



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 13:26–41

“Paul at Antioch—Biblical Evangelism: Part II”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are studying the book of Acts, and we are in chapter 13, in which Luke records the message that the apostle delivered in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia. And our theme is “Biblical Evangelism.” And last week we looked at the opening part of the Pauline sermon, in which he reviews the past history of Israel and brings his readers and listeners up to the coming of our Lord and today we’re going to look at the remainder of the first part of his ministry in Antioch, beginning at verse 26 through verse 41. So this is our Scripture reading for today, Acts chapter 13, verse 26 through verse 41. You see that this will be a review of the ministry of our Lord, as over against last week, a review of the history of Israel to this point. Beginning with the 26th verse, the apostle writes.

“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulcher. But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto

the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, ‘Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.’ And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’”

Now, you’ll notice that the apostle here is simply alluding to Old Testament passages from Scripture, which his listeners were supposed to be familiar with. He’s cited Psalm 2 in verse 33, and now he cites Isaiah chapter 55 in verse 3 and verse 34. And in the next verse he will cite Psalm 16, and so he’s just going back over the Scriptures so that they may be able to put them together and understand the fulfillment in Christ. Verse 35 continues:

“Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, ‘Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.’”

Now, you see what he is thinking about is that he’s trying to show that David is not the fulfillment of those prophecies. The fulfillment is intended to be found in David’s greater son and he will show that the Psalmist said that the one of whom David was writing would not see corruption. But David’s tomb was right there near the city of Jerusalem, and it’s obvious he did see corruption. So the prophecy must have been of someone not David, the historical David. It is, of course, of David’s son. Verse 36:

“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not

be justified by the Law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”

And, again, you can tell from looking at your set of column references or if you have a Bible that has any reference to other passages, you will see that he concludes with a citation from the Old Testament again; this time from the book of Habakkuk chapter 1 in verse 5, and he warns his listeners that just as the nation Israel did not recognize the incursion or invasion of the Chaldeans, in the day of Habakkuk, as the sign of the judgment of God upon the nation for unbelief, so he warns them that they, too, are in danger of the same disciplinary judgment from the Lord God that was exercised centuries before. It doesn't take much sense of the reading and application of the Scriptures to realize that the warning that the apostle delivered to the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia, of perhaps failing to respond to the Word of God, is the kind of warning that we, today, must consider as well. For, after all of these centuries, the Word of God is set out most plainly for us and we, too, are in danger of not responding, just as they did not respond in the time of Habakkuk the Prophet. And just as they did not respond in the time of the Apostle Paul.

May the Lord give us by His grace the will to respond positively. May the Lord bless this reading of His Word.

[Message] Last week, as we began our study of Paul's ministry in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, I mentioned that our title that we would be following would be, “Biblical Evangelism,” and so we are still continuing in that particular theme. I mentioned last week that we are inclined to think that the church never faced such a task as it faces today in challenging the world. We have humanistic philosophies, we have Marxism, we have science, we have the world's obsession with sex, it has emasculated religion, parading under the name of Christian, and many other things that try the endurance of biblical Christians.

One of the things that is striking, I think, is the fact that the world today has such a great appreciation for the science of our modern days. Some years ago, not too many years ago, in the Reith Lectures, Edmund Leach stated that since science offers us total mastery over our environment, we should behave like gods. And then, in the London Times, just a few years back, he took the argument a step further. Since scientists now had the power of creation and destruction, he said, “They should learn to play god in a moral as well as in a creative and destructive sense.” In other words, it’s for the scientists to tell us what is right and what is wrong, and the scientist is to be the source of his own morality. We have interesting examples of this in the fact that in our day, scientists frequently band together to give us moral advice, as if because by God’s grace they have been able to look into the creation and discover some things that other generations have not discovered that that makes them experts in the moral and spiritual realm.

We’ve also seen the stampede of the clergy following this kind of thinking and particularly in the realms of the sexual revolution of the past or present generation. We have, for example, a polished, literate kind of package that has been urged upon Americans, in which they are to enjoy hedonism, and the other things that go with it. And this is looked upon as a kind of suave, pseudo, or rather suave intellectualism, which is really a pseudo-intellectualism.

One thing that was most interesting, a few years back, was the fact that Hugh Hefner became so popular among even the clerics; and it was stated not too many years back that Hefner was the hottest thing in theological seminaries since Martin Luther. Now, a few years back, we have learned the true nature of that kind of thing, but we have to go through it constantly, in order to have impressed upon us in marvelous patience and endurance on the Lord God’s part that truth if found in the divine revelation.

The Apostle Paul, a rugged little Jewish man, almost fifty years of age when he preached the Word in Antioch in Pisidia, an age when men should be turning, normally, to the comforts of a firm base, went into the synagogues of his day and faced contemporary thought with the Word of God. And let us not think for one moment that the apostle did not face the same depth of challenge that

we do. He faced the great philosophies of his day, which even philosophers will admit were finer philosophies than the philosophies of our modern day. He faced the leading religions of his day, and the degrading morals of them, and he faced them with the Word from the Word of God.

We're not to think, for example, that the things that we find today with new names are any different than the things of the apostle's day. The world has never really come up with any, basically, new philosophy. The kind of philosophy that we see under the names and titles given to it today is just the same old philosophy that we have seen in human history, down through the generations. One sees that if you just examine the philosophies of our day. In the final analysis, there is a body of values and ultimates that men hold and they are human values and human ultimates. Call them by different names, call them by fancy new names, in order to gain the attention of our generation, but they are ultimately the same things and they are usually utterly opposed to the things that are found in the Word of God. In fact, the Word of God is a critic of philosophies of men from the days of Adam to our day.

With what did Paul confront his generation? Did he give them new techniques? Did he give them new philosophy? Did he give them a comment on the philosophies of his day in their language that people might understand?

Well, from what we read in Holy Scripture, he confronted the world of his day with no new techniques, with no fresh terminology, and no diluted message. What he did was simply turn to the divine revelation, found in the Word of God, and he gave it to them; and he gave it to them in the words of Holy Scripture. What a lesson for evangelists and what a lesson for the people of our day. The language of Scripture and the thoughts of Scripture is for our day.

We live in a day when everything has to be made easy in spiritual things, but not in other things. If you want to learn medicine, you have to learn the most difficult kind of terminology. In fact, sometimes, when you go to your doctor, and he finally tells us what's wrong with you, then you have to say to someone, or perhaps even your doctor, if you have the courage to talk back to him, “What in the world does that mean in common language. [Laughter] I have several doctors, great

doctors, elders in Believers Chapel, and when they tell me what’s wrong with me, I just say, frankly, “What do you mean?” But that’s perfectly normal.

If we are sitting down in front of a computer and then we look at the “user friendly” language, of the manuals that go with the computer, my, you not only need the dictionary, because the dictionary doesn’t even have some of those terms, you need the help of someone constantly at your side. But when you come to spiritual things and someone says, “The doctrine of justification by faith,” we are completely defeated. And so he uses big language; justification or sanctification, whereas all of those things that go to make up computer language or medical language, not to mention scientific language, who can understand that? But, yet, men do. And men, ultimately, come to understand that computer language, so I’m told, and I’m looking forward to the day when I do, too. When we come to biblical things, we’re going to have to learn a few terms; and the Apostle gives us some of them here, as he preached the same old truth in the same old terminology that was found in the Word of God.

Well, we looked at Paul’s beginning of his sermon last week, and we saw that he began with the divine election of the nation Israel. He spoke very rapidly of how the history of the Old Testament was the preparation of Israel, for the coming of the Messiah. And then he closed in verse 25, with words of John the Baptist in which John, the forerunner of the king, said, “I am not he!” But John introduced what has been called the infinite music of the Gospel because he was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul will launch into a review of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what do you think he will talk about? Will he talk about the mighty miracles that he performed? No. He doesn’t even mention the miracles, so far as I can remember, here. Do you think he will talk about the teaching of our Lord? And surely no teaching has ever been greater in its essence than the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ? No. He will not talk about the message that is found in the Gospel, the messages found in the Gospel preached by the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you think he will talk about the good life that he lived? No. Peter says, “He went about doing good.” That’s just a little

summary of what our Lord did, but Paul doesn't even bother to do that. Do you think he will talk about love? How can you talk about biblical things without talking about love? You know, just love, in general? That's great. People love to hear that; the world loves to hear that. They don't like to hear, “Our God is a consuming fire,” but they love to hear that “God is love.” Paul doesn't even talk about that. Well, surely, he must talk about politics? No, he doesn't talk about politics. Well, you cannot be a good evangelical man if you don't talk about “social reform.” Public housing and the problems of daily life? How is it possible for a preacher to truly preach the Word, we are often told today, if he doesn't talk about the problems of life? Capital punishment, the poor, the problems of pornography, abortion.

Now, let me say this, I am personally against abortion. In fact, I support, financially, pro-life organizations. But I do not think that it is the duty of a preacher to emphasize those things in his message. And I hope that you understand that. I have a friend who is in the ministry and I know some people in his congregation; it's a joke in his congregation. It's a friendly joke, he's a fine man, but he cannot preach a message without mentioning abortion and the problems of abortion. He's all caught up in that movement. Well, I don't think that that is really the duty of a preacher; to do things like that. The preacher has one simple opportunity to proclaim the most fundamental message of all; the message that touches permanent life, life of the spirit, eternal life. It's important, of course, for us to deal with things that touch this bodily life, but when people tell us that you cannot be heard if you don't talk about the things of the bodily life, you cannot be heard about things that have to do with the life of the spirit, I don't believe it! I don't think it is true.

Now, I do think that we should be interested in questions like abortion. We should be interested in questions like capital punishment. I certainly feel that's biblical. We should be interested in the poor and Christians should do what they can to help the poor. And we certainly should be opposed to pornography and things like this; but these are not the burdens of the message and the messenger of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have precious little time to make known the important message. And we must, it seems to me, emphasize that. Let others, if they will, talk about

those things. I will not be critical of the issues that they raise. But so far as the significance of that issues as over against this issue, this is the issue that really counts because it touches our eternal destiny; something more important than our physical body.

So listen to Paul. He doesn't talk about the problems of life, and they had them in the days of the Roman Empire in which the apostle ministered. He doesn't talk about the contemporary thought. He doesn't talk about the philosophies of the day. As a matter of fact, his message is summed up in the death and the burial and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the answer to the problems of sin, the problems of life, and the problems of destiny.

He didn't hesitate to speak about the errors that existed in his day. I think that he would have appreciated what Augustine said when Augustine said, “Love men, slay errors.” I think that is the work of a preacher; to love men, but to slay errors. It is our responsibility to preach plainly and clearly and accurately the Word of God. So Evangelicals need not only to pray together, they need to slay together, the false ideas and false philosophies that are all bound up in human autonomous philosophy. We have the answer to the needs of men in the Word of God. Listen to Paul's preaching, now, as he comes to the climax of the message that he delivered to men who were not responsive to the Word of God. First, he talks about the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, verse 26 through verse 29.

“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day.”

Now, that was an existential remark because just before the apostle stood up, they had just read the prophets; and so they understood exactly what he was talking about.



“They have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet they desired Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulcher.”

Now, this little expression in verse 26 through verse 29, “for,” this is why the Word of God came to Antioch’s Jews. They had rejected the Lord Jesus Christ and as a result of that, the message came to them. Notice that their rejection of the message was the rejection of rebellion not confusion. There are people who think that if we just preach the gospel plainly and clearly, clearly men will respond. I have a friend in the ministry who likes to say that, “The world is waiting to hear a clear gospel; and the reason that men do not respond today is because they hear a confused gospel.” What is unfortunate is that this individual, who says that, then proceeds to give us his own brand of a confused gospel. But the problem with the world is not a confused gospel; as a matter of fact, if you just turn on your radio or your TV, you will, sooner or later, hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is there, there to be heard. But the problem is not confusion. The problem is not a false presentation of the gospel. The problem lies in the rebellion of men toward the Word of God. That’s the real problem. And that is what Paul talks about here. He said, “They have the voices of the prophets, read every Sabbath day, but they fulfilled those things when they condemned the Lord Jesus. They found no cause in Him. He had fulfilled all that was written in the Word of God, but they desired him to be slain.”

Further, they also put him in a sepulcher. Isn’t it interesting how Paul and Peter lay stress upon the fact that the Lord Jesus was buried. You go back in chapter 2 in verse 29, and see the same emphasis. And, perhaps, the reason for this is, when our Lord was buried, that was the proof of the reality of death; and also, the completion of his humiliation. Why do we bury people? Well, to speak very frankly to you, we bury people because we could not stand to have their decaying bodies in our presence. That’s why. Now, when our Lord Jesus Christ was buried that was simply the sign of the corruption of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ and the desire of the world to cover it up because it

would soon, they thought, be filthy. In fact, we do not have in the Scriptures, so far as I know, a greater contrast than the contrast between the divine majesty of the second person of the Trinity, who has taken to himself human nature, and the man Jesus lying in a sepulcher. What a contrast. The majestic Son of God, but now the body dead, in a sepulcher. We know from the prophecies and we know from the fact that he could not be corrupted. And Paul goes on to speak about that because that was prophesied in the Old Testament in Psalm 16.

I love that story of the little girl who was one night, when the winds were blowing especially hard, and it, there was a tremendous storm going on outside, in awe she said to her father, “God must have lost grip of his winds tonight.” Well, you might have thought, if you had been one of the apostles, that when the Lord Jesus Christ was taken by the Romans and by the Jews and when he was slain and when he was thrown into the sepulcher, you might have thought, as they evidently did think, that God lost grip of his divine purpose and program. Because, after all, wasn’t he the promised one. Did we not hope in him?

As a matter of fact, on the Emmaus road, that’s what they said, “We hoped that it should have been he who would have redeemed Israel, but now, he is subject to the Roman authority and the Jewish power and he is dead.” And the apostles had gone home, slinking, went into hiding like wounded animals. But God had not lost grip of his purpose and plan. And so we read in verse 30, right after it said, “They laid him in a sepulcher. But God.” “But God,” how important that is. “But God,” while the apostles are moaning the dirges of, “If that’s all there is,” God acts in mighty power. He raises the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is seen to vindicate the saving purpose of the Lord God. This great event of the resurrection, is one of the really truly great events of the Word of God and one of the greatest, if not the greatest, events of all human history.

Isn’t it a strange thing that in the light of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the infallible testimony to that event, the world seems to have no real comprehension of what happened? The main difficulty with the secularists and, of course, we are talking from the human level, is to persuade them to examine the case for the supernatural.

J. B. Phillips, in his “Ring of Truth,” recalls, “Hundreds of conversations with people, many of them of higher intellectual caliber than myself, who quite obviously had no idea of what Christianity is about.” Now, mind you, Mr. Phillips was talking about England and Scotland, the British Isles, where everybody in school is required to study Scripture. It’s not like the United States, where if we study Scripture, we cannot really study Scripture because of the separation of Church and State. False, of course; contrary to the Constitution; but the secularists have the last word. And so we are not even allowed to study. But mind you in Britain you study Scripture.

Now, of course, the interpretation that is put upon it may be not the interpretation of the Word of God, but they at least study Scripture. And Mr. Phillips, now, is talking in that context, when he says that these men of higher intellectual caliber than he, and he surely was of high caliber himself, had no idea what Christianity was about. And he concluded, “They knew virtually nothing about the New Testament. The resurrection, the most important event in human history, is politely and quietly bypassed, for it is not as though the evidence had been examined and found unconvincing, it had simply never been examined.” That’s characteristic of our day. They do not examine the evidence. Now, I know that people say, “Well, there are some explanations, are there not, for the resurrection.” Well, there is one famous one that the Jewish people thought up; that is, the Jewish people of the apostles’ day. When they were asked about the resurrection, they simply said that his disciples came and stole away the body of our Lord from the tomb.

Now, if the disciples had done so, they would have confirmed what they sadly believed, that Jesus died the death of a deluded prophet, a kind of ancient Jim Jones. Why then should the disciples who panicked in Gethsemane have conspired to impose on the world a new religion, which they, themselves, believed to be false, and to have broken with the synagogue, their church, and have risked the same death as their master in defense of a monstrous and superfluous lie? And they didn’t have the privilege of going around the country and holding seminars on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and charging everybody one hundred drachmas if they would come and listen to messages

concerning him. They couldn't do that. So they didn't have any motive for doing this. It's obvious these were men who truly believed what they were propounding.

Pascal said, later, “I readily believe those witnesses who get their throats cut, and that's all they had the privilege of getting their throats cut or their heads lopped off. And we don't know the traditions of the apostles' ends to be true in every case; but the traditions of almost every one of them is that they lost their lives in defense of the truth that they were proclaiming with no possibility whatsoever of any personal gain.”

As a matter of fact, any one of those men could have become a wealthy man, by going around the country and explaining why, at one time, he was a follower of Jesus and why, now, he was not. And he could have gotten his one hundred drachmas or whatever by having a seminar on why Christianity is not true. But we don't have any records of any one of them defaulting like that. So the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the result of the divine power in raising him from the dead. And he was seen and, further, Paul said, “We declare unto you the glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children in that he hath raised up Jesus,” as the psalmist said, “Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee.” And he refers to the Old Testament Scriptures and he said, “You know those passages. You know the second psalm, which talks about the divine king who is to come. And how it says, ‘Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.’ That passage was fulfilled in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. On that day, God said to him, “You are my Son. Today I have begotten you.”

One might ask the question, how is that text fulfilled in the resurrection? “You are my Son, I today have begotten thee.” After all, he was the divine Son who had no time of begetting. That's true. That's true, so far as the divine Son, is concerned. But the divine Son, at the time of the conception and incarnation took to himself an additional nature. And, he was born in our midst, and he was a little baby; just as little babies are babies. And he grew up and experienced the common things of life, apart from sin. He, ultimately, became a carpenter and worked at a carpenter's bench before God called him to the active exercise of his Messianic ministry. And then the Lord Jesus went

out to minister among men. When you looked at him, you saw an ordinary man. You didn't see someone with a halo about him; you saw an ordinary man. In fact, the only indications of the appearance of the Lord Jesus are statements like some of the Jews made when he said, “Before Abraham came to be, I Am.” They said, “Well, he's not yet fifty years of age.” Maybe an indication of the fact that the very identification of the eternal Son with us is enough to age a man.

But then the time came when he was crucified and he was placed in the grave. And on the third day he came forth from the grave, glorified, the first and up to this day the only person who has ever received a glorified body. So, now, the glorified body goes with the eternal Sonship. And on the day of the resurrection, God in Heaven, the Father, proudly says, “Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee.” And so the Lord Jesus, in the fullness of the divine Sonship, with the glorified humanity, fulfills on the day of the resurrection that marvelous statement from the psalm, Psalm 2, verse 7, “Thou art my Son. This day have I begotten thee.” The whole work of redemption, as it applies to him, the resurrected Son, has come to its fruition now. And the glorified Son, today, sits at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

Now, Paul continues because he's speaking Scripture. So get out your little manual and learn the language of the Word of God. It's not like Wordstar, I'll tell you that. It's not like Lotus 1-2-3. Or it's not like the kind of language that you learn in the engineering department or whatever, at the college or university. It's a whole lot simpler and it ministers directly to the human willing heart. “And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.”

What are the “sure mercies of David”? Why, the Old Testament is full of prophecies of the Davidic covenant. God made a covenant with Abraham, and then in words to Abraham he said, “Abraham, kings are going to come out of you.” And then, later, he made a covenant with David, and he said, “David, one from your seed is going to sit upon a throne and rule forever and ever.”

Now, it is evident that implies that there is going to be a people of God who are going to enter into the blessings of divine redemption because they are sinners. And, further, that they are

going to come into the kingdom of this greater Son of David, and enjoy the presence of God throughout the ages of eternity. That’s what the “sure mercies of David” include.

Now, he’s expounding Isaiah chapter 55, when he says, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” So I’m going to turn back to Isaiah 55, because his listeners in that synagogue probably knew something about that chapter. But I have so little confidence in my audience that I’m sure that if I were to say, “How many of you at this moment will stop for just a second, would you give us just a little summary of the contents of Isaiah 55?” I’m just embarrassed enough to feel that if I were to do that there wouldn’t be too many of you who would stand up and in a few choice sentences give me the contents and the meaning of Isaiah 55. Am I right? Yeah, some of you looked very, very embarrassed. So I know I’m right with reference to some of you and to tell you the truth, if you had done that to me, I may have stumbled around a good bit, too. We’re just not familiar with the Word of God as we ought to be. So Isaiah 55. You remember, chapter 53, I wouldn’t do that with chapter 53, because most of you in Believers Chapel could give me a summary of Isaiah 53, that great prophecy of the servant and the ministry that he performed in death, particularly. In chapter 54, the story is continued. But now, in chapter 55, we have an application and the prophet will call out in invitation.

“Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; [No seminar. No paying for the Gospel.] Come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

Because they bought water in those days without price, much less money and wine and milk. Milk and wine they bought with money, too. And they bought water, too, but this is something without money and without price.

“Why do you spend money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. [He’s talking about the promises of eternal life.] Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”

There it is; that’s what Paul is thinking about. Now, listen, notice what follows.

“Behold, I have given him [that is, David’s son] for a witness to the people a leader and commander to the people.”

In the Hebrew text, this is plural, to the peoples, he is talking not simply about Israel, but he’s talking about the ministry of the Lord Jesus is going to go out to the nations of the earth. And, Paul, in a moment, when Israel does not respond in the synagogue, he will say, “Lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” He’s talking about this very fact, that the prophet has been speaking about; and he’s learned the things that he says from the Word of God.

“Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee [He’s talking to the Messiah, and he’s saying] nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee.”

These are the Gentiles. This is inclusive of you and me. We run unto him. And some of us already have, I hope all of you have, run unto him.

“Because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he [The Lord God, the Father] hath glorified thee [The Son of David]. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: [He calls for prayer and faith. Let the wicked forsake his way, repentance and the

unrighteous man forsake his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

What a magnificent statement that is. Mr. Spurgeon, in a study of this says, “Jesus is a grand attraction, for guilty men.” Isn’t that magnificent? “Jesus is a grand attraction, for guilty men.” And for men who feel their guilt, and the burden of their sin, there can be no greater attraction than the sure mercies of David. Abundantly pardon? Why is God’s pardon abundant? Well, it’s abundant, first, because it comes from an infinite fountain. Pardon is the child of mercy and Scripture says that “with Him mercy endures forever.” And, if mercy endures forever, from him, it comes from an infinite fountain. It is distinguishing. He passes by some. He passed by the angels, when the angels fell. He saves men. It’s distinguishing mercy; but it’s infinite eternal mercy.

As a matter of fact, Paul will say, in one of his letters to the Romans, this same person talking about the sure mercies of David, he will say, “He has mercy upon whom He will have mercy; and He hardens whom He hardens.” This is because he is the eternal God. His pardon is abundant because of the objects to which pardon is extended. They are abundant. Heaven is not scant of inhabitants, one interpreter has said. And the bible makes that so plain because in Heaven, when the Apostle John sees his magnificent vision, he sees people from every tribe, kindred, tongue and nation there. In fact, he sees a multitude, which no man could number. Let us not think that because God’s mercy is distinguishing, and because he passes by some, that heaven is going to be populated by few people. That is not true. Heaven is going to be so filled with people, as testimony to the gracious mercy of an abundantly pardoning God, that you will be unable to number how many are there. Abundant pardon.

And the pardon is abundant because of the sins that are blotted out. Think of the sins of thoughts. Mr. Spurgeon says, “Sins of thoughts are like gnats in the evening.” And if you’ve ever been in Texas in July and August, you know what that means. You get out, it’s a nice, lovely afternoon. It’s finally cooled off from a hundred and ten to a hundred and six [Laughter] and so you



want to enjoy that. And it's not long before the gnats are so bothersome that you have to say, "Let's go in to the good old air conditioning." That's like human sin. Human sin are like the gnats; our minds are so filled with things that are contrary to the Word of God. Some of you are looking at me as if, "My, is your life like that?" No, I know yours is like that, too, because you're part of the human race as well. Sins of thoughts, sins of words, sins of deeds and, not only that, but the sinfulness of the sin. Here is a man who plans to do something that's wrong. Well, he's already sinned. He hasn't done his thing yet, but he's already sinned. And so he makes all of his plans to accomplish his evil deed and he's sinning all along. Why, it's like a spider's nest and all of those little spiders, because that's like our sin is. It's as your sin is, and my sin is. Sins of thought and word and deed; and then, also, things that we ought to have done and we didn't do. So he abundantly pardons; covers all of that over by the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, oh, the abundant means for sinners; why, think of the substitute who came and took those sins upon Himself. One who was very God of very God, sufficient for untold worlds. I don't know whether there's life out beyond this planet. I have no reason to think there is. I rather think that there is no life out there. But that, of course, is simply supposition as far as I'm concerned. I haven't traveled out there. And so I have no way of really knowing. And I know, so far as I can tell, there's no evidence of life out there, to this point. But let me say this to you, if there were life out there, if there were untold planets and untold people upon them, the value, the sufficiency of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ would be sufficient to cover their sins, too. For our Lord's death is sufficient in its infinite value to cover the sins of all men and others, too.

Now, that's not the same as saying the intent of God, in what he did. But his death is sufficient in value to cover those sins. What an abundant means for pardon we do have. And the abundant terms, look, it's not, "I will pardon your iniquity if you weep a little." Or "I will pardon your iniquity if you will do a bit of penance." "I will pardon your iniquity if you will bring me a bit of money." Or put some money in the collection plate. Or "I will pardon your sin if you promise to do

this. Or promise to do that.” No. It’s, “I will pardon your iniquity if you call upon the name of the Lord in faith.”

Open your heart to receive, as a free gift, the forgiveness of sins. What an abundant pardon we have when one looks at the fullness of it. When God says, “I forgive you,” that’s a valid remark from one who says, “I remove your sins as far as the East is from the West. I cast them into the depths of the sea.” As Isaiah says, in another place, “Thou has cast all my sins behind Thy back.” The word of pardon is irreversible. It is forever. Do you know that? Do you have the assurance of an eternal pardon? Is there a time to which you can point in your life, in which you came to the Lord Jesus and received as a free gift abundant pardon? Or if there is no time are you sure that you have come? Many of our young people, growing up in Christian homes, cannot think of a particular time; but they know they have come. Do you know you have come? Do you know that abundant pardon? And then, why, like the writers of Hebrews, time would fail me if I were to talk of the blessing that attends this pardon; bondage to freedom, anxiety to peace, frustration to divine guidance; from the disturbed condition of many of us to the comfort of the Holy Spirit; from a troubled life to a counselor who gives counsel that is always right; to a Heavenly Father. So there is no place for despair, even for the biggest sinner in this auditorium. If you come to the Lord God, he will abundantly pardon your sin.

So, you, Paul, in the audience, you blind Bartimeous, you Zacchaeus, who have wronged others, you Mary Magdalene out of whom went seven devils; there is abundant pardon in the sure mercies of David that flow out of the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross.

Well, Paul wouldn’t be the kind of preacher that he is, if he didn’t say a bit more about this. We sing, “Who is a pardoning God like thee, or who has grace so rich and free.” That’s true. But we ought to make the application and Paul made the applications. And don’t think it didn’t take courage in that synagogue, for the apostle to say the things that he said because he went on and said, he didn’t say, “You know, God is a great God of love, so won’t you come and hold his hand or won’t you open up your heart and let him in.” No. Listen to how he ends his sermon. Sometimes we need to be

shaken a bit. So he says, in verse 38, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” That’s the *sola fide*. By faith alone, by grace alone, by Christ alone, we are declared righteous, something that keeping the law could never do; for no man can keep the law. When we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God pronounces in a decree that that individual who has believed in the Lord Jesus stands before him righteous, with a righteousness that satisfies the claims of Heaven. That’s what it means to be justified. It means, as the old Puritans used to say, “Just as if I had never sinned.” And we could say, “Just as if I had always done everything right.” Or, as William Cunningham said, “The righteousness of God is that righteousness which God’s righteousness requires him to require.” And that’s what we have when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now, he doesn’t stop there. He says, “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: For I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.” And the apostle senses in the audience there is rebellion against what he is saying. And he says, “Look, the same thing that happened in the days of Habakkuk when he warned Israel that the Chaldeans were going to come down and that was the hand of divine judgment upon them because of their disobedience. And those Chaldeans came and they did not respond. The same thing that happened then is going to happen to you because you have rejected the message of the Lord God; and, in spite of adequate warning, you are turning away from him. And the next Sunday, you will say, “Lo, we turn to the Gentiles,” because he sees that they are adamant in their rebellion against him.

And so, this morning, I say to you in this audience, do not think for one moment, that this same kind of appeal is not being addressed by the Holy Spirit to our generation and, particularly, to our church people, who have sat under the hearing of the Word of God for literally generations, but are turning away from the things of the Word of God. “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and

perish.” God working a work in our days, a work which we do not believe, though a man declare it unto you.

May I just, very quickly, tell you a very, very striking account of an event that happened in one of the most important Americans. Most of you know of Aaron Burr. Mr. Burr was one of the most brilliant men of his day. He went to Princeton University and when he graduated, he graduated with the highest honors that had ever been given to any graduate of Princeton; and even in nineteen fifty, when I was on the campus of Princeton University, on several occasions for meetings, even then his grades were still the highest that had ever been earned by anyone at Princeton. I don't know where he stands now, but I'm sure it's not more than two or three, if he's not still number one.

There was one young man in the Christian group that had a chance to beat Mr. Burr's average, and I don't remember how he did. His name was Bill Rush, and where he is today I don't know. He's probably the president of some corporation. But Mr. Burr was a very intelligent man. The general feeling of history is that he was a traitor; but many books, some just recently, have been written to try to prove that Mr. Burr was not really a traitor. That's beside the point.

Mr. Burr, when he was on the campus of Princeton University, was in the midst of a revival that was going on. And he was approached by others about spiritual things; and, in fact, he was so disturbed over the thing that was happening, unable to make a decision, he went to see one of his professors and told him about his dilemma. And the professor gave him the Bible. Can you imagine that in one of our modern, Ivy League universities today? To go to a professor and ask for help and the professor recommends the Bible? Well, this was a great thing to do for Mr. Burr. He gave him a Bible. He said, “Go to your room and settle this matter on your knees.” He said, later, instead of doing that, he tried to shake off the power of the Holy Spirit. And, finally, in desperation, he cried out, “God, let me alone and I'll let you alone!” And as soon as he said it, all conviction left. Years later, he had a friend whom he admired very much. “Dr. Burr,” this friend said, “I'd like for you to meet a friend of mine.” “If he's anything like you, I'd like to meet him,” said Dr. Burr. “His name is Jesus Christ,” said his friend, “And I'd like for you to meet him.” He said, “The cold sweat popped

out on Dr. Burr’s forehead.” Now, we say far-head down South, but anyway. He said, “When I was nineteen, I faced the question of Jesus Christ, and finally I cried out, ‘God, let me alone and I’ll let you alone.’” And then, Mr. Burr said to his friend, “From that day to this, I never had one desire to become a Christian.”

There is such a thing as divine retribution. And may God speak to our hearts and may we not come to the place where the Word of God is of no meaning whatsoever for us. If you are here today and you have never believed in Christ, I’m going to give the simple invitation. Come to him! Believe in him! Cast yourself upon him! He will abundantly pardon all of your iniquities because he has abundant mercy that endures forever. Come to Christ! Believe in him! Trust him!

[Prayer] May they come to Christ, for abundant pardon. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.