



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 11:1–30

“Abraham to the World!”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The subject for today and the ministry, in a moment after we sing our next hymn, is “Abraham to the World!” And we are turning to Acts chapter 11, for the Scripture reading. And the relationship of the sermon title to this chapter is, simply, to make the point that the great promises of redemption that were given to Abraham and, specifically, that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed, a promise that refers to the seed of Abraham and, ultimately, to our Lord, we find in their process of fulfillment, now, as the gospel goes out beyond the land of Judea and Samaria and reaches Antioch and from Antioch will reach out to the world. That’s the reason of the title of the message is “Abraham to the World!” And as we read through this chapter, I hope you will notice that that’s the thrust that Luke gives us in this great 11th chapter.

Now, reading, beginning with verse 1 of Acts chapter 11.

“And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him saying, “Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.””

You noticed, incidentally, that they do not object that Peter baptized them, but rather that he, a Jewish man, ate with the Gentiles.

“But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, ‘I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners. and it came even to me, upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, ‘Arise, Peter; slay and eat.’ But I said, not so, Lord: For nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.’ And this was done three times and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man’s house. And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter, who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. [Peter refers back to the Day of Pentecost.] Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, [John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.] Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God saying, ‘Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.’ Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.”

Now, notice that that’s very striking because, obviously, the early church had a great deal of difficulty in adjusting to the fact that the Gospel is going to go out to the Gentiles and Gentiles be received on the same basis as Jews are received. They didn’t doubt the Gentiles could be converted,

but what they did not yet see and the experience in Cornelius’ house helps and the Acts chapter 15, finally settles the question, that Gentiles may be saved and enter the family of God in the same way, possessing the same promises as an Israeliteish believer.

“And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus or Jesus as Lord. And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.”

That’s a marvelous text, if you’ll just carefully think about it. “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” Just a theological question at this point. Why did they believe?

“Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church, which was in Jerusalem and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”

It’s rather striking that three times we have reference to the disciples being called “Christians” and in all three occasions, it is others who called them “Christians.” They do not call themselves Christians; others call them Christians. There is, of course, nothing specifically wrong with the term Christian, but it’s a very vague term; it’s even vague today. And so, consequently, when a person says he is a Christian today, you really don’t know exactly what he does believe. And you

can see how the use of this term arose. We really need something a bit more specific in order to really know a person's faith.

“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

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

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee and we give Thee praise for the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we thank Thee that those great promises made to Abraham have now gone out to the world. And we thank Thee for the inclusion of us in that great company. And we thank Thee for the freedom that we have to come to our Lord Jesus Christ and to be received by Him as a member of His Body. We thank Thee, Lord, for those in this audience who belong to Him and who belong to that Body. And we pray Thy blessing upon them, both spiritually and physically, materially in every way that will bring glory and honor to Thy Name.

We give Thee thanks for our country as well. May, Lord, Thy hand be upon this nation for its spiritual good. And give us protection and give us peace in accordance with Thy will. We give Thee thanks for the whole body of Christ; and, Lord, enable us as Barnabas that good man to rejoice in all that Thou art doing, wherever the gospel is being proclaimed. We also pray, Lord, for those who are ill and sick and some specifically in the hospital; Lord, we pray for them. Give strength and encouragement, wisdom and guidance to the doctors who minister to them. Bless their families, provide for them and encourage them, as well. And, Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and may our meeting today be a meeting in which we

are built up in our faith and strengthened. Enable us, also, to represent effectively and fruitfully the Lord Jesus Christ, this week.

We pray, in His name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for this morning in the exposition of the Word is “Abraham to the World!” You may have noticed, as we read through Acts chapter 11, that the chapter really is a chapter which falls into two somewhat separated parts because in the first few verses of the chapter through verse 18, Peter simply recapitulates what happened in Cornelius’ house. And this he does, really, for about the third time, considering also the vision that he had received and that Cornelius had received as well.

But in the latter part of the chapter, we have the extension of the word to the Hellenistic Greeks or the Hellenistic Jews, the Greeks. The importance of the experience that Peter had in Cornelius’ house, we mentioned a couple of weeks ago, is underlined by the fact that for three times Luke describes the events in this book of twenty-eight chapters. When you remember that they had, usually, a scroll about thirty feet long on which they would write their books and that was about the maximum length and since this book of Acts as well as the Gospel of Luke would have taken up just about the thirty feet of the scroll, you can see that he must have regarded this as extremely important to devote so much time to it.

The early church had great difficulty in understanding what had happened in the cross of Christ and in the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The fact that the children of God were no longer under the Law of Moses as a code, and also the fact that on the Day of Pentecost, the family of God became what Paul calls “a New Man.” The legal requirements being set aside, the body bound together by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, something absolutely unique and now, all believers indwelt permanently by the Holy Spirit, these are new things. And, consequently, historically, they had difficulty in grasping all of this as it transpired. So we’re not surprised that they had some difficulty in believing that the Gentiles

should be received just as the Jews, because for so many years if a person became a believer as a Gentile, he was expected and required to enter into Israel and to come under the Law of Moses. So that the idea of possessing the blessings of salvation in their fullness, apart from the Law of Moses, was something that was difficult for Gentiles who had some association with Judaism to realize but, even more so, for Jewish people who were used to think of themselves as the ones through whom the Word of God came and to whom all who believed in Christ must come in fellowship.

So we're not surprised then that the thing that happened in Cornelius' house is made very important in Luke's Gospel. He wants to lay stress upon the fact that Gentiles may be saved, but, also, and particularly in chapter 15, he will make extremely plain, through the recounting of the events that happened when Antioch met Jerusalem for their conference there that a person who was a Gentile may enter into full fellowship with the Lord and not be required to submit to the requirements of the Mosaic Law and not be circumcised as males.

The organized church today, has different problems but it does have problems. It is in trouble; infiltrated by materialism and secularism and humanism and even socialism and, also, by heresy. And, I think, in some ways by outright cynical rebellion, in the case of the abortion question. It's not hard to see why. The church is not following the teaching of the Word of God. If we follow the teaching of the Word of God, we are never out of style. But if we follow the teaching of the moment, the theology that is being taught at the present time, what we call around theological seminary contemporary theology, one of the things you learn is that contemporary theology is contemporary only for a short period of time.

Dean Ing, who was not a believer himself in the fullest sense, nevertheless expressed an important truth when he said, “If you marry the spirit of your own generation, you will be a widow in the next.”

One of the convictions that the elders have in Believers Chapel, I'm speaking for them, I'm sure it's true of them, is that we want to propound the ministry of the Word of God because it is always contemporary.

Now, in the first part of chapter 11, Peter vindicates his ministry by recording what happened in Cornelius’ house. This would have been a problem for Peter because, after all, he was a Jewish man. And, later on, we know that he was at Antioch, he himself fell prey to the tendency to relapse into a bit of the old-age theology. For if you’ll remember, when he was in Antioch, he himself dissimulated and though he had been eating with the Gentiles, he began to withdraw himself from them and even Barnabas was carried away, Paul says later, by their hypocrisy.

So Peter had his difficulties and I can imagine that when these things happened in Cornelius’ house he was a bit disturbed over it, personally. I can just imagine him thinking to himself, “How am I going to square myself with my home church in Jerusalem? I’ll never be invited again to the annual apostle’s Bible conference when they learn that I’ve been eating with Gentiles because we’re not supposed to be eating with Gentiles.” So it’s then in harmony with this that we read.

“And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, ‘Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.’”

So they do not understand yet that those requirements, incidentally, there was nothing in the Law that said that a Jewish man could not eat with a Gentile, but that was Jewish tradition and that was identified with what they as Jews believed. But, at any rate, they asked him, “You went in unto men uncircumcised and didst eat with them. How could you do that?” And so Peter records again his experiences. He tells about the vision that he had. He tells about the vision that Cornelius had. He tells about how he was told to go to Caesarea and preach and to give words whereby, in Caesarea, that Cornelius and all his house should be saved. And he said, as he records it in verse 15, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning.” And, further, Peter says, “I remembered then the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto

us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I should withstand God?” So here is the climax of the thing and he is saying, in effect, “You are questioning the equality of the Gentiles and my eating with them. Well, my experience in Cornelius’ house indicates they may receive the Word of God apart from adherence to our particular traditions.” So, in effect, what he says is, “Let’s listen, and pay attention to what God has done.”

Now, there are some other things that, I think, we ought not to pass by here. You’ll notice that he says in verse 15 and 16, “As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.” Now, when he says, “As on us at the beginning,” he refers to the experience on the Day of Pentecost. Now, this is rather important, this particular text, because it answers a question I think rather convincingly, when did the church begin? Now, the apostle in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, says that, “By one Spirit,” or, “In one Spirit, we are baptized into one body.” So that the way we enter the church of Jesus Christ is through the baptism of Christ in the Spirit or, perhaps, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Probably, the language of 1 Corinthians 12:12 and 13, supports the idea that it is Christ who is the baptizer, but he does it in the Spirit. But, at any rate, that is the means by which we enter the church. You don’t enter the church by signing your name to a church roll. You don’t enter your church by attending one regularly, as in Believers Chapel, you enter the church through the baptizing ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Apostle Paul, and that is done in the Spirit.

Now, in Acts chapter 1 in verse 5 and 6, the Lord Jesus had said, “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence.” So since the Lord Jesus in his earthly ministry had said, “I will build my church,” not, “I am building it.” And then here, he tells us that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is still future, “Not many days hence,” we would think, of course, that what happened on the Day of Pentecost was really the coming of the Holy Spirit in this baptizing ministry. And our Lord would perform his ministry in the Spirit at that time. You can search Acts 2, through though and you do not find any specific reference to “They were baptized by Christ in the Spirit.” And so one might want to hold out a bit, if he wanted to reject this teaching, and say, “But it doesn’t say that in Acts 2, it says simply that they were filled by the

Spirit.” But it’s clear from Acts chapter 11 in verse 15 and 16, that Peter identifies the baptizing work of Christ in the Spirit as happening on the Day of Pentecost. He says, “As I began to speak in Cornelius’ house, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, ‘John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” So just as our Lord promised that that would occur, not many days hence, Peter identifies it as having happened on the Day of Pentecost, for the first time, and since that’s the way we enter into the church, something unique took place on the Day of Pentecost.

We don’t deny that there was a people of God from Old Testament times, and that there is this one people of God on through into eternity, but a new stage in the development and program of God took place on the Day of Pentecost. So new with the Law of Moses being done away with as a code, that the Apostle Paul can speak in Ephesians 2, of the two being reconciled into one, Jew and Gentile, and they’re coming to be one new man. These are the Apostle’s words in Ephesians chapter 2 in verse 15. So this statement by Peter, which he made in Jerusalem, is of very great importance, because it identifies the birthday of the church as having occurred on the Day of Pentecost.

Now, there is something else here that’s important, I think. In the 17th verse, he states, “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Today, we often hear people say that to receive the Holy Spirit, one must undergo a second work of grace. Not simply believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, but then have some second charismatic kind of experience after we have believed in Christ. The reception of the Holy Spirit is not a second work of grace. The moment that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit. And that moment we have the Holy Spirit as a permanent indwelling person. Every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, at the moment of faith in Christ, comes to be indwelt permanently by the Holy Spirit. That is not a second work of grace. We are not saved at one point and receive the Holy Spirit at a second point. That is, I think, made very plain here. It comes through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, there is something else here that is of importance. He says, “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, ‘Then hath God also to the Gentiles

granted repentance.” Now, the word “grant” is a word that simply means, “to give.” In fact, that’s what the Greek text has at this point; the common word for giving. So that repentance is given. Repentance is not something that we work up ourselves. It is something that is given to us. As a matter of fact, we cannot repent of ourselves. That’s very plain. And I quote again my familiar text. I cite it so often I’m afraid that it might be put on my gravestone and it really isn’t quite the text I would want on my gravestone, although, it’s a perfectly good text. I always remember a person who said, “Do you believe John 3:16?” My friend said, “Yes.” “Do you believe John 1:12 and 13?” “Yes” “Do you believe Romans 8:1?” “Yes.” He knew all of those texts. And then his friend said, “Do you believe Ezekiel 4:22?” And there was silence. But, of course, we believe all the Word of God, don’t we? Even though we may not understand what it is.

But anyway, Romans 8 says, “The mind of the flesh is enmity against God, and it’s not subject to the law of God.” You’ve heard me, haven’t you? It is not subject to the law of God. “Neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” So we cannot of ourselves repent. We cannot of ourselves have faith. It is given by God. And if we notice these little things in the Word of God, we’ll not be confused. “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted, given, repentance unto life.” Notice, also, that repentance is unto life. Repentance is something that includes and involves true faith. We should not really distinguish these things absolutely, because repentance and faith are very closely linked together. Repentance is a repentance unto life in this case. So it is given and life follows. We don’t have life and then repent, except, insofar as we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit to receive repentance and faith. In that sense, we do.

Now, then having said that, Luke begins something that seems quite different and it really is. In fact, there would be good justification for making Acts twenty-nine chapters instead of twenty-eight, because verse 19, marks a beginning of something that is quite different.

Remember, as you’ve been reading the book of Acts with me that there are three lines of expansion from the persecution that took place when Stephen was stoned to death. In the first place, Philip preached the word in Samaria. Then Peter went out on a preaching journey and he finally went

into Cornelius’ house in Caesarea and preached the Word there and Gentiles responded. But, now, some unnamed men go to Antioch and what is striking about it and so true to so much in the Word of God it’s surprising. You might have expected either Philip’s preaching. The well-known deacon and evangelist, or Peter’s preaching in the house of Cornelius to be the beginning of the work that would lead to the spread of the church to the world. But no, some unnamed individuals are the ones who are the means by which the movement takes on a Gentile flavor. This is the shoot that grew; the one that is described here when it says, “And some of them were men of Cyprus, and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching Jesus as Lord.” For Antioch, from now on, will become headquarters of the Christian church; moving from Jerusalem to Antioch. And these unknown men are responsible for it.

Antioch was the third city in the empire, after Roman and Alexandria. It was Syrian in population, Greek in culture, Roman in government. So it was a metropolitan, a universal kind of city. It was, of course, a city that was extremely evil and known for its evil. It vied with Corinth on the continent of Europe for reputation as an evil city. But it became the headquarters of the great Hellenistic church.

Now, “men of Cyprus and Cyrene,” we don’t know who they were. They were just ordinary Christians, so far as we know. They were not officials. They’re not even said to be elders or deacons. They’re not said to be pastor-teachers or anything like that. They were just believers. But they were believers like Jeremiah, whose word was in their heart like a fire, and they could not keep from preaching it, and so they went to Antioch and they began to preach Jesus as Lord; these simple believers. In fact, the text as you look at it in the Greek text, a couple of times the word that is used of their preaching is just the word that I might use if I were to carry on a conversation with Mr. Prier, up here or with Mark McCracken. No offense intended, Mark, when I call him “mister” and didn’t call you “mister” you understand. [Laughter]

But just a kind of conversation, well that is the expression that is used here. It’s the word that really means “to say.” So they were just talking about our Lord. Now, there is another word that

often has the connotation of chattering; that’s not the word that is used. But it is a word that simply means “to give out the message.” And so these individuals went to Antioch. We don’t know who they are. When we get to heaven, we’ll discover their names. But they are the instrumentalities in a significant move of the headquarters of the Christian church and a significant move in the ongoing of the Gospel, which eventually reaches us in the Western World. They spoke; they preached Jesus as Lord. They were moved to tell their friends about the Gospel of Christ. Nothing can be more important than to tell your relatives, your friends, and those with whom you come in contact, about our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, when Andrew found the Lord, the first thing that he did was to go and get Peter. And John says, “He brought him to Jesus.” We’ve often said this. It’s still true. The greatest thing that one person can do for another is to bring them to Christ. So that’s what they were doing. And, by the way, they didn’t have any church, any great church, later this became a great church, where John Chrysostom preached, with thousands in attendance. But it began by these simple Christians who were just talking the Gospel. They didn’t say, “We’ve got a great preacher down here, in this edifice, and you ought to hear the great Mr. Blustering-Bombast, who stirs the air with vaporous grand-eloquence,” or something like that. But they just talked up the gospel. And that is, perhaps, the most effective way for the spreading of the Word of God. And, so far as I can tell, they simply preached Jesus is Lord. It was not an intellectual treat that those preachers gave the people of Antioch. We’re not saved by intellectual treats, Mr. Spurgeon says. And, they just preached the simple message of the Lord with intensity and sincerity, and the hand of the Lord was with them.

Now, that is very significant because that is in perfect harmony with the preceding statement, in verse 18. “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.” So we don’t labor alone when we preach the Word and you don’t labor alone when you tell others about the gospel. The hand of the Lord is the ultimate response, is the ultimate responsibility for fruitfulness in gospel work. The hand of the Lord that prepares hearts of individuals to come to meetings like this

or to convince men of their sin, convince men of their need. That’s the work of the hand of the Lord. And the hand of the Lord was with them, with the necessary result that men should turn to the Lord. That’s just another way of saying that faith is the gift of God. The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. You can be sure, that when you give out the message to your neighbor, to your friend or to your family member that God works with his Word. And you’re not responsible for their conversion; it is God who is, ultimately, responsible for their conversion. But it is your responsibility to give out the message.

Now, with all of these people turning to the Lord, why, news reached the city of Jerusalem. And the city of Jerusalem was, and particularly the believers there, well, they were a little bit disturbed when they heard what was going on at Antioch because they wondered if it was genuine. So they sent a man by the name of Barnabas to Antioch in order to find out what was really going on. It’s a good thing they sent Barnabas because he was a man who enlarged his theory to fit the facts. The tendency of people who have experienced the blessing of God is to doubt that it occurs anywhere else. It’s very characteristic of us, as human beings, because it is part of our sin nature, to think that everybody must respond to the Word of God as we do.

John MacNeil was a great evangelist, Presbyterian Evangelist, Mr. MacNeil was an unusual fellow. He, being an evangelist, he didn’t have a whole lot of sermons. But he preached these sermons various places around the world, very fruitful ministry as an evangelist and preacher. And Mr. MacNeil in one of his sermons described denominationalism and how some of our denominations might have grown. He describes the man of John 9, the blind man, meeting the man of Mark 8, the blind man that our Lord healed there. In John 9, the Lord had spat upon the ground and made clay out of the spittle and put it on the eyes of the man and had healed him. But in Mark 8, the incident there he had only spat upon his eyes and he was healed. Mr. MacNeil imagined that these two came together and they began to discuss their conversion. And the man from John 9, said, “How did it feel when he spat upon the ground and made that clay and put it on your eyes?” And the man from Mark 8 said, “He didn’t do that to me. He just spat on my eyes.” He said, “You mean to

tell me that our Lord did not spit upon the ground and make clay out of the spittle and put it on your eyes?” He said, “No, he didn’t do that. All he did was spit upon my eyes.” Well, this conversation went on for a little while, and finally the man from John 9, said, “I don’t believe you can see.” [Laughter] “If our Lord didn’t spit upon the ground and make clay out of that spittle and put it on your eyes, you cannot see!” And so Mr. MacNeil used to say, “And that was the beginning of two denominations.” [More laughter] The Mudites and the Antimudites.

Well, that’s very characteristic of human nature. You could almost believe that something as ridiculous as that could happen. But in Barnabas’ case, he was a man who the facts could cause him to enlarge his theory to embrace them. And so he went to Antioch from Jerusalem and when he came, he saw the grace of God. It was clear God had worked; and though it was a surprise that they were not required now or expected to become Jews and submit to certain requirements of the Jewish law, like circumcision, it’s obvious they’ve experienced the blessing of God. “Some men will only allow the wind that bloweth where it listeth to make music in the pipes of their organs,” Mr. Spurgeon has said. But, in Barnabas’ case, he was willing to acknowledge that God really had acted there, and he was actually glad.

It’s very difficult for us, at times, to be glad when God blesses another assembly that doesn’t follow our distinctive principles. Now, we have some distinctive principles in Believers Chapel. Some of you will say we have some peculiar principles. All right, but they are distinctive and we think they’re biblical. But we don’t think that God only blesses if he follows our peculiar principles or our distinctive principles. We believe that God blesses when the gospel is preached. We simply say, “He will bless a bit more if all of the principles of the Word of God are followed.” But we don’t want to be so narrow and so unloving and so critical that we can fail to see that someone who simply preaches the gospel of Christ and may be in error on a number of side points that are not as important as the gospel, may receive blessing from God. We would be fighting against God. We rejoice.

And Barnabas was glad when he saw the grace of God. Let us in Believers Chapel hold to our distinctive principles of ministry by gifted men and things like this, but let us also rejoice in the blessing of others. And, perhaps, if we rejoice then maybe we'll get a chance to unfold the Scripture for a little further harmony with the Word of God. And then maybe they can be of benefit to us in other ways as well. So he was a man who saw the grace of God at work and he felt joy over it. And what did he say? Well, if he had been a modern man, and he had gone to see what had happened there, and it was not organized at all, he would say, “Well, you need an organization. What you need is a pastor, and you need a few committees and you need to appoint some elders and some deacons and you need to set up a budget because money is important. And, furthermore, it might even be good for you to have a faith promise program and since you're going to have young people, why not a Christian education committee and maybe a Christian education director and so on.” Well, let's not talk about those things now. I just want you to notice the simplicity of this church in Antioch.

We read that when he saw the grace of God, he was glad. He exhorted them all with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. Now, we make a great deal over theology in Believers Chapel. And, I think, rightly so because there are so many people who seem to think that you can really cleave to the Lord without any theology. And I always like to ask them, “What Lord is it that you're talking about?” And the minute they start answering that question, they start talking theology. So you cannot have a relationship with our Lord, without having a theology. But you can over emphasize theology. You can so over emphasize propositions that you lose a bit of the personal relationship with the Lord that you ought to have. So we need to have a personal relationship with a Lord, who is described, propositionally and doctrinally, in the Word of God. We need both of these. Cannot get along without them. So I like what Barnabas said, “Cleave unto the Lord.” That's the objective description of a man who has true faith in the Christian revelation.

The simple soul's complaint of some theologians is, “They have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have laid him.” Now, that is valid. And it is important for us, then, to as Barnabas, to exhort one another, to cleave to the Lord. That's the subjective side; to cleave, not

simply acquiesce but cleave to the Lord. That means to “remain faithful to.” That’s the meaning of the Greek word that is used there, “Remain faithful to the Lord.” We become Christians by turning to the Lord. We remain Christians by cleaving to the Lord. And to cleave to the Lord is to sit at his feet and hear his Word, just like you’re doing right now through the instrument, human instrument, human failing instrument, listening to the Word of God. And, on other days of the week, reading and pondering the Word of God, asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten it for you.

Now, Barnabas is a man who was glad. He exhorted them to cleave to the Lord, for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. Why was he a good man? Because he was under the control of the Holy Spirit. And why was he under the control of the Holy Spirit? Because he had faith. Those three little things are so beautifully descriptive of this man, Barnabas. The preeminence of these gentler traits of the Christian life: Faith, the control of the Holy Spirit, and the goodness that came from it. And, notice, too, who makes men good. It is God the Holy Spirit who does that.

Now, what would you have done, if you had been Barnabas? If you were a little preacher or teacher, what would you do if you have come from Jerusalem now and some unnamed people there have been talking up the Gospel, and here is a great crowd of people that are finding the Lord, and you’re a well-recognized man with a gift of exhortation, for that’s what Barnabas had; he was a son of consolation. What would you do? Why, I think you’d want to stay there and be the preacher. You’d want to be the only preacher, like I’ve often told you about Dr. Chafer, who got a card from A. C. Gaebelein and Dr. Gaebelein, a well-known kind of person. He had a little bit of a touch of “I think I’m maybe the greatest.” He wrote Dr. Chafer, a good friend, and said, “I’m at such and such a Bible conference, having a marvelous time, I’m the only speaker.” [Laughter] So you can imagine Barnabas. Here is just an ideal situation. He’ll be the only speaker for this crowd of people. But you can see how great this man, Barnabas, was, in spite of his failings just a human being. But the first thing he did was to think, “My friend Saul can really be of help to these people.” And so he departed to Tarsus to seek Saul and to tell him about what was happening in Antioch. And he brought him to Antioch and it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves together with the church

and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. And so, these two men, there was never a pastor of the church of Antioch. Ministry was by gifted men. And here we have Saul and Barnabas preaching the Word of God and God blessing that Word. I can understand why Barnabas was called a good man.

Well, the remainder of the chapter has some interesting details. We don't have time to talk about them. The Christians were called Christians at Antioch. I don't think that's the best name for a Christian. When a person says today, "I'm a Christian," you have to ask a second question. "What do you believe?" Because so many people travel under the banner of Christian that do not necessarily believe the things that are found in the Word of God. Well even then it was the word applied by outsiders and, therefore, it's not as definite as you would like. It's not as definite as disciples. It's not as definite as brethren. Two other words found in this context. And it's not as definite as believing. Believers is good enough. That's why we call it Believers Chapel not the Christian Chapel; that would be all right, but more specifically, Believers Chapel. I guess we ought to be even more specific. Mr. Prier, it ought to be Christian Believers or Believers in Christ Chapel. But then, I hope, you understand, that's what we mean.

Well, it concludes with a gift, because giving was a responsibility of believers and they sent relief unto the brethren, which dwelt in Judaea. They didn't give their tithes. There was no such thing as a tithe then. They gave out of gratitude for what Christ has done for them. Well, it's a beautiful outline of the marks of the Christian church and I hope that we pay careful attention to it.

If you are here today and you have never believed in Christ, we'd like to remind you that Christ has died for sinners. And that he has provided an atoning sacrifice so that you may have the forgiveness of your sins. May God, through his hand, so move in your heart, that you turn to him. We invite you to come to Christ and receive as a free gift eternal life, through him. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we are grateful to Thee for this beautiful day; and we thank Thee for the variety of this universe of which we are a part. Thou hast been good to us in so many ways. And, Lord, we particularly pray, if there are some who are here this morning in this meeting, who have never believed in Christ, may the example of the Christians at Antioch remind them of their own responsibility to have a personal relationship to the Lord. And, may they turn to Him and then cleave to Him. May Thy grace go with us as we part.

In Jesus' name. Amen.