



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 12:37-50

“The Mystery of Unbelief”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We’re turning to John chapter 12 in the Scripture reading, verse 37 though verse 50 is our reading for today. I know you will notice as we read these verses that it is a kind of summary of the book to this point as preparation for what shall follow in the upper room discourse beginning with chapter 13. John chapter 12 and verse 37, John writes,

“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.”

In the 8:30 message I did not make any comment with reference to this, and I might not in the preceding hour, but I would like for you to notice that John says, “These things said Esaias when he saw his glory and spake of him.” Now of course when one turns to Isaiah 6 where this passage is found, there is no reference directly to Jesus Christ. What Isaiah sees in the temple is the vision of

Yahweh or the Lord of the Old Testament. And it is possible that when John writes, “These things said Esaias when he saw his glory and spake of him,” that he intends to identify the one who is the Old Testament Yahweh who dealt with the children of Israel with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is also possible that he means simply that when one sees the Lord Jesus Christ one does see the glory of Yahweh. Now in the light of the context that may be the preferable view, but it is possible that he intends us to understand that when Isaiah saw that vision of the Lord high and lifted up he is seeing a vision of Jesus Christ.

“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.”

It’s a marvelous picture of the mediatorial work of our Lord who as the mediator is completely subject to the Father in carrying out the redemptive work. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this magnificent summary of this magnificent gospel. And we thank Thee for the mighty signs which the Lord Jesus did accomplish for we know

as John has said that they're designed to identify him as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God who should come, accomplish the atoning work and make it possible for those who are sinners to possess everlasting life.

We thank Thee for the great plan of God, and we thank Thee Lord that it has been proceeding according to the plans made in the ages of eternity past. We look forward to the accomplishment of all of the goals of our great God. And we would today worship Thee and praise Thee that in wonderful grace Thou hast included us.

As we think Lord of what the Scriptures say of us and recognize our lost condition that we do not deserve any blessing from Thee that we deserve to suffer eternal punishment. We are so grateful that Thou hast in grace elected a people and brought that people to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and O Father we pray that if there should be some in this auditorium who have not yet believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, do not give them any rest nor peace until seeing the Son of God as the sacrifice for sin, they lean upon him and what he has done for time and eternity.

We thank Thee too for all of the other blessings of life that are ours. And we give Thee praise for the promises of God. We pray Lord that we may learn to lean upon them in all of the experiences of life.

We especially bring before Thee those whose names are listed on our calendar of concern, some in Believers Chapel, some friends and relatives of people who are in Believers Chapel. We bring them all to Thee Lord and we pray that Thou wilt minister to them in accordance with Thy will and give healing.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege of the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and Lord bless that ministry today wherever it goes forth. We pray that Thy blessing may be upon the ministry that goes out from this chapel, over the radio, through the Bible classes, through the publications ministry and through other forms of outreach. O, Father may Thy hand be upon it for good.

We thank Thee for the indications that we do have that there are individuals all over this part of the world who listen and respond to the things that are taught here Sunday and Sunday, day after day, Thou hast been good to us Lord, and we give Thee thanks.

We pray Thy blessing upon the elders and the deacons. Give them wisdom and guidance. May Lord, Thy hand be upon the ministry of the chapel for the glorification of the name of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] One of the mysteries of the word of God is the mystery of why some individuals respond to the message of the Lord Jesus Christ and why some do not. Everywhere that individuals gather to discuss the Bible that question comes up. Friday afternoon going to the airport in Chicago the young man who drives me back to the airport every Friday afternoon brought up the question because we were discussing a course in Pauline theology that I was teaching and that he had taken the year before with another teacher, and I had commented upon the fact that I had been reading his notes and had found him to be a man who was a true believer in the sovereignty of God. He was a man who just taught one course at the seminary and then had to go back to Brazil where he serves on a theological faculty in Sao Palo. And the young man brought up again the question of why it is that some respond and some do not.

Well it is a mystery in one sense, and yet in another sense the Scriptures do give us a great deal of information to make plain to us why it is that some respond and some do not. Ultimately there may be a point of mystery in it. But in the final analysis it appears to come down to the distinguishing grace of God. Well that's something that comes before us in this section as John reviews the ministry of the Lord Jesus to this point. And our subject this morning is “The Mystery of Unbelief.”

The apostle brings his readers to the climax of the public ministry of our Lord because with chapter 13 in the upper room discourse he will begin to speak to the apostles in the light of the fact that he will no longer be with them. So the whole tenor of the gospel will change in the next few

chapters. The apostle has been speaking primarily of the miracles that the Lord Jesus has preformed, and he has been desires to bring his readers to the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God and that in this belief of that confession they might have life through his name. That’s why he begins by saying, “Though he had done many signs before them.” So here is a point of pause in his ministry in which he will summarize what has been taking place, and furthermore he will give a bit of an explanation of why it is that the vast majority of the nation Israel having heard the marvelous ministry of the Lord Jesus accompanied by the magnificent signs has nevertheless not responded.

It’s almost as if someone were being guided through some unusual site. I think of Carlsbad Caverns because it used to be the custom for guides when they took you down in the caverns to stop about half way down, and they would review for you what they have come through, or what you have come through and then what lies before those who are with the party. And in a sense the apostle is reviewing the place from which his readers have come, and he is attempting to give a bit of a philosophical explanation of what has happened and why it has happened.

Now his words that follow contain an explanation and then finally a word by way of summation from the Lord Jesus himself. You see people who were reading the gospel who were Jewish might have a problem with what has happened because surely as one looked at the history of the Nation Israel and reflected upon the fact that God elected Abraham and gave Abraham magnificent promises that included a blessing upon his name, included a land, included a people, included ultimately worldwide blessing and then all through the Old Testament period of time God had spoken through the nation Israel and its prophets and its priests and others, and now we have this strange situation in which the vast majority of the nation so far as we can tell lived in unbelief. And when the message of Jesus Christ came to them they did not respond to it.

That would pose a problem, and when we have on the one hand the leaders in Israel, the priests, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the students of the Bible standing on one side and on the other side, this man from Nazareth, Jesus with a small company of people, at his death about five hundred or so. And here the mass of the nation contending that he was a blasphemer, that he

was not teaching the truth, and this small company of rather insignificant people made up of fisherman and others for the most part contending that they were really given the true interpretation of the history of Israel.

You can see how someone might raise the question, “Did not God speak to our fathers? Did he not give us the divine revelation of the kingdom? This man Jesus said the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” So they would say, “Did not he give us these things?” Can it be that this small company of people has the truth and this great mass of people, the leaders in the nation should not have the truth? And I’m sure that it came down to something like this, for they must have seen the issue. It’s so plain. If these people are right, if these leaders in the nation and the great mass of people are right, these people are wrong. And if these people are right, all of these people are wrong. And it was a matter of life and death so they were contending and so they were contending also. So you can understand why the Apostle John might have felt it necessary to explain how it should be that the great mass of the people should be in unbelief and actually should be wrong.

Now later on the Apostle Paul in the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters of the Epistle to the Romans feels it necessary to do something of the same thing. There in the first 8 chapters he unfolds in a magnificent exposition of the doctrine of salvation the way by which men are saved out of sin by grace brought ultimately to the place where they are to be glorified and Israel is missing from among the number of the people. And immediately the question would be raised. Paul, is not Israel the mediator of divine salvation, and you are saying that there is a people of God that are an elect people of God that have arisen through this gospel that you are proclaiming? But Israel is not among them? Paul, either you are right and all of Israel is wrong, or Israel is right and your gospel is wrong and furthermore this man of whom you are speaking Jesus of Nazareth is an imposter and is not really the great prophet, the great priest, the great king who is to come.

So both John and Paul find it necessary to explain Jewish unbelief. And it’s rather interesting that they both do it on the same basis. They look back in the Old Testament and they go

over the Old Testament and expound those Scriptures that have to do with the history of the nation Israel. The Apostle Paul in Romans 9, 10 and 11 looks at the Old Testament passages and deals with them and now John the Apostle does much the same thing, not so extensively for he says, “Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?” And further he cites another text from Isaiah in order to explain what has happened. So both of them then are seeking to explain Jewish unbelief in the light of the presentation of the gospel through Christ.

Well the apostle begins by saying, “Though he had done so many signs before them,” he does not of course detail all of the signs. He’s made a selection of the signs, seven of them. Just for a quick review, first of all he turned the water into wine. That’s suggestive of the new age brought by the new age brought by the Lord Jesus Christ. He has healed the nobleman’s son. That suggests that healing comes through faith and through faith alone. He had healed the impotent man. That suggests that there is a new power that is provided through the Lord Jesus Christ and his ministry. He like all of the gospel writers has described the feeding of the five thousand and in that a new sustenance, a new food is provided through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the hidden manna, as he himself will say to the church at Pergamum in the Book of Revelation. He walks on the water as if to suggest that he is a new guide for life and amidst all of the troubles of life the Lord Jesus Christ is sure to bring his people through. He heals the blind man as if to show that when one comes to Christ he has new eyes to see. There is a new enlightenment that he provides.

This morning I sought to illustrate this from Numbers chapter 10 verse 29 though verse 36 where Moses speaking to Hobab his father-in-law says that he would like for Hobab to follow the children of Israel as they make their way to the Promised Land. Moses said, “We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, ‘I will give it to you,’ come with us and we will do thee good for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel.” Quite an invitation to Hobab who was not an Israelite, but a Midianite. “Come on with us. The Lord has spoken wonderful things of us and if you follow

us he will do you good.” And Hobab replied, “I don't want to go. I'm going to depart to my own land and to my own kindred.” And then Moses again appeals to him. He says, “Don't leave us Hobab, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes.” I think that's a lapse on the part of Moses. After all the Lord had said, “Moses I'm going to guide the children of Israel by giving you a pillar of cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night.” And that is to be your guide. When the pillar of fire or cloud stays in one place, you're to stay in one place. And when it moves, you are to move. You do not need any Hobab, he might have said to Moses.

Now very frequently in the work of the Lord and in the life of the Lord we fall into the same kind of trap. We tend to find more confidence in our Hobabs around us than in the fact that the Holy Spirit indwells us and is to be our eyes. In fact the Old Testament says, “I will guide Thee with mine eye,” Psalm 32 and verse 8. Psalm 34 expresses the fact that the eyes of the Lord are upon the believer. But sometimes and it's often only natural that we have, we have more confidence in our Hobab's than we can see than in this invisible God that we cannot see. Well the Lord Jesus healed the blind man. He is able to give enlightenment. He's able to guide his people.

And then finally the climatic miracle was the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus. That was our Lord's way, and John's way of stressing the fact that when new life comes, it comes through Christ. He is able to give birth to life. He is able ultimately to resurrect to eternal life those who have believed in him. So, “Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him.” How amazing. One would think having seen some of these signs that a person would immediately respond to them, but that is not true. There are individuals who have read the Scriptures over and over again who have not responded to them.

Now one might ask the question, what is the cause of this unbelief? Well we read in the 38th verse that John added in order, “That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled.” In other words, the signs were for the purpose of fulfilling the Scriptures which had prophesied that Israel would not believe. So the first cause for the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ is it was

predicted. Like Judas, Jesus said, “The Son of Man goeth as it is written concerning him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed. So, “Though he had done so many signs before him they believed not on him in order that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled.”

Now John cites Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 1. He turns to that favorite Messianic passage. The evangelist of the Old Testament it has been said is Isaiah the prophet, and he begins that great 53rd chapter by saying, “Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?” I’ve always thought that the apostles understood the Old Testament a whole lot better than their critics. Modern critics like to criticize the apostles for failure to follow the contextual use of the Old Testament. In the final analysis the apostles understood the Old Testament a whole lot more than their modern critics. It’s a rather interesting thing, you can attend conferences where the modern critics are and they have sometimes difficulty finding passages in the Old Testament. They will say, “I think that’s in such and such a book.” But the apostles were students of the word of God. They were deep students of the word of God and they had a most unusual ability to take the Old Testament and apply it beautifully to the situation.

Now I’d like for you to notice that when John cites this passage it has a most definite and intimate connection with this situation. He says, “That the Scripture might be fulfilled that said, ‘Lord who hath believed our report?’” That is the report that we have made. Now the report that he is talking about here is of course the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Who hath believed our report?” The teaching concerning the Lord Jesus. Later this passage will be used by the nation Israel in the future, but here John makes the application to the present time. “Who has believed the teaching that we have been propounding concerning the Lord Jesus Christ?” Report, what a beautiful application of that passage. And then “To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

Now the arm of the Lord is a figure of the power of God. How was the power of God manifested in the ministry of the Lord Jesus? Well in these mighty signs that he is speaking about. So to whom, who has believed the message that we have given concerning him and to whom has the

significance of the signs been revealed. It is of course an expression of amazement over the unbelief of the nation which shall be made in the nation, which shall be made in the future, but here John applies it to the present situation. An expression of amazement that there are so few who have responded to the message that Jesus has given and that the apostles have given concerning him. And also amazement that they have not responded to the exhibition to the might and power of God in the miracles that the Lord Jesus has preformed.

Now of course there is a clue here to why they have not responded, and it's in the one word revealed. “And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?” in other words, it is not our intelligence. It is not our acumen that is the reason why some respond and why others do not. What is it that makes believers out of individuals? Well, the clue is right here. He says, “To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? No one can truly understand that Jesus is the Lord. No one can respond to the message and teaching that he gave. No one can see the significance of the mighty signs, to whom those significances have not been revealed. Can you not see that the apostles all harmoniously affirm the necessity of the initial work of God in a human heart. To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

Now that's the first reason he gives for the unbelief of the nation Israel. God has not revealed the significance of the ministry of the Lord Jesus to them, but further he goes on and speaks even more mysteriously if we might call it that. “Therefore they could not believe,” or literally the Greek text says, “For this reason they could not believe because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.” Oh what a strange text this is. Now in order to understand it one must at least go back to the Old Testament in Isaiah chapter 6 and review what God said to Isaiah there.

Now Isaiah chapter 6 is the passage in which Isaiah describes his call. And in the description of his call he has the magnificent vision of the glory of God as he went into the temple. Uzziah had been a great king. He had strengthened Israel. He had made Israel a real power. He had

ruled for about forty years. He had been responsible for a number of military improvements. He was the Ronald Reagan of his day. Therefore of course he was a very popular king because he had strengthened Israel and Israel had become a power. But unfortunately Uzziah like many of us who are human beings in the last days of his life, his heart was lifted up in pride and arrogance and being lifted up in pride and arrogance he went into the temple and sought to offer incenses and the result was that God judged him with leprosy and he spent the remaining days of his life in a lepers house. But he was a great king and Israel no doubt was very discouraged when Uzziah found it necessary to effectively abdicate from the throne. And Isaiah was evidently was very discouraged himself as he looked about at his nation which had lost its great leader.

Well Isaiah is given this magnificent vision of the glory of God just to remind Isaiah of the fact that though Isaiah passes on, though the great kings of the earth pass on, he is still there. And it is in him that our faith is truly to rest. So he is given the Lord on the throne high and lifted up with his train filling the temple.

Now in the course of this unfolding of the fact that the Lord is there Isaiah is given the message that he is to preach. Now what would you think his message would be? Well it would be to go out and talk about the Messiah that is to come and if they will believe in him they will have everlasting life. Well of course that's a great message and Isaiah does include that in the message that he gives, but strictly speaking the message that he gives is just the opposite of that. Well not just the opposite, but it certainly is a strikingly different kind of message.

Listen to what God said to him. “I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said Isaiah, Here am I; send me.” What's your message, Lord? And then we read, I heard the voice of the Lord God and the Lord God said to me, the 9th verse, “Go,” ah, I'm going to be the messenger of the Lord, “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.”

Now notice the next words, “Make the heart of this people fat.” Now that's not a blessing. That's a curse. “Make their ears heavy. Shut their eyes, lest they see,” listen this is the Lord God in

heaven saying this. “Make their heart fat, make their ears heavy, shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed.” In other words, Isaiah your message is to be a message of prevention of healing. What an amazing message. What an amazing message that a God who is the God of glory and the God of grace should say to this people, “Isaiah there is no hope. They abide under divine retribution and reprobation. Prevent them from responding. Amazing isn't it?”

Did you know that the Lord Jesus cited this text in Matthew chapter 13 and said that it pertained to the people of his day. Did you know that the Apostle Paul referred to this text in Acts chapter 28 and said it referred to those people to whom he was ministering. And here in John, John unites with Paul and our Lord in applying this text to the people of their day. There is a difference. Isaiah was told in imperational language, do it. And John since it has been done says, using declarative language, “He has blinded their eyes. He has hardened their heart that they should not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts and be converted and I should heal them.” In other words, the I will not, I will not, I will not, I will not finally becomes I cannot, I cannot, I cannot, I cannot. What a solemn message. If we continue to reject the message of the word of God there is such a thing as a doctrine of divine retribution. And in fact the Bible makes so plain that if there is a doctrine of divine election and nothing could be plainer for one who reads the Scriptures. There is also a doctrine of divine reprobation. They both are true.

Just recently there has been issued a book by a well-known New Testament scholar called *The Justification of God*. It's an attempt to expound Romans chapter 9, a chapter in which remember the apostle writes, “Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated,” which raises all kinds of questions. And then in a few moments he talks about Pharaoh and then he cites the passage from the Old Testament in which God says, “I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and I will harden whom I will harden.” He is an absolutely sovereign God.

John Piper who has written this book has been a professor at Bethel Theological Seminary, is now a pastor in Minneapolis of a large Baptist church there, and a well-known scholar. Piper's

contention in this book is that it is the manifestation of the glory of God that the apostle is interested in and this position that is set out by the Apostle Paul in Romans 9 and I think is set out here by the Apostle John is designed ultimately to show his glory in his power to have mercy upon whom he will have power and also his power to harden whom he will harden. Ultimately God will be completely justified. But his glory is manifested in the fact that there is such a thing as the doctrine of divine retribution and also reprobation.

There is a story that H. A. Ironside tells in his book at this point as he's seeking to expound this particular text. And it happened to him in his ministry. He used to minister in a Sunday school in San Francisco and he was trying to illustrate the truth and he said to a group of boys and girls who were in his class, “How sad to know boys and girls, each time you say no to the Lord Jesus your heart gets a little harder, and if you keep on saying no the heart gets harder and harder until ultimately, or by and by, God will call it a heart of stone. Those are scriptural languages. And you no longer care about the things of God but you persist in spurning his grace and you will therefore die in your sins. He said he was pleading with the boys and girls to give their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ in their early days. He said there was a little girl just a little tot in his class just five years old.”

And then H. A. I. adds the words, “We sometimes think these little folks take nothing in.” Sometimes we do. Sometimes students of Christian education make, what I think, is a wrong statement that it is impossible for children to respond to the gospel really. But at any rate, he said, “Her eyes were fastened on me as I spoke. Her mother had brought her to Sunday school and on the way home she did not have a word to say her mother later told me. She was thinking of her own father who never went to church or Sunday school and when she got to the house. She walked in. It was Sunday morning and he was sitting in his easy chair, looking at the news paper and smoking a cigar.”

A wonderful kind of Sunday morning to spend. You know you don't have to work. You can just stay home and read the paper and have a good time. When I was growing up when I got old enough to say to my parents. I don't want to go to Sunday school and they were not anxious to

make me go I spent my time out on the golf course because there is not nearly as much traffic on the golf course Sunday morning. There were some people who attended churches and so you didn't have the problem of getting around the course. Sunday morning was a wonderful time to play golf.

At any rate, he had his paper before him and the little girl jumped into the room ahead of her mother. She darted over into her father's arms. She leapt up in his arms and she said, “Daddy, Daddy feel your heart. Is it getting like stone?” He said, “What are you talking about?” She said, “Well, the man at Sunday school said if you say no to Jesus you're going to get a stone in your stomach. Have you got a stone there?” [Laughter] “Oh, Daddy I hope you haven't for if you have you can't be saved.” Well H. A. I. said that the result was that this man that very morning knelt upon his knees and received the Lord Jesus as his Savior.

“Therefore for this reason they could not believe because Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.” There is a divine law of retribution. The unwilling may become unable to respond to the gospel. The ultimate cause of unbelief is the sovereignty of the Lord God and behind that we cannot go.

I wonder as I think back over the fact that Isaiah was told to give this message to those people and then in our Lord's day came the climatic revelation of the grace of God and John's affirmation what Isaiah prophesied has come to pass. What flows out of this of course is that the salvation of God goes out to the Gentiles to the whole world. And ultimately Jewish unbelief has led to the salvation of a vast number of Gentiles and so there is something good that has come from Jewish unbelief. The apostle in Romans 9, 10 and 11 of course goes on to say you Gentiles should not feel proud because you stand only by faith and if you do not continue in your faith you like Israel shall be cut off as branches off of the olive tree, and in fact Israel shall be grafted in again. Notice the future tense “Shall be grafted in again,” for God is able to graft them in again. And in of course he goes on to say that Israel shall be saved. So the divine program is working its way out exactly as God intended that it should work its way out. That probably lies in the background of

Isaiah tell them that their eyes should be blinded, harden their hearts, so that they don't see, so that they're not converted, so that they're not healed because greater things are in view in the future.

Well lest one get the impression that all of Israel and all of the important people in Israel were unbelievers, John adds in verse 42, “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him.” Why he has in mind there no doubt, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews and Joseph of Arimathea a member of the Counsel, but though he was a believer, John says later in this very gospel did not give his testimony because he was a secret believer. He was afraid, and so, he adds, “Nevertheless they were not confessing him lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” I wonder incidentally if when he says, “Lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” He's still talking about why people are in unbelief.

Now of course he's talking about people who are in saving unbelief. That is unbelief that prevents salvation. In the case of these men they were true Christians but their unbelief prevents others from responding to the gospel and of course destroys the joy that they have. And thus because they were afraid they might be put out of the synagogue, they did not own up to their faith. Even believers can be so weak that they do not confess their faith and therefore become instrumentalities of the restraint of the spread of the gospel. I hope that there are none of us who are actually restraining the propagation of the gospel because we don't have the courage to say in front of our friends, our business colleges that we are believers in Jesus Christ.

Desiderius Erasmus was very sympathetic with Luther in many ways, yet he would not break with the church of Rome. He understood what Luther was trying to say and finally later on begins to deny it, but men look back and they rarely know who Erasmus is, but Luther is the person who is known and Erasmus' weak stand ultimately, probably an unbelieving stand in my opinion, because he would not break with Rome, and so as a result of that the gospel suffers. Jesus, and shall it ever be, a mortal man ashamed of Thee?

“Jesus, and shall it ever be, A mortal man, ashamed of Thee? Ashamed of Thee, whom angels praise, Whose glories shine through endless days?” Could it be that someone who knows him is ashamed of him. Well yes, John says, it’s possible. It’s possible.

Now there is a brief summary of the ministry and John doesn't tell us when these words were spoken by the Lord. He doesn't tell us the place where they were spoken. He doesn't even give us the occasion that caused Jesus to cry out evidently in a loud voice and say, “He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” So, it’s John’s meditation on the words of our Lord and he puts them here as the summation of the ministry. And if I were to sum it up I would say that Jesus says his presence is the presence of God.

When the Psalmist prays, “My soul thirsteth for God,” he is essentially thirsting for the Lord Jesus Christ. When the philosopher speaks about seeking to know God. He’s really seeking to know the Lord Jesus Christ. John says his love is the love of God and he says also that his work is the saving work of God. Jesus Christ is the perfect representation of God, speaking the words of God, being God to the nation in his day. And I think also in verse 47 through verse 50 he says he’s the perfect mouthpiece of God. His words are the words of God. At the Great White Throne Judgment the words of the Lord Jesus will judge men. Of course all judgments committed to the Son and the Lord Jesus will be there to judge men, but it is a judgment that is in accordance with his word. Incidentally you can tell from this that Jesus is no figure of independent greatness during his mediatorial work. He’s the word of God, as John says. He’s the representative of the Lord God. And so at the Great White Throne Judgment men shall be judged by what Jesus said, how he interpreted the divine revelation.

What kinds of excuses do you think men will have at the Great White Throne Judgment? Well I can imagine a man, when the judgment falls upon them of the lake of fire or the blackness of darkness forever, “But Lord I am a religious man.” And the word will come, “Did not the Lord Jesus say Ye must be born again.” Religion is not enough. “I’m a good man, at least as good as

most, and certainly as good as a lot of those people that attend church.” Ah, but did not the Lord Jesus say that thou shouldst love the Lord with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself?” The commandment is not simply to be a good man by human standards but to be a perfect man. If one seeks to attain to heaven by what we do. I don't believe faith alone will save, but did not Jesus say, “Only believe?” Do not the Scriptures say that you are saved by grace through faith? Do not the Scriptures say that we are justified through faith? But I believe in good works. I believe that men must do good works. Ah, but did not Jesus say, “If ye then being evil?” There are no good men. To do a good work one must do a work that proceeds out of faith in God and be directed toward the glory of God. All other works are self serving works. No man can do a good work from the divine stand point who is not a believer in Jesus Christ.

I cannot accept the deity of Christ. Did not John say, “No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him?” In seeing him we do see God. Did not the Lord Jesus say, “Before Abraham came to be, I am,” affirming his preexistent existence? His eternal existence it would seem. Did he not say, “I and the Father are one,” one thing, posses the same nature.

I cannot accept the substitutionary death. I think that the death of Jesus Christ was a good influence but I don't think that he died in the place of others. We must stand for and with ourselves. No one can stand for us. No one can suffer for us. We must suffer ourselves. There is no such thing as substitution. Penal substitution, some man bearing the punishment for someone else? That's unjust. Did not Jesus say, “The Son of Man did not come as a minister of himself, but he came to give his life a ransom for many?” Did he not teach the substitutionary death that he died? These words of the Lord Jesus shall judge men at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Well I thought and my preacher told me that we're all going to the same place although we're going in different ways and ultimately we shall all reach there. And furthermore did not Paul Tillich say that? Do not the great scholars of the Christian church affirm that? Is not this the view

of the mass of men who are in Christian theological seminaries today? But did not Jesus say, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me?”

Well a loving God will not send anyone to an eternity of punishment. How can we possibly believe in a loving God and affirm that he would actually send people to hellfire for eternity? Well I can imagine that someone might say, “How did you get that idea of a loving God?” The idea of a loving God comes from Christianity. The gods of the heathen were not loving gods. It’s only in Christianity that we find a loving God. But do you not also know that this God is a just God and a righteous God? Do you remember the message that came to Noah in his day? “Noah, build an ark because after a time I'm going to destroy the earth because of the sinfulness of men.” So Noah preaches. He preached by every nail that he hammered into that ark, and men mocked as they passed Noah. But he convicted the world, oh convicted the world of the fact that God was more important, and the word of God was more important to him than what people thought and were saying.

And can you not imagine them standing around, leaning up against the tree, watching Noah and his sons build the ark, month after month, year after year, a hundred and twenty years waiting? Can you not hear them saying, “Noah, he’s a very severe man. He believes in that doctrine of election. He believes in the doctrine of sovereignty of God. Can you imagine that? He even believes that God’s not going to be frustrated, and furthermore he believes that a loving God would actually send people to a Christless eternity, a soulless eternity, and he would actually drown the whole world? Can you imagine that? He believes that. He’s a fanatic if there ever was one. Does not he know that a loving God will not send anyone to hell?” But he did. He did, and he’s a loving God, but he’s a just God and a righteous God.

You see when we stand before the Great White Throne Judgment if we stand there the words of Jesus Christ will judge us. “He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words hath one that judgeth him.” You would think that he’s going to say now the Father will judge him. “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in that day. For I have not spoken of myself but the

Father which hath sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting.”

Incidentally you’ll notice that he says that he does not offer an invitation. He commands men to believe. His commandment is life everlasting. “God commandeth men everywhere to repent,” the Apostle Paul will later say in Acts chapter 17 and verse 30.

Well our time is up and we must stop. What a sad thing it would be for some of us in this auditorium or some of us who are listening over the radio to say ultimately the harvest has passed, the summer has ended, and we are not saved. May God deliver us from that pitiful confession. If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we remind you that there is a way of escape through the blood that is shed. Come to Christ. Confess your lost condition. Flee to him who saves to the uttermost those that come unto God by him. May God deliver you from the judgment that is sure to come.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these magnificent words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ. O God may it never be said of our generation that our hearts have been made fat, our ears have become heavy, our eyes have become blinded and that there is no healing...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]