.”

So here were these three churches, and so I told Martha, “Let’s go to the Free Church of Scotland,” because I’ve known some men in it, and they generally are sound theologically. And so we went there. It was a communion weekend. They make a lot of that; have meetings on Saturday in preparation, and nobody was there at eleven o’clock. Church was open. Two German young fellows that were apparently traveling on vacation were standing outside, and we talked with them, and we went in. We were four, and then another couple came in—evidently visitors. Then someone came out and said, “We’re not having a meeting here at eleven. We’ll have a little prayer meeting, and then we have a communion service at twelve.”

So we had to leave shortly, and so we decided we’d leave immediately and walk down the street to the Free Presbyterian Church, which was half a block away. And we looked there, and there was nobody standing around there either, so evidently the same thing was happening, and so I said, “Well, we are forced to go to the Church of Scotland,” and so we went around the corner. It’s just another half block away. They all can almost hear each other preaching.

We walked in. The congregation was there. They had the Lord’s Supper that morning, and their pews have the—the pew in front of you has a little ledge on which hymn books and Bibles are placed, rather than as we do here. And they had it set up with tablecloths all down the center section; two side sections, one large center section, and white cloths set all the way down where they serve

the Lord’s Supper. And so we went in and sat on the side, and the minister in the course of the opening announcements said, “In the first hymn we welcome all Christians to partake with us, and when we sing the first hymn, if you want to partake the Lord’s Supper with us, move over from the side into the center.” And so we moved over into the center, and two or three other couples did, but largely all down the sides, there were lots of people that didn’t take communion.

So I wondered what kind of message we would have, and a young man about thirty-six years of age was the guest speaker that morning, and he stood up and delivered a message that could have been delivered in Believers Chapel, maybe better. So the two Sundays that I was there, it was a very sound message—Calvinistic too, very Calvinistic—in harmony with the Westminster Confession of Faith. Both of these messages—both touched on unconditional election and preach it. And I was very pleased. It shows that God providentially guides our steps, no matter where it might seem, sometimes in unlikely places. Well, as I walked out I couldn’t resist this—when I walked out the regular minister was there. I said, “Do you believe the things that that fellow preached this morning?” And I fully expected him to hedge a bit you know and say, “Well, I generally,” or something like that. He said, “No, that’s what I believe, and that’s what I preach.” So even in a denomination that now is largely on the liberal side of things, there are some fine preaching still being carried on in Scotland.

The next Sunday we had the soundest message of all, and I preached [laughter]; a church in Edinburgh. So it—it’s a—it’s great to be back, and I really appreciate very much the privilege and opportunity that is ours. When you go to a place like that, which is such—is filled with such history—Christian history, and see the condition of the nation spiritually today, it’s very sad; very sad to go into the cathedrals, and find that there is no preaching of the gospel; very sad to read the newspapers, and note that John Knox and those who followed him in the Scottish Reformation have very, very little influence in the land of Scotland today. It’s very sad.

It has been said that the Church today needs more than a lift. It needs a life that issues in a leap of joy, and of course, the occasion of that saying is the third chapter of the book of the Acts, in

which we have recorded for us the healing of the lame man. Some years ago an Episcopal bishop, realizing that there was something wrong in his denomination, called for more religious fanaticism; a rather strange thing we might think for an Episcopalian to say. A Methodist, about the same time, called for the emotionalism that made Methodism famous. Of course, that is one of the things that we remember about Methodists; that they loved to say in the golden days of the denomination, “Amen and Hallelujah” in their meetings. But then the gospel of the grace of God was continually preached. Even a Baptist spoke some years ago about the same time, that the denomination should not be afraid to shed tears. Well, all of these things may be useful, but of course, the more fundamental thing is, “What is being said in the pulpit?”

A social gospel may give the sense of emotionalism; may also be accompanied by some shedding of tears; might even call—be called a form of religious fanaticism. But a social gospel can give no real spiritual leap that comes from life in Christ.

One of the more famous of our contemporary theologians is Jurgen Moltmann, and he is famous for his theology of hope. Well, that’s perhaps a little better, so far as the title is concerned, but again identifies—identified as it is with the theology of liberation, it too cannot really give us any fundamental spiritual experience that is valuable for us. What we need can only come through the risen Christ, and Luke, who has written the history of the early Church, makes that very plain chapter after chapter; that our needs can only be met by the Christ who was raised from the dead and who is continuing to do his work.

I have a—a very great love for Vance Havner, who is now with the Lord, but for many years he preached over the country. He preached. He taught. He was a pastor in my home city of Charleston, South Carolina, in the First Baptist Church there for a while. He had a remarkable gift with his pen. In one of his messages, he asks the question, “Would we really like for religious fanaticism? Would we really like for emotionalism to come to our churches?” He said, “Suppose we took seriously Charles Wesley’s ‘O For a Thousand Tongues’, and we sang ‘Hear him ye deaf, his praise ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ. Ye blind behold your Savior come, and leap ye lame

for joy.” And he said, “You know, if people started leaping in our congregations today, there probably would not be a great deal of happiness, but on the other hand, an exodus of scandalized saints.” Well, that’s probably true, and, in one sense, we’re not asking for that, but what this man experienced; this tremendous joy that came to him because of the ministry of the Lord Jesus on the spiritual level is something that the Scriptures set out as an experience for us.

The scene is, as you can see, very simple. It is in the days following the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. There is some connection with the preceding in that we read in verse 43 of chapter 2 that, “Fear came upon the people in Jerusalem in those days, and many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” And this is the story of one of those mighty miracles that was being done. It was three o’clock in the afternoon, the time—the third time of prayer for the Jews during the day, and Peter the practical, and John the poet, or Peter the doer of deeds, and John the dreamer of dreams and visions, come to the temple area, evidently to engage in prayer.

Now, there was a certain lame man who lived in Jerusalem, or thereabouts. He had been lame from his mother’s womb, and so he had never walked. He didn’t know what it was to get on his feet and take a step. And he had been carried daily, and placed at the gate of the Temple—which is called “Beautiful”—in order that he might ask for alms. And so he was there. One thinks of him as a picture, not simply of individuals, because of course, he is a picture of individuals outside of Christ. They are lame in their sins, and cannot walk in a way that pleases God. But it also is a picture of a church in which the gospel has departed.

I think of so many churches in Scotland—the land that I visited; large cathedrals in many cases, other types of churches, the gospel not preached. The church is like the lame man. It cannot help anyone. It needs help. And so this man is lying at the gate of the temple called “Beautiful,” and asking for alms. Now, of course, what will happen when he walks is designed to be a messianic sign. That will become evident as the miracle takes place, but the fact that he was lame from his mother’s womb alerts us in the beginning, to the fact that this is a messianic miracle.

Now, the Old Testament is full of clear signs by which Israel might have recognized their messiah. It was not a surprise—should not have been a surprise for Israel—that the Lord Jesus was the messiah, for the Scriptures had set out in detail the things that would mark out the messianic king. For example, in Isaiah chapter 35 the prophet speaks of the things that the messiah will do. He says, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then the lame man leap as in heart, and the tongue of the dumb—dumb sing, for in the wilderness shall waters break out and streams in the desert. Then shall the lame man leap as a deer.”

So when this man was healed of his lameness in this remarkable way, those who were students of the Scriptures might well have said, “This is a messianic miracle. We have never seen anything like this. Jesus must be the messiah.” That was the way in which they should have responded.

Well, he was placed daily at the gate, because that was where he might expect to get more money. I have heard stories—in fact, W. H. Davies a poet, has told the story of a friend of his who was a beggar, who told him that whenever he went to a new city, he would always look for a church with a spire and a cross upon it, because if he found the church with the spire and the cross, and if he located himself in the area, he always did better than if he were somewhere else, because, generally speaking, near the temple or near a church where there had been some truth from God preached, the people tended to give more. So he was there, and he was put there daily, because that was the best place for him to get some money. Well, Peter and John approach, and he of course, expect to—expected to get something for the—for—from them, particularly because when Peter approached them, he stopped and he fixed his eyes upon him. In the Greek text, there’s a great deal of stress upon that. He fixed his eyes upon him, and that man thought, “Well, I’m going to get something now,” particularly when Peter said, “Look on us,” and he looked, expecting to get something.

And then Peter must have disappointed him with his first words, “Silver and gold have I none.” I can imagine he’d—what a let down. He thought he was going to get something. The first thing Peter says is, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give thee. In the name of Jesus

Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” What a tremendous gift that was. And so Peter reached out. “He took him by the right hand. He lifted him up, and immediately his feet and his ankle bones received strength.” Now, you’ll notice of course, Peter really did have something. He had something more important than money, and do you notice too, that there was no “if” or “but” about it. As a matter of fact, there is no process about this healing, though there is a healing or two in which, in the New Testament, we do have some process in the healing. But here there is no process, and will you reflect for a moment upon this miracle, because it’s not like healing miracles that are often claimed in charismatic churches today.

Think about this for a moment. The New Testament speaks of the gift of miracles, and the gift of healing, but here is a man who was lame from his mother’s womb. Now therefore, he had never learned to walk. He didn’t know what it was to walk at all. Children must learn to walk. If you’ve ever watched a little child begin to toddle, you’ll understand that they have to learn to walk. They do not sit in a highchair and say—I know it’s not true, because my grandchild—children never did this. They never sat in the chair and said, “You know, I’ve reflected upon this walking. It’s not difficult. All you need to do, is to put your foot out, transfer your weight to that foot, then put the other foot out, transfer your weight to that foot, and walking is easy.” You can see the little child raising the high chair, and sliding down, and walking. Why of course, how silly. You have to learn to walk. As a matter of fact, adults who have walked, and who’ve been on the bed for a lengthy period of time will tell you—as I’ve often had them tell me, “I practically had to learn to walk over again.”

Now, here is a man who has never walked in his life, has been lame from his mother’s womb, and Peter says, “Rise up and walk.” He takes him by his right hand. He lifts him up. His feet, his ankle bones receive strength, and the man stood up with a walked, and entered into the Temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. That is a divine miracle, and I will guarantee you that that has never occurred in the halls of the charismatic movement. This is the kind of healing miracle that the Lord Jesus performs, and in this case, through his apostles. This was designed to let people know

that Jesus was the messiah. “The lame shall be healed and leap as a deer.” And here is the messianic miracle.

Thomas Aquinas once had a talk with Pope Innocent II—so it is said—and he happened to walk in when the Pope was the fore—at his desk, or somewhere—place where he had a lot of money around, and the coins were there, and he looked up and he said to Thomas, “Thomas, the church can no longer say ‘silver and gold have I none.’” And Thomas Aquinas is supposed to have replied, “Well your honor, it cannot say any longer either, ‘Rise up and walk.’” And he was talking about the fact, that the Church had lost its power. Well, the church has lost a great deal of its spiritual power, because it’s lost its interest in the Word of God.

Now, I want you to notice before we pass on to the sermon, that it’s evident that our Lord is continuing his work. Luke had said that he wrote the gospel, because he wanted to tell us what Jesus began to do and teach. Stress rests upon that “began to do and teach,” because in the history of the church in the book of Acts, he continues to do and teach. And let me say this too; that in the twentieth century, in 1984 when spiritual things happen, the Lord Jesus is continuing to do and teach through his servants. That’s the message of the book of Acts, and we should never lose it. Also, we have something new, and that is that our Lord is now teaching through individuals, through his church. He had said, “Stay in Jerusalem. You shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth.” They are fulfilling that word of our Lord by being witnesses to him in Jerusalem.

Notice also, that the church has, as its gift to lame humanity not simply help like alms, like help for the poor. You know, people seem to think that Christianity is bound up in the giving of gifts to the poor. Strange, isn’t it? Now, that could only happen—people could only be convinced of that—in a society in which the Word of God is no longer being read. If the Word of God were being read, that kind of line would not play at all, but it does play because people no longer read the Scriptures. There is nothing wrong, of course, in helping the poor, and the church’s ministry will be most helpful to the poor, when it deals with their most sever problem, which is their lack of spiritual

life. To give the—to—for the church to engage in the gifts of gifts to the physical needs of men has some value, but the value that the church can communicate to society most fully, is the gift of life, spiritual life. And in time, we shall see that that is true.

Mr. Havner said, “A lot of our uplifting these days, is mostly soap and soup, but very little salvation.” What the church usually gets today when it comes to church, is a fix, and they listen to a little talk of fifteen or twenty minutes, an ethical kind of talk. They get their little fix—and incidentally, this is true of a lot of evangelical churches, too. They preach to the everyday things of life, and often forget the ultimate realities which are far more significant, but particularly in our liberal churches, they get a fix, and then they go out and they have to come back next week for the same kind of thing. A joint of liberal theology is worthless in the ultimate realities of life.

Well, this is all designed to be a sign of the fact, that the Lord Jesus does more than give alms. He gives life. This lame man is so much better off than if Peter and John had conferred an estate upon him. He now has life for his lame bones. Well, this is the occasion for preaching, and of course, I admire Peter because remember, he is in a very volatile atmosphere. People have turned against our Lord Jesus Christ. He is regarded as a blasphemer. The authorities have put him to death. The name of Jesus Christ is very, very bad at this time. “It would be wise,” someone might say, “that Peter should preach the gospel, but not identify too closely with Jesus of Nazareth. Peter, why don’t you preach the prophecies of the Old Testament, and that they will be fulfilled in a man who will come and do the things that Jesus has done, but avoid the direct connection with him.” I can see many people would give good, sound advice like that. We might think it was good, sound advice. So what do we expect Peter to preach? Will he further inflame the passions of the people by saying, “Look, you have been guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth who is the messiah.”

John Ruskin once said about a preacher’s opportunity that, “It was half an hour to raise the dead in.” That’s a good picture of what preaching is, “half an hour to raise the dead in.” I know what you are thinking. It’s forty-five minutes to “raise the dead in” in Believers Chapel, but then it takes longer with some who are in this audience. “Forty-five minutes to raise the dead in.” Now, we don’t

want to lose an opportunity, when we have such an opportunity, and so Peter will respond, and he will not hedge in any way. He will speak directly to the situation. Peter now is a man filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will preach the truth as he finds it in the Word of God.

I don’t know that I do that. I would like to do that. I have a Catholic friend, and when she hears this message, she’ll recognize who she is. She lives in Buffalo. She writes me from time to time. She urges me to keep preaching the Word of God as it is written. She’s still in the Roman Catholic Church. She is a believer; has trusted in our Lord Jesus Christ, and writes me from time to time to encourage me to continue to preach the Word as it is written. Now I say, I don’t know that I do that. I’m probably just like anyone else filled with fear from time to time, but I do admire those who preach boldly. And here is Peter in the midst of these Jewish men who have crucified our Lord Jesus Christ. They have rejected him, and he will tell them that the messianic signs are being performed, because the Messiah has come, and the reason that the kingdom has not come at this point, is that the nation has rejected the king. In some ways, the boldness of Peter in such a situation, is almost a greater miracle than the miracle that he performed, because it took a great deal of spiritual courage to do what he did in the temple area.

Let’s listen to what he says. He says first of all, “Why are you marveling at what has happened? Why are you also looking upon us so earnestly as if we, by our power, have performed this miracle? You shouldn’t be surprised and astounded as you are, because Jesus is the Messiah, and the Messiah when he came will unstop the ears of the deaf. He will enable the tongues of the dumb to speak. He will also heal the lame. He will heal the lepers, and the gospel shall be preached to the poor. These are things that our Scriptures have said that he would do, so why should you be so surprised? Look at your past history and your prophecies, and look at the goal of history, and you will understand what is happening now, and you will also understand why the kingdom of God did not come with him. We have rejected the king.”

Now having said that, he launches into a brief treatment of the great acts of God. These things will be further developed in the Acts, and because of time this morning, we’ll save a good bit of that for later messages.

But you’ll remember that the writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews says that, “God spoke through the prophets to the people in ancient times, but he has in these last days spoken unto us in such a person as his Son.” And so Peter will sum up God’s message in the Son. Listen to what he says, and he relates it to the ancient covenants, the ancient promises which God is so diligent to perform. “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus, whom you delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of life.”

Bengel, the great German commentator calls that, “the magnificent antithesis.” Think of it. How can you kill the Prince of life? Well, you can put him to death physically if it is the divine will that he die, and die as the redeemer, but we read, “Whom God has raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know. Yea, the faith which is by him hath given him that perfect soundness in the presence of you all.” The faith is the faith of Peter. The name which is responsible for the healing, is the name of our Lord, or all that he is. So the magnificent antithesis is overruled in the mighty power of God.

Now, that is what happened—has happened, but Peter will make his appeal now, and he will say in verse 17, “And now brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.” But ignorance is no excuse. Ultimately, ignorance will enable them to have a time in which they may reverse their decisions, but ignorance is no excuse. Ignorance is no excuse in our law either. When the policeman pulls you over after you’ve had your foot too heavily on the accelerator, and you say, “I didn’t look at my accelerator. I didn’t notice I was going eighty-five in a thirty-five mile speed—speed zone.” Why, he will say, “Ignorance is no excuse.” Well, ignorance is no excuse in biblical things either, but it is such an excuse that it gains us some time. So Peter says, “I know that through

ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that messiah should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.” In other words, the prophecies have been fulfilled. The messianic king has come. He has suffered as the redeemer. Now, not only that. He goes on and says, “Repent ye therefore.”

Do you remember that the first message of our Lord was, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.” The last message of our Lord was, “Stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes. Repentance and forgiveness shall be preached.” “Repent,” or in other words, “reverse the verdict of Passover Eve when you, as a nation, crucified your redeemer, making him the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, but condemning you because of your crucifixion of our Lord. Reverse the verdict of Passover Eve, and if you do,” Peter says, “then some significant things will take place. First of all, the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

I related that to the experience of Exodus, when they came out of the bondage of Egypt, came into the land, and they were no longer under bondage to Egypt. They lived in the freedom of the superintendents and kingship of the Lord Jehovah himself. “Times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which was before preached unto you whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” So times of refreshing, the second advent, the restitution of all things, and as we said when the disciples said, “Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel,” ah, he uses the same root, and he says, “the restitution of all things.” This is when the kingdom is restored to Israel, and this also is the “time when all the families of the earth shall be blessed in the seed of Abraham,” as he will go on to say.

So repent. Repentance is the message that is needed by those who have crucified our Lord Jesus Christ. Repent. There are some people who think that we ought not to even preach “repent,” but repentance is set out in the New Testament as a biblical doctrine. It’s set out in the New Testament long after our Lord’s crucifixion, as the preaching of the apostles. Peter preached repentance. Paul preached repentance. Even when Peter speaks in his last epistle, he’s still talking

about repentance. Repentance is perfectly appropriate for us, and particularly for those who have rejected the message of the Lord Jesus Christ for a period of time.

When George Whitfield came to this country and preached the gospel, he preached “repent.” In fact, there was a—a ser—or—or rather, a poem that was written about Mr. Whitfield by John Greenleaf Whittier, and it reads this way. “Lo, by the merrimack Whitefield stands; In the temple that never was made by hands; Curtains of azure and crystal wall, and dome of sunshine over all; Called in his youth to sound and gauge, the moral lapse of his razed age; And sharp as truth the contrast draw, of human frailty and perfect law; Possessed by the one dread thought that lent, its goad to his fiery temperament; Up and down the world he went, while John the Baptist crying, ‘Repent.’”

He was the greatest evangelist that ever came to the United States of America; magnificent response. David Garrick, the great actor said that, “Mr. Whitefield could melt an audience by simply pronouncing the word ‘Mesopotamia.’” And he said he would give a hundred guineas if he could say, “Oh,” like Mr. Whitefield. He was a great man. He preached that men should repent, and that’s what we should do if we have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, and have had a false verdict concerning him. That is our responsibility, to repent; that is, to change our minds concerning him, and by the grace of God, rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit to change our actions with reference to him as well.

Repent; times of refreshing. A new Exodus is going to come. Times of restitution; a new inheritance. They will have the kingdom restored to them. They will enter into the land, just as they entered into the land of Canaan in special blessing. Some say, “Is this a re-offer of the kingdom to Israel?” Why of course it is a re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, and that kingdom is still offered to Israel today. The Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 11 in verse 23 says these words, “And they also”—he’s talking about Israel—“if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.” There is only one thing that stands between the nation’s entrance into its spiritual blessings as a nation, and that one thing is to reverse their attitude to the Lord Jesus Christ. When that happens, these magnificent blessings shall take place. Now, the things that will happen are

the things that the prophets have written about. If you want to know what the future is like, read the past, and the messages of the prophets.

Now finally, he concludes by saying, “Look”—the twenty-fifth verse, “you are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham; And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”

In other words, the Lord Jesus came to Israel, because to Israel the promises were given, and Israel is the clue to worldwide blessing. Listen to what Paul will say long after this. “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision, for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” That’s the order: our Lord came for the nation, he came to confirm the promises for them. He also came and made it possible for the Gentiles as a group, to enter into relationship with him, because they too were included in the Abrahamic promises. Israel is the key to the future worldwide blessing, and Peter is preaching that in his first lengthy message following the Day of Pentecost.

Well, let me close, for our time is up. One can see, that this incident illustrates that there is not only spiritual life for this—should I say, spiritual life for this lame man, because that’s what the physical experience is designed to represent. But there is spiritual life for Israel if they will turn, and there is spiritual life for all in Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ is able to cancel our disabilities. He is able to communicate ability. He is able to create worship, and while we do not expect to have any kind of physical leaping like the lame man who had never walked in his life, there should be the leap of spiritual joy when we have come to know that we are truly the Lord’s through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no power in the term “Baptist.” There is no power in Methodism. There is no power in Episcopalianism. There is no power in Believers Chapel as a church. The power rests in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We preach him, and we preach salvation through him. He breaks the power of cancel sin. He sets the prisoner free. We do not. He does. Even an upright life without

acknowledgment of Christ, leaves a man only a scoundrel in the sight of God. May God help us as we reflect upon this incident, to realize that life comes ultimately through the messianic king, and the death that he has accomplished.

But let us not close without reminding you that Peter also said to them, citing the prophecy concerning the prophet from Deuteronomy. In the twenty-third verse, “It shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear the prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” Individual salvation has always rested upon the relationship to Christ, and whether Jew or Gentile, our individual responsibility is the personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel individually is just like a Gentile individually. They have the great promises that have to do with the nation, and he will ultimately so work, that the nation, as a nation as a whole shall come to the Lord in the future. In the meantime, if men do not believe in Christ, they are lost. Call that narrow if you will, but it is the narrowness of the Word of God.

We are living in days in which there are strange things happening. General Booth of the Salvation Army, at the turn of the century said, “The chief danger of the twentieth century will be religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ.” Isn’t that striking? We have a building to the south of us there. You’ve talked to those people. They say, “We’re Christians.” There’s no Christ. “Christianity without Christ.” That’s true of many of our well-known denominational churches; Christianity, but no Christ. “Forgiveness without repentance. Salvation without regeneration. Politics without God.” Isn’t it interesting, that the General should say that. “Politics without God, and heaven without hell.”

Well, General William Booth was not a prophet, but he certainly gave a good insight into the generations that have come since him. We’re living in those days. If you’re here, and you have never believed in Jesus Christ, you’re lost. You’re headed for a Christless eternity. “You shall be destroyed,” as Peter says, “from among the people.” But by virtue of the blood that was shed, the offer of a spiritual salvation, far more valuable than anything that might be done for you in a physical way, is offered to you through the blood that was shed.

May God in his wonderful grace so move upon your heart, that you recognize your lost condition, and that by his grace—for repentance is a gift, as we shall read in the fifth chapter of this book. May God give you the grace of repentance, so that you reverse the decision and flow of your life at this point, and turn to him through whom you may have the forgiveness of sins. We invite you. We urge you. We appeal to you, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus. Come. Turn. You shall be turned by the grace of God if you acknowledge your condition and give yourself to him who died for sinners. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these magnificent messages. We consider it one of the greatest of the blessings of life to have the Word of God, and O Father, if there are some here who have never believed, we ask, Lord, give ... [End of tape]