



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 12:38–50

Gospel of Matthew

“Jonah, the Unclean Spirit, and the Family of Jesus”

TRANSCRIPT

Now we're turning to Matthew chapter 12 and verse 38 and reading through verse 50 for our Scripture reading.

“Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Master, we would see a sign from thee.’ But he answered and said unto them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah, for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty,

“Jonah, the Unclean Spirit, and the Family of Jesus” by S. Lewis Johnson
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swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.’ While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, ‘Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.’ But he answered and said unto him that told him, ‘Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?’ And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, ‘Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.’”

May God bless this reading of a portion from his Word.

Our subject for today is “Jonah, the Unclean Spirit and the Family of Jesus.” There are some familiar incidental questions that come before us in the passage we have read for our Scripture reading this morning. Was Jonah really swallowed by a whale? Was our Lord crucified on Friday, or is the tradition of Good Friday just that—tradition?

Tertullian said many hundreds of years ago, “Custom without truth is error grown old.” And is it, in the light of our Lord’s statement that he would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, wrong for us to celebrate Good Friday as the day of our Lord’s crucifixion?

Has our Lord some special relationship to the Virgin Mary? Some special spiritual relationship that might justify her being called a mediatrix? Is it justifiable to speak of her as being bodily assumed into heaven in a way different from all of the other saints? Is it really true to think of the Virgin Mary as someone who needed to be saved just as you and I needed to be saved from our sins?

There are some of the questions that arise out of this passage, somewhat incidentally, because they are not the primary thrust of the section. There is one other thing that I think is significant here, too, and it concerns this final paragraph, verse 46 through verse 50. That paragraph contains one of the most important descriptions of true believers to one another in the whole of the Bible, and I dare say that if we did understand and carried out what is stated in those verses, then we should not have problems of Christian fellowship in the meetings of the saints.

That our relationship to one another transcends that of blood could not fail to make a difference among many of us in the church of the Lord Jesus. “A Christian’s only relatives,” said an early church martyr, “are the saints.” Now that is true to biblical teaching, and I say that that section is of the greatest importance for a local church struggling over the problems of relationships to one another.

Now we have reached the portion of Matthew—and I’ve been repeating this over and over again—in which an hostility to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, has reached its peak. We have in the 12th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew at least five illustrations of opposition to him. And I think as we noted last week that the climactic manifestation of opposition to the Son of God is when our Lord healed the dumb demoniac, his charge—or his accusation from the Jewish leaders that he was guilty of casting out demons by the prince of Beelzebub—and our Lord spoke those very solemn words about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and how it would be possible to be forgiven of sin against the Son of Man, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would never be forgiven. Not only not in this age but in the age to come, when the Messiah is here in person again in the millennial kingdom.

Now that, I think, is a kind of personal climax of the opposition to the Messiah, and we will note, next week, when we begin our study of the 13th chapter that the tone of this Gospel begins to change. But we’re looking now at the last section in which two or three illustrations of hostility come before us.

Now in the 38th verse through the 42nd verse, the Lord Jesus speaks about the sign of the Prophet Jonah. Evidently, after he had given that very stirring and strong passage concerning

unpardonable sin, some of the scribes and Pharisees went off and began to deliberate with themselves. And after a deliberation for a period of time, in which they undoubtedly deliberated over the warning and challenge that he had submitted to them, the Pharisees returned. And they asked him saying, “Master, we would see a sign from thee.”

The request has all of the veneer of a politeness, but it comes from men who are, at heart, hypocritical. And they’re looking for an entirely different kind of sign from the signs that they have been receiving. Now he has been performing miraculous signs for the whole of his ministry up to this point, and so the idea of coming to the Lord Jesus after all of these mighty messianic miracles and asking, we want a sign from thee, is the boldest kind of disbelief and opposition to the ministry of the Messiah.

The Apostle Paul said, for the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom. It is the characteristic, so the apostle states, for the Jews to require a sign. What kind of sign did they require? Did they require him to make some change in the heavenly bodies? Did they wish for him to do some unusual form of sky-writing? Did they want him to give them some vision of an angel or archangel, such as Michael, at their beck-and-call? He has already performed miracles that anyone with an open mind would have called marvelous miracles. And now they ask a further sign from him.

It’s not surprising that the Lord Jesus should refuse to give that sign. He speaks of them as an evil and adulterous generation. Now what a revealing charge that is, too. Because you see, the relationship between the Nation Israel and the Lord was the relationship of marriage, according to the Old Testament. God spoke of the marriage between Israel and Yahweh. Now, if a person breaks a marriage bond, he is guilty of adultery. And Israel has broken the marriage bond, and it is not surprising, then, that the Lord Jesus should address that as an evil and adulterous generation. It is an accusation that they have broken the marriage bond.

But he speaks to the point at issue which is, we want to see a sign from thee. It is the activity of an evil and adulterous generation to seek after a sign, he says, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. We all know the story of Jonah, and you, especially, because you have

just heard, probably, an exposition of that book right here in Believers Chapel. We know the story of how Jonah the rebellious prophet was given a commission by God to preach to the Gentile city which was abiding in unbelief: the great city of Nineveh.

He fought against it with all of his natural man rebellion against God, and finally went down to the sea and took a boat for the opposite direction. As a result of this trip and the storm that arose because Jonah was on the boat, he was cast into the Mediterranean Sea, and Scripture tells us that God prepared a great fish which swallowed the prophet and brought him back and spit him out upon the land. I am sure in the presence of some followers of Isaac Walton who must have fled pell-mell from the seashore, leaving some of their equipment behind.

This man came out. Undoubtedly, his skin had been touched by some of the gastric juices inside the belly of that great fish. He came out with a sun tan that one did not acquire that quickly from the shores of Spain, where he wanted to go. He came to the city of Nineveh. Undoubtedly, what had happened to him preceded him, and having been the recipient of this great miracle by the fish, it was natural for those people who worshiped the fish-god to think he was some unusual man who had had his message authenticated by this remarkable miracle.

He went into the city and had a very brief message which he gave all over the city. Jonah speaks about the city as being of remarkable size. And the message that Jonah gave them was a brief, short message of doom and judgment, right to the point, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” It’s a message so short that you can hardly get three points out of it, and you would wonder, could it really be preaching without three points, an introduction and a conclusion?

[Laughter]

All he said, according to the book of Jonah was, *‘Aarba`iyim yowm Niyneh haphak*. That was the Hebrew for “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” You can imagine that this was a very popular message in the city of Nineveh. But remarkably, the whole city, according to the book of Jonah, repented in sackcloth and ashes and became believers in the God of Jonah.

Now the Lord Jesus refers to this and he says, “No sign shall be given to it but the sign of the Prophet Jonah.” Jonah had been swallowed by the great fish; for three days and three nights he had been in the belly of that fish. Now that raises the incidental question, did the whale—or did a whale—swallow Jonah? The reason that we ask the question is that in the Authorized Version, the term, great fish, which is found in your text here is in some of the places of the New Testament rendered, “a whale.” And it is said in the Authorized Version that a whale swallowed Jonah.

Now the first thing that we must point out is that in the Old Testament, in Jonah chapter 1 and verse 17, where the text says “God prepared a great fish to swallow the prophet,” the Hebrew expression, *dag gadowl* is an expression that means, simply “a great fish.” It does not mean, “a whale.” So, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, and we repeat the same for the New, for the Greek word *katos*, which is used for and translated “whale” in the New Testament, also means, simply “a huge fish.” So far as the Scriptures themselves are concerned, they do not say that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The texts of Scripture say that God prepared a great fish.

Now we do know some facts about whales that would cause us to wonder why they were the type of fish that was used by God. It is true that the Greenland whale, a very common type of whale, has a gullet or a throat too small to swallow a man. But then, there are many sperm whales which are fully large enough to swallow men. And not only do we know that, but we do have some historical verification that that has happened.

There is a famous case of a man by the name of James Barkley who was a whaler. And he lived around in the latter part of the 19th century. In 1891 he was on a whaling vessel called *The Star of the East*, and they harpooned a giant whale. And as the whale was in its death throes, it swung around, smashed against the boat in which some of the sailors were found out from the main ship, and destroyed it. All of the men were picked up by the larger vessel except for two. And after a short time, they discovered the body of the other and the man had drowned. But James Barkley was not found.

They took the whale in, and they began to cut on the whale, and about a day or so later as they came to the inside of the whale, there they discovered James Barkley. He was unconscious, but nevertheless alive. He was taken, ultimately, to a London hospital, and after he spent time in the hospital, he survived to speak of his adventure.

He said that it was awfully warm as he went down the throat [laughter] of that great fish, and when he got down inside the fish, he didn't remember anything after that. But when he survived and came out of the hospital after three weeks—he said, incidentally, it was very slippery as he went down the throat [laughter], and I don't know whether he likened it to okra or not [more laughter]—but it was very slippery and the heat was so terrible as to make him lose consciousness. But when he came out of the hospital his skin was permanently tanned by the action of the gastric juices of the whale. So, it is not an entirely impossible thing looking at it from the standpoint of human experiences.

Of course, we must remember that when we remember in the Old Testament that God prepared a great fish, that this is designed to be a miracle. God prepared a great fish. And in the New Testament account of it, our Lord Jesus is referring to that. So we should not, if we believe there is a God who creates, we should not be surprised if such a thing did take place, and we should not stumble over it.

There was a leader in the Baptist church here in the South whose name was Dr. Scarborough. He was a friend of William Anderson's who was the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church here in the city of Dallas. Dr. Anderson was a leading evangelical of a generation or two ago, and as a matter of fact, was a Vice-president of Dallas Theological Seminary. In fact, Dallas Seminary is in Dallas, Texas because Dr. William Anderson was pastor of First Presbyterian Church here. He invited Dr. Chafer to bring the seminary to Dallas, served on the faculty as well as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in this city.

Dr. Anderson in one of his books of sermons speaks about a conversation he had with Dr. Scarborough who spoke to him about his son and an experience that he just had with him. He

said his son came to him and evidently he was a young man who was of college age, and said to his father, “Father, I’m having a little bit of difficulty with the story of Jonah and the whale.”

And the father said to him, “Well, I must say to you I’ve had trouble with that myself, son, and would like to have a talk about it.” So they sat down and as the conversation began, the older man said to the younger man, “What’s your trouble?”

He said, “Well, I don’t see how God could put Jonah in the whale and keep him under the water for three days. I just cannot understand it.”

And his father said, “Your trouble is superficial. My problem is a great deal deeper than that. The problem with me was not how God could put Jonah in the whale and keep the whale and Jonah in the water for three days and three nights. But rather, how God could make Jonah, or he could even make a whale? That, it seems to me, is a more fundamental problem. And if we grant that God is big enough to create a whale or a great fish, and especially a man such as Jonah, then to have Jonah swallowed by a great fish is no real problem at all.”

Really, in the final analysis, if we can believe the first verse of the book of Genesis, I do not see how we should have problems with any miracles thereafter. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. If we can accept that by faith, then the miracles of Scripture are minor matters.

Now of course, the reason the Lord Jesus cited this is to stress the fact that Jonah is a type, or an illustration, of his own experience, so that Jonah’s being in the belly of the great fish and in the Mediterranean Sea for three days and three nights illustrates how the Lord Jesus shall be crucified and shall be in the heart of the earth, three days and three nights. And that is the ultimate spiritual and physical miracle of God’s whole universe: the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That’s the sign that the generation shall be given.

But incidentally, he refers to the fact that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights and then claims that the Son of Man, or the Son of God, shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. But the Christian church has traditionally said that the Lord

Jesus was crucified on Friday and he was raised on Sunday morning. So how can we believe that Jesus Christ was three days and three nights in the earth, and at the same time believe that he was crucified on Friday and raised again on Sunday? It would seem obvious to anyone who knows how to count that it is not 72 hours from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning.

Now let me say this right at the beginning that if we mean by three days and three nights a literal 72 hours—24 hours for each day; a day and a night—then there is hopeless contradiction in the Word of God. Because, you see, in the Bible, we are told in more than one place that the Lord Jesus was raised *on* the third day: in Luke chapter 9; in Luke chapter 24 more than once; in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 we are told that the Lord Jesus was raised on the third day.

Now you don't have to know anything about the elementary laws of thought to know that it is impossible for something to be after three days and on the third day at the same time. Whatever is, is, and something cannot both be and not be. These elementary laws of thought, like the law of contradiction and the law of identity, and the law of the excluded middle which all students of logic know about, why those laws say as plain as day that something cannot both be on the third day and not be on the third day, but rather, after three days.

So you see, it's not so simple as to count back 72 hours and say, therefore, that the Lord Jesus must have been crucified on a Wednesday or a Thursday. Many years ago, when I was just a brand new Christian, and attending some meetings that Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse was holding, in an aside to us after one of the meetings, he said there are many things to us that the church was witness to and has observed down through the years that are not necessarily scriptural. Now I learned that that is absolutely true.

But then he said, I think I could prove to you that the Lord Jesus was crucified on Thursday and not on Friday. Well, I didn't know enough about the Bible on those days to know whether that was a problem, and I was not particularly interested in his solution at that time, because I didn't say anything about it, and I let it pass. I wish I had listened to his explanation.

But I have read many other explanations, and as a matter of fact, just yesterday I pulled down a commentary on the book of Jonah and looked at this section. And in this commentary, the commentator, again, sought to argue that the Lord Jesus was actually crucified on Wednesday afternoon, and put in the grave shortly after Thursday began on Wednesday evening.

And then he sought to prove that he was really in the earth 24 hours of three days of the 72 hours. It's impossible to do it. For in the first place the Lord Jesus was placed in the grave before the end of the day in which he was crucified, and they did that in order to not come under the condemnation of “he that is hanged on a tree is accursed,” and the Hebrew law demanded that he who was hung on the tree be removed from it before the Sabbath Day. So the Lord Jesus was in the grave part of Wednesday if he was crucified on Wednesday, and if that is so, then he was not raised on the first day of the week but on the seventh day of the week, because there would still be part of the seventh day on Saturday afternoon.

Then I've heard those who've argued for Thursday. But, again, it just does not fit. Because, as I say, even if we could prove that he was 72 hours, three days, night and day, in the heart of the earth, we then would have hopeless contradiction in the Word of God which said he was raised on the third day. Well, maybe we do have a contradiction in the Bible after all, we might say.

What is the solution to this problem? I think the simplest solution and the most plausible solution is to recognize that the Jews did not count time as we count time. For a Jewish or a Hebrew man, any part of a day was a full day in their official reckoning of time. Now, that means that if we have any part of day, we have not only the whole day but the day and the night. In other words, any part of a day is 24 hours, in their reckoning.

Therefore, if our Lord was crucified on Friday and placed in the grave before Friday is over, then, according to Hebrew reckoning of time, he was in the grave a day and a night at the conclusion of Friday. For the hour or so of Friday counts for them as a day and a night.

Then he was in the grave all day Saturday. That would be 24 hours. That, too, counts for a day and a night. And he rose on the first day of the week. Whether he rose shortly after sundown on

Saturday evening, or early Sunday morning as the Scriptures seem to suggest, the difference in counting time would make no difference, because any part of Sunday is reckoned as a full day and a night. It is in this sense that our Lord Jesus was in the earth, the heart of the earth, three days and three nights—part of Friday, all Saturday, part of the Sunday—according to Jewish reckoning of time, 72 hours or specifically three days and three nights.

Then, of course, we have no problem, and we have no contradiction, because to be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights is the same—can be harmonized—with being raised on the third day. Now, the question you might ask me, and I hope you would ask me this because I think you should be interested enough to ask something like this, is there anything in the Bible that would suggest, aside from my explanation, that this was the kind of thinking that they had with reference to time. And, of course, there is.

I'm going to ask you to turn with me to the book of Esther, chapter 4. This is one clear illustration, but not the only one in the Bible. Esther chapter 4. You know the story of the book of Esther, and it's not necessary to recount it for the purposes of this comment or two. But in the 4th chapter, Mordecai calls upon Esther to risk her life for her people. And we read in Esther chapter 4 and verse 15 (it's page 565 in the approved edition of the King James Version [laughter]). I didn't look to find out what page it is in the New American Standard Bible, but if you open your Bible up, almost to the center, you're not far. You're warm. Esther chapter 4 verse 15:

“Then Esther told them to return Mordecai this answer, ‘Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day (notice it, night or day); I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.’ (Now notice, she is going to not eat. She's going to fast; she's not going to eat or drink for three days, night or day). So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that

Esther had commanded him. Now it came to pass *on* the third day (not after) that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king’s house, over against the king’s house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the entrance of the house.”

You see, for Esther to say, “Fast three days and three nights and then I will go in unto the king,” is no contradiction with the statement “on the third day she went in.” For on the third day, according to Hebrew reckoning of time, is after three days and three nights. The Bible, you see, uses this reckoning of time in major parts of it. There are other illustrations of it.

So then, we can conclude that our Lord was crucified on Friday, and he was raised again on Sunday, and the Christian church has not been in error down through the years. Custom without truth is error grown old, but we should never take the attitude that tradition is wrong unless there is very good reason for rejecting tradition. After all, those who lived hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years ago are much better able to determine what happened than we are who live in the 20th century.

Now having that as a background, the Lord Jesus uses this incident of Jonah in verse 41 to say that judgment is going to be poured out upon the generation that listened to him, and the men who are going to rise up against them in the judgment and condemn them are the men of Nineveh. “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.”

Now here is a tremendous contrast between the Gentile nation, the city of Nineveh, and the Nation Israel. Now just think for a moment. Jonah, a rebellious prophet. The Lord Jesus, a true prophet of God. Jonah, sinful prophet; the Lord Jesus, a sinless prophet. Jonah, a unpitying minor prophet. The Lord Jesus, the compassionate Son of Man. Jonah, a minor prophet; the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. Jonah: a man who came with a message of doom. The Lord Jesus: who came with a

message of sovereign grace, of salvation through the atoning blood that would be shed on the cross at Calvary.

Jonah, who came without a series of miracles that authenticated his message; that miraculous experience that stood behind his message. The Lord Jesus, who constantly, day after day, all over the land, performed the mighty miracles of healing, even restoring people who were dead to life.

Now in the light of this, to whom would you expect the people to respond? Why of course, you expect the people to respond to the mighty Son of God, the sinless Son of God, the Great Prophet of God, the obedient servant of God, the one who brought the message of grace and confirmed it with miracle after miracle. But surprisingly, it was not so.

The people of Nineveh, the Gentile city, who did not have the privilege that Jewish people had of having the revelation of God and long experience with it, it was the Gentile city that repents at the preaching of Jonah and his message of judgment, and it is the Jewish generation which had had the privilege of John the Baptist and Jesus that rebels—not only refuses—but rebels so violently that they crucify the Son of God who brought the message to them. It’s not surprising, then, that the men of Nineveh are said to rise in judgment with this generation and condemn it.

And when he adds the words, “a greater than Jonah is here,” he is only expressing the truth. And again we find this illustration of this truth that we’ve seen all through the Gospel of Matthew that the Lord Jesus makes these astounding claims which, if they were not true, would immediately qualify him as being the most arrogant of men who has ever lived. A greater than Jonah is here. In a moment, he will say a greater than Solomon is there in his presence.

Now this was a rebuke to the despisers. This was a rebuke to the people who heard the word over and over again, and I wouldn’t be doing my duty as a preacher of the Word if I didn’t say to you that this message is addressed primarily to those who have the message, hearing the Word of God Sunday after Sunday, and especially to those of you have heard it Sunday after Sunday.

You have heard the true gospel of the Lord Jesus proclaimed Sunday after Sunday, but you have never responded. This kind of illustration that the Lord Jesus uses is especially addressed to those despisers and positive rejecters of the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Now he also has a word for the indifferent, for the lackadaisical, for those who are lax in their spiritual desires. He says, “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the farthest parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.” Now you can immediately sense the Queen of Sheba’s coming to the Solomon and the presence of the Lord Jesus in the midst of the generation.

Here was a woman who had heard about Solomon and that he was a king of the God, Yahweh. All of that’s found in 1 Kings chapter 10. It says that she had heard of his fame, she had heard of him as a representative of Yahweh, and so she desired to come. She came that lengthy distance from Sheba in order to come and hear King Solomon and see if the things that were said about him were really true, that he was as wise as he was said to be, that he had performed the mighty works that he was said to have performed, and that there was a God Yahweh who had loved Israel with an everlasting love—that’s all in that passage—and had put Solomon on the throne as an evidence for his love for Israel.

And so she traveled that lengthy distance with those riches to give to him. Now you can immediately sense the contrast as the Lord Jesus speaks to this rebellious, indifferent generation before him, because they have not only Solomon, they have a greater than Solomon. And they not only have a greater king than Solomon, they have the eternal Son of God right in their presence. And they are totally indifferent to the message that he proclaims. And I wouldn’t be doing my duty if I didn’t say a word to you, too, from that standpoint, because it is possible for you to be in the presence of the preaching of the Word of God and not respond to the message that means life because you have no spiritual desire whatsoever to be in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

And you know, it is very easy for that to happen in an evangelical church just like this one. It’s possible for you to come into an auditorium like this and to desire to be anywhere but here. And the word that our Lord Jesus speaks about the Queen of Sheba is a word for the indifferent.

He speaks for a few moments about the unclean spirit. We don’t have time to speak about that. It’s kind of a compact, eerie little parable about a haunted house, designed to stress the fact that Israel, while they abandoned idolatry when they went into Babylon, they came back with no vital relationship to God. And now, instead of having idolatry—it’s true the house was swept clean of idolatry—but now in place of idolatry as the sin that brought them to captivity and judgment, they have all of the formal legalism and the doctrine of reformation without regeneration characterized by the leaders of the Jewish nation at that time.

The scribes and the Pharisees beautifully illustrate an upright religious kind of man who has no vital relationship to God, and according to the Lord Jesus Christ’s parable, that state of man is far worse than the state of the idolater. And then he makes the application, even so shall it also be under this wicked generation.

In the final section, we have one of the great human tragedies of the life of the Lord Jesus. Would you not think that the Lord Jesus, who had lived for thirty years as the Son of Joseph the carpenter, who had the closest of relationships in a very strict, closed kind of society, very intimate—like the meeting we had this morning at 8 o’clock [laughter]—very intimate—that was someone else’s description of it—very intimate, would you not have thought that the brethren of the Lord Jesus would not have responded to him? Did you know that not one of the brethren of the Lord Jesus believed in him in the days of his flesh? And do you know that even Mary, who did believe in him, became very confused, and actually came to warn the Lord Jesus against being too fanatical in the service of God.

Mark puts the story much plainer than we have it here in Matthew, but the word went out all over the land, he’s beside himself. The crowds were flocking to him. He was giving these sermons that convicted men or were sermons of judgment—and mingled with the grace of God, of course—

but sermons of judgment. And there were crowds that were flocking to hear him, but there was also a mighty swell of rejection and rebellion against him that was sweeping over the land.

And word was out, he’s gone mad. And evidently the brethren of the Lord Jesus and the mother of our Lord decided that they should do something about it. So they came to him, and I can just imagine Mary’s little speech that she just prepared. It was something like this:

Now son, we are very delighted that you’re so interested in the Scriptures and in spiritual things, and that you’re interested in all of this evangelistic preaching that you’re doing. This is all very good. We are very interested in the fact that you like to read the Bible, that you have all of these strange friends [laughter]; that’s fine, that’s perfectly all right. But, don’t you know that you’re upsetting people all over the land, and the synagogue is getting very disturbed over you and you are in danger of being put out of our denomination (I mean, our synagogue). [Laughter]

Can you not imagine that little speech that was there? Because you know that this is true of human nature, right back here in chapter 10 in verse 36 and verse 37, the Lord Jesus had said, “And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” A man’s foes shall be they of his own household.

Now any true follower of the Lord Jesus except those who have the privilege of being brought up in Christian homes, knows exactly what the Lord is speaking about. A man’s foes shall be they of his own household. Those are not my words, these are the words of the Lord Jesus.

And Bunyan, who has caught this so beautifully in his *Pilgrim’s Progress* right in the beginning of the book—remember when Christian was there with the big burden upon him which was weighing him down, and he meets Evangelist. And Evangelist tells him about the gate toward which he shall go. And beyond that, he shall find salvation; the gate is narrow and restricted.

As he begins to make his way toward the wicket gate, his wife and children cry out to object to what he is doing—Bunyan has caught the truth of this so beautifully. And he, remember, Christian puts his hands over his ears, stops his ears and runs toward the gate crying out, “Eternal life! Eternal

life!” as his mother and his family members seek to dissuade him from coming. A man’s foes shall be they of his own household.

And often, it is not simply the unbelieving members of the household, but even the believing members who do not understand a man who becomes a kind of “fanatic” for the Lord Jesus. Now, they stand outside and word comes to the Lord Jesus, “Thy mother and thy brethren stand outside desiring to speak with thee.”

The Lord Jesus then gives a kind of rhetorical question to the ones who are about him. “Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?” Now, he does not object to family ties. Family ties do exist, and the Lord Jesus recognizes them, because Scripture says, “Honor thy father and mother.” And even when he was hanging on the cross, he committed Mary, the Virgin Mary, to his cousin John in order that John might take care of her. Evidently, Joseph his father was already dead, and since he was the oldest child, it was his responsibility to care for Mary. And so as he died, he was committing Mary to the care of the Apostle John. So it is evident that the Lord Jesus recognizes family ties as legitimate. While he does not object to family ties, he does object to the authority of family ties.

And it is he who says to his mother, “What have I to do with thee, woman?” And here, I must close with this, he turns toward the disciples and makes this remarkable statement with reference to them, “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” In other words, spiritual relations are sovereign over the natural ones, because spiritual relations are eternal, and the natural ones are temporal.

I do not think there is anyone who loves father or mother more than I did. I loved my mother, I loved my father to the end of their days. And I loved my brother, and I loved my two sisters. But there are relationships that transcend the family relationships. The relationship of blood is temporal. The relationship of spirit is eternal.

I often have people come and say, wouldn't it be nice if we had the spirit in Believers Chapel that we had when we were much smaller. Now, sometimes I agree with that, because it is sad that we have so many come to a meeting such as this, and other meetings, and we do not get to know each other as we should. I recognize what lies back of that, and I think it's a valid thing.

And when people say, let's have a breakfast or let's have a supper or a meeting or a banquet or something, I personally would not want to object to anything like that, so long as it is made a voluntary thing. But I personally feel that the reason, the basis for Christian fellowship is not the social. The basis for Christian fellowship is a common love for Jesus Christ. And the deeper the love for Jesus Christ, and the deeper the relationship that we each have, the deeper will be our relationship to one another.

I appreciated so much Mr. Prier getting up in our evening meeting a few months back and saying, that according to Scripture, the true fellowship is the fellowship of a common love for Jesus Christ. And I want to say this to you, that I think that if we as a congregation or as believers could ever really grasp the fact that our true brethren, our true brother, our true sister, our true mother, our true father, is not our earthly relations, but is the spiritual brother in Christ, then we should we not have problem of Christian fellowship and Christian love, because deep down within the relationship of the Spirit is the deepest relationship you can have with anyone.

That's why your relationship with your family, husband and wife, is so much better if there is love that is not only physical, not only emotional, but spiritual in Christ. Here is the secret, it seems to me, of the right relationship in the church of Christ.

Let's close in a word of prayer. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord, for the teaching of Holy Scripture. We are so grateful to Thee that Thou has revealed the Lord Jesus as greater than Solomon, greater than Jonah, who came with a message of grace, the wisdom of our great triune God, and has preached to us the saving ministry of the cross.

“Jonah, the Unclean Spirit, and the Family of Jesus” by S. Lewis Johnson
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And O God, if there should be someone in this audience who has not yet come to Christ,
give them no rest nor peace until they, in their hearts, turn to Thee, receiving the free gift of eternal
life.

And may grace, mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.