



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 23:37–39

“Christ’s Lament over Jerusalem”

Gospel of Matthew

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading is rather brief this morning. We are reading only three verses, the last three of Matthew chapter 23. If you’ve been here the last few Sundays, you’ll remember that the 23rd chapter opens with some words of admonition for the Pharisees and the scribes and then for the disciples, and continues with our Lord’s announcement of seven woes upon the Pharisees. I mentioned this in the reading of the Scripture last week but several have since asked me why there are eight, when I only mention seven woes, and again, I repeat the 14th verse, found in the Authorized Version which many of you may have before you, is probably not a verse that belongs to Matthew. But some early scribe in copying the Gospel of Matthew remembered that the contents of verse 14 are found in Mark chapter 12, and in Luke, so he inserted them here, and it came into our Authorized Version as a result. But there are only seven woes. The one in the 14th verse is not genuine in the Gospel of Matthew.

Then at the conclusion of the woes, we have the section that has to do with our Lord’s lament over Jerusalem, and this is our Scripture reading for this morning.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold,

your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me
henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

May the Lord blessing this reading of his inspired Word.

The subject for today is “Christ’s Lament over Jerusalem.” It is the parting wail of a rejected love. One of the great expositors has said, adding, “The lightning flashes of the seven woes end in a rain of pity and tears.” What we obviously see in chapter 23 at the conclusion of the great chapter on the woes is the unrequited love of a man for a nation. It has been said that great lovers are great weepers, and that great workers are great weepers. I think the order should be love, weeping, and working. It is the love that leads to the weeping over failure to respond, and it is that love and that weeping that leads to working.

Jeremiah has been called the weeping prophet, and with good reason, because Jeremiah is the man who said, “O that my head were waters, and my eye a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of daughter of my people.” I think I can understand why when the Lord Jesus was here and asked at Caesarea Philippi, “Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am,” that the disciples replied, some say you are Elijah and some say you are Jeremiah. It is because there was characteristic of our Lord Jesus the weeping of a man like Jeremiah.

I think that reminds me also of the Apostle Paul, who after concluding his eight great chapters on the saving work of the Lord Jesus in the first eight chapters of Romans, in the 9th chapter begins, I say the truth, in Christ I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

One of the older commentaries on the Old Testament, a German man by the name of Hengstenberg, said concerning Jeremiah, that “he was no second Elijah. He had a soft nature, a susceptible temperament. His tears flowed readily.” That would beautifully describe our Lord, for he was a lover, and because he was a lover, he was a weeper, and because he was a lover and a weeper,

he also was a worker. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, Isaiah said. So we’re not surprised then to read that he is called the suffering servant of Jehovah.

A great love for a nation, an unrequited love, led to weeping, but it also led to a complete devotion to the best interests of those for whom he came. The Son of God in tears, the angels wondering sea / hast thou no wonder O my soul, he shed those tears for thee. He wept that we might weep, might weep for our sin and shame / He wept to show His love for us and bid us love the same.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. The warnings to the scribes and the Pharisees and the disciples are over, and the woes are completed, and now the Son of God yearns over the ancient theocratic city with great intensity, and then he offers a solemn sentence of abandonment, “Behold your house is left unto you desolate.” And concludes with the fact that Israel shall suffer discipline for an indeterminate period of time until they shall say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Now that’s the principal burden of this section of the Gospel of Matthew. The lamentation in the first verse is, of course the thing that strikes us most clearly as you read these verses.

Now I think there is one thing that appears immediately, and we ought not to forget it. And I don’t think that we should ever forget it—particularly if we are teachers of the Word of God, or if we are simply witnessing to our neighbor. There is no vindictiveness in this prophecy of doom. And yet on the other hand, our Lord unflinchingly pronounces it. He doesn’t hesitate to say, behold your temple is left unto you desolate, but at the same time there is no vindictive spirit about him.

There is a Bible teacher whose books I’ve read for many years, a lot of his books—can’t say I’ve read every one of them cause he wrote over fifty—but in one of them in one of his commentaries he said that as a very young man he had a personal interview with Robert William

Dale, one of the great theologians and preachers of the first part of this century. And in the course of that interview, in the study of this well-known theologian from Birmingham, England, Dale spoke to him and said, “I never heard Dwight Lyman Moody speak of hell without feeling that he had a right to do it, because I never heard him speak of hell except in a voice tremulous with emotion.”

Now I think that does express a truth. I do not think that men have a right to speak of the anger of God, as if they delight in that anger. We do not have any right it seems to me to speak of the judgment of God in a spirit of glee. As far as I can tell in the Bible, when the wrath and anger of God is spoken, it is a very solemn thing. And I think you can also catch something of the spirit of our Lord, the spirit of tears, when God announces the coming judgments that are to fall upon the unbelieving. After all, he is a God who delights in mercy, and we should speak our tones of judgment in tones of mercy.

Well what shall we say then about this opening statement? O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee. I think you can sense the tenderness of a broken heart in the words of our Lord. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the very repetition of these words points to the deep pathos of a king who yearns wistfully. It almost seems as if he’s still hoping to win them from the apostasy to which they have committed themselves.

It reminds me of the lesser David, the David of the Old Testament, who when he learned of the death of his beloved son Absalom said, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son; Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem; Saul, Saul. Over and over in the Bible, the repetition of words frequently points to pathos and tenderness.

I think I remember one incident in the ministry about twenty years ago in connection with this. I don’t think I’ll ever forget it. It was the case of man who so far as I know had come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus through the preaching of the gospel which I had given, and he evidently became a very active Christian, and while yet a very immature Christian had been very active in testimony. But he had also been a man who had been given to a certain kind of sin, and after he had been a Christian for a while, he fell back into this sin, and one night—and I think as far as I know it

was an isolated incident—one night he fell into this sin, and was as he was coming home after having lied to his wife about where he had been, he rounded the corner of the bend of a road and ran into a tree and was killed almost instantly.

I can still remember the telephone ringing about three o’clock in the morning and just hearing the words over the telephone, Lewis, Lewis, and then the person, the wife, gave his name, so-and-so is dead, and I got up and dressed and went over to the house. And I also still remember the words that she was saying. She would frequently speak beyond me and say, O honey, honey, why did you do it? The repetition of the words, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, contains a deep pathos and a yearning intensity over the future of the nation Israel.

Did you notice how Israel how Jerusalem is described? Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee. Of all the descriptions that you might expect of the most religious city on the face of the earth, this would seem to be the least likely. Jerusalem, the city of peace—that’s the most likely derivation of the name Jerusalem, the city of peace—and the present participles, killest the prophets, stonest them, suggest that this is a constant characteristic of the religious city of the earth. Amazing isn’t it? Not amazing when we remember that the Lord Jesus said it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem. It’s in the religious city, it’s the religious place that you are most likely to find the crucifixion of the truth of God.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee. She’s described in the feminine gender because the term that is used is, feminine, and it’s as if the Lord Jesus is saying Jerusalem is a murderess, continually draining the blood of the prophets, and now she is on the threshold to follow the draining of the blood of the prophets and the strangling of the wise men of the Old Testament by the slaying of the Son of Man himself.

Now let’s look at the compassion of our Lord and the terms that are used; very beautiful. How often would I have gathered thy children together? Now mind you, these are not the words of a mere man. Suppose I were to stand up and say, Dallas, Dallas, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings? Ridiculous. To think of one man

gathering a giant city like this city under his wings. You see, the very fact that our Lord expresses this is an indication of the fact that he considered himself to be more than a man. It would be preposterous for a mere man to gather the inhabitants of a city together. He speaks as the divine Son of God, and further, in the same breath that he mentions the gathering of the children together, he speaks also of the sending of the prophets. In verse 34 we read, “Wherefore behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men.”

Now it is God who sends prophets. And then in verse 37 he said, stonest them that are sent unto thee. So what he is saying is, I am the Yahweh of the Old Testament, the one who sends the prophets and the wise men and the mighty men and the apostles, and it is I who would have under my wings the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem. How often? Not just once. In my opinion, I cannot prove this, but in my opinion this is not limited to the times that our Lord in his earthly ministry went to the city of Jerusalem. The preexistence of the Son of God is a fact of divine revelation, and in the Old Testament he often appeared as the angel of Jehovah. That preincarnate theophany of the Lord Jesus was designed to prepare the nation Israel for the incarnation. That is the thing that lies back of the the the theophanies of the Old Testament, and as the angel of Jehovah he ministered to the nation Israel.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10 the Apostle Paul says that the rock that followed Israel was the Messiah. So we have Christ in the Old Testament experiences of the nation Israel, and when he says, how often would I have gathered together under my wings, he is speaking not simply of his earthly ministry but of the ministry that preceded his incarnation.

And then have you reflected upon the figure that he uses? How often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens. Now I’m not a rustic—except in my thinking—I didn’t grow up on the farm. I would be much better expounding this if I had grown up on the farm. I often wish I had, incidentally, because the prophets of the Old Testament, and it seems to me the apostles of the New, and our Lord, understand figures of speech in ways that I have a very difficult time comprehending, but I can sense here that there’s something unusual in our Lord

going to the barnyard for an emblem of tenderness. He says how often he would have gathered thy children together just like a hen gathers her chickens.

Hendrickson, in his commentary I think, has caught this very well. He must have grown up on the farm, but he said, “The simile that Jesus uses is unforgettable. A chicken hawk suddenly appears. Its wings folded its eyes concentrated on the farmyard. Its ominous claws ready to grasp a chick. Or to change the figure, a storm is approaching, lightning flashes become more frequent, the rumbling of the thunder grows louder, and electrical discharges follow more closely, rain drops develop into a shower, the shower into a cloudburst—in either case, what happens is that an anxious and commanding, cluck cluck cluck, (that’s what he wrote; that doesn’t sound like a hen I know [laughter]) but the hen calls her chicks, conceals them under her protecting wings, and rushes off to a place of shelter.” That’s what our Lord has in mind.

Now you know the thing that is striking about this is that it would seem to suggest that what Israel really was thinking is that these threats of judgment that were to come were things that were empty. There were for them no chicken hawks, or Cooper’s hawks, or eagles about, but the Roman legions were not far away from the city of Jerusalem in time, and if you remember your ancient history you know that the emblem of the Romans was the eagle. It belongs to the same family as the hawk. And it was not but just a few years after this that the Romans did come. The chicken hawk did come, and the chicks, exposed, suffered ultimate judgment and were sent to the four corners of the earth.

You know we are living in rather interesting days. I must say I am very glad I’m living in 1977. I have been very interested as you can tell from my comments here and there in what has happened in the relationship between men and women in our day. It’s very striking. I’m sure, incidentally, that there are some injustices that have been done to our women, and of course we as Christians cannot help but be sympathetic with things that would do away with injustices.

Some of the things have become rather amusing to me, and one of the most amusing things to me I must confess, that the feminists—I know there are not any feminists in this auditorium—but

the feminists are very interested now in removing the sexist language from the Bible itself recognizing that the ultimate sexist is the God of the Bible. And so believe it or not there are committees in some of our rather conservative denominations, there are committees that are studying ways in which they can eliminate the sexist language of the Bible.

Now there is no need to do that, of course, because the Bible does not denigrate women. In fact when you look at the Word of God, you discover that the Bible recognizes that recognizes that there are certain excellent virtues certain excellencies about the females. I have no doubt whatsoever that this is true to fact and that we have certain virtues and certain excellencies that belong to the female gender, and we who are of the male gender can only admire these excellencies.

Now the Bible presents God as a God who possesses the excellencies of the male and the excellencies of the female, so even though the term “he” is used of God—incidentally, all of the religions of the ancient world so far as I know spoke of God in that sense. If you go to the Old Testament you do not find any reference to a female deity, that is within the revelation within in the Word of God.

Now I don’t mean the fact that there were not female deities in the ancient religions. I don’t mean that. I mean in the religion set forth in the Word of God. But the thing I was trying to get at is this, that in the Bible, the recognition of the excellency of the female, and you will find sentences like this, as one whom his mother comforteth so will I comfort you and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem, so God speaks of himself as a comforting mother. And so we should not take away those things in Scripture any more than we should the text, like as a father pityeth his children, the Lord pityeth them that fear him. We—there is no need to exalt the Virgin Mary, because the excellencies of the female gender are found in our great God and so we can, with real propriety, speak of our great God as a great father/mother God.

Now we say Father and our Father God and I prefer that, but the excellencies of the female are found in our great God. Here the Lord Jesus likens himself to a hen who wants to gather his chicks her chicks together under his wings.

Now then we read, “And ye would not.” Now that is an eloquent statement of human unwillingness. In the Bible there is no question but that we read that men are unable to respond to the Word of God apart from divine enablement. I guess in the exposition of Matthew, I have cited Romans chapter 8, verses 7 and 8. I said in the morning service at 8:30, seven or eight times I guess—I have done it ten or twenty times. There we read in Romans 8:7 and 8, “The mind of the flesh is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God. It cannot be.” So the mind of the flesh, the mind of man, naturally, cannot be subject to God. It is not in the power of human nature to respond to God. So Paul concludes in the 8th verse, so then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Incidentally that’s why we believe that the Holy Spirit must work in a man’s heart and bring new life before faith, because faith pleases God, and if a man who is not yet regenerated, exercise faith, then you cannot say they that are in the flesh cannot please God. They can please God.

So the Bible teaches that a man is brought by the Holy Spirit to life, and the first manifestation of the life is faith in the Son of God. That’s why we say regeneration logically precedes faith. That may startle you, because you hear preaching in which the opposite order is so often given, but theologically the other is impossible. As John says, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God”—perfect tense. Everyone who believes has been born. You see, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. And so when the Lord Jesus said, how often would I and ye, would not expresses the natural unwillingness of men.

Well that brings me to an interesting question. There are two major interpretations of Christianity within Christianity. There is one class of interpreters of the Word of God that believe, essentially, that salvation is a work of God, but it’s also a work of man. And then there is a group of believers who believe that salvation is the work of God period. Now this controversy will not be settled by this sermon this morning, only of course because not everybody is listening.

Now, seriously, this controversy will never be settled, in my opinion, as long as we are on the earth. It will be settled when we all get to heaven, and then we shall discover what is the teaching of Holy Scripture. And I want to say there are many Arminians who are believers, in my opinion. Of

course I wouldn’t be honest with you if I didn’t say that they are confused believers, in my opinion. They talk about salvation being of the Lord, but at the same time they also utter phrases that suggest they believe salvation is also of man.

Now when we come to Matthew chapter 23 and verse 37, my Arminian brethren roll out their heaviest pieces of armor, [laughter] because here they have their rocket, their cannons, and in any discussion sooner or later this text is going to come up. It’s one of their great weapons and they love to hit unthinking Calvinists over the head with it. You say that salvation is altogether of the Lord, but did not the Lord Jesus say, how often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not? Does that not say that we can frustrate the work of God?

I had a student at the seminary who hit me over the head with this some years ago. I confess, I saw stars for a little while. [Laughter] I had never thought of this text in that particular context, and it stumped me. I’m sure he went off and thought, well I have defeated Dr. Johnson [laughter] Well, he won the first engagement, I’ll grant that. He won the first engagement, but the battle, well that’s different. The whole campaign is over now, and I think I’ve won.

But this is an interesting text and, I say our good brethren who are students of the Bible enough—and there are Arminian brethren like that—they say this is their text. It proves what they say. What do they say? Well let me read you some of the things they say. I’m sure you’ll recognize in this, the preaching of many evangelicals. The great mass of evangelicals as a matter of fact. I don’t think I’m unfair or unkind in saying that. They say and I’m quoting, “It is in the power of man to hinder the execution of God’s will.” All God’s decrees are not preemptory, another one of them says, but some are conditional and changeable.

Simon Episcopias, who became the leader of the Arminians after Arminius died said, “It is ridiculous to imagine that God doth not seriously will anything but what taketh effect.” In other words, it’s ridiculous to think that God only wills those things that really come to pass. And then the remonstrant, or Arminian synod itself said, “It may be objected that God faileth of his end. This we readily grant.” In other words, it is their position that God has certain things that he wills, but he fails

in attaining his end or his purpose. Why? Well because he has given men the power to resist his sovereign will.

Now I have before me something that one of my students gave me, and it is really a letter of appeal for funds from a Christian organization. This letter I’m not going to read the names of the people involved in it, because I don’t want to attack them personally. I want to think primarily of the doctrine. And I want to say right at the beginning that when I do this. I do not mean at all that we as those who believe in the sovereignty of God should not, I do not want to say that we should not be interested in evangelism. Of all the people who should be interested in evangelism—those who believe that God accompanies his Word with the power to irresistibly bring men to Christ—it is they, who of all people, should most should most confidently preach the Word of God, and we do.

So I hope you will not misunderstand what I’m saying. But I firmly believe that when we preach the Word of God, we must preach it as God has written. We are not being faithful to God if we do not do that. This begins, I believe God has raised up so-and-so to write a whole new chapter of history in such-and-such a community on behalf of the kingdom of God. We are asking you to join with us in becoming the agents of God to fulfill this undertaking this letter begins. The fact is the Holy Spirit has not had the same options in the so-and-so community as he has had in other communities of America.

Now that would be news to the Holy Spirit. [Laughter] Were it not for the fact that the Holy Spirit knew in ages past that this brother would write this. Later on, he says, I suggest to you the Holy Spirit has not had the same options in the such-and-such community that he has had in other communities. I appeal to you to give us a chance to reverse that situation. And that’s in capital letters.

Now can you imagine the colossal spiritual effrontery to believe that the Holy Spirit is unable to do what they are able to do if we give them a little money?

Now here are people that do not have even the power to get the funds to do their work who are asking us to believe that they can do more than the Holy Spirit who controls the cattle on a thousand hills. The only really sad thing about this is that most evangelicals would read that—I’m

sorry I did say it; I do mean it—most would read that and see nothing unusual about it at all. I consider it an attack on the sovereignty of our God in heaven.

Now I want to say in love, I don’t consider it a willful attack. It’s not that at all. It’s a very unwitting attack, and I hope I don’t say that in the spirit of glee, but rather in something of the spirit of our Lord. Augustine said, “For if without any doubt as the truth sings of him in heaven and in earth, whatsoever the Lord pleased he hath done, surely he has not will to do anything he has not done.” That was a great theologian.

In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah, who had a good concept of the sovereignty of God, in the 14th chapter of his prophecy makes a very interesting statement that bears on this point. In the 14th chapter in the 24th verse he says, “The Lord of hosts has sworn saying surely as I have thought so shall it come to pass and as I have purposed so shall it stand.” As I have purposed so shall it stand. As a matter of fact, as I have thought, it shall come to pass. In the 46th chapter and the 10th verse again the prophet writes, “Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying (this is God speaking) my counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure.” Well Dr. Johnson, what does this text mean though when it says, I would, ye would not?

Now I pass by the dealing with the context in detail here since it doesn’t really bear on this particular theological question. I do want you to notice simply that when our Lord spoke and said O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, and then spoke about Jerusalem’s children, he evidently was referring to the leaders and governors of the nation down through the years, and particularly this present generation of leaders under the term, Jerusalem. And her children were thy children, by that he meant the ordinary citizens in the nation Israel. So he said O Jerusalem Jerusalem thou that stonest the prophets and them that are sent unto thee how often would I have gathered thy children and ye would not—that is, you prevented the ministry by your opposition to the Word of God. In other words he’s saying same the same thing that he said over in verse 13, “But woe unto you scribes and

Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut up the kingdom against men for ye neither go in yourselves nor permit them that are entering to go in.”

Now then what is this I would though? I would, ye would not? Well now, we can look at all of the texts of our Lord Jesus Christ and ask ourselves the question does he speak as the Son of God and does he speak out of his divine nature, or does he speak as the Son of God but speak out of his human nature? So when he says, “How often would I?” is he speaking of the divine Son? Well I have said that he has been speaking of the divine person when he said I would have gathered all of your children under my wings. No mere man could have said that.

So if he is speaking as the Son of God, then he speaks here of God’s benevolent will, by which he does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Old Testament makes it very plain that I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God does not rejoice in sending men to hell. He may, for reasons that are known ultimately in himself, he may determine that some shall go to an eternal separation from himself, but he takes no pleasure in that. It’s part of his great sovereign will into the recesses of which we do not have access except through divine revelation.

Now if he speaks then as God here, it does speak of his benevolent will, and we should think of our God in that way. It’s not a pleasure for God to send somebody to an eternal separation from himself. He doesn’t clap his hands in laughter over that. But on the other hand, if Christ is speaking out of his human nature, then he’s speaking out of the human affection which he as a man had for his own people. I remember when he met the rich young ruler, looking upon him, Scripture says, Jesus loved him. That was natural affection. That was the affection our Lord had for someone who had not responded to him; a natural affection. Not the complacent love of a sovereign God who had elected and who brings to faith in Christ according to his sovereign good pleasure.

So when we read here that how often would I, we are not to understand our Lord to be speaking here of the decretive will of God—that is inflexible, it is invariable, it is unchanging—and God’s decretive will is always carried out. That’s the error of our Arminian friends. They’ve failed to understand the difference between the decretive will of God and the human affection of our Lord

Jesus. Or perhaps we could put it, the preceptive will of God—the things that please him but which may not necessarily be carried out according to his good pleasure.

You see, if the Arminians were really right, if their cannons and their rockets are to be really so powerful as to destroy the interpretation of the other company of people—I won’t name ’em—it would be essential for them to show that Jesus Christ, as God, as God, said, I would have gathered you but you prevented me. And further, it would be necessary for them to show that he said that to everybody, giving everybody the same grace and then to have the Scripture read, ye would not. This they have not done. This they cannot do—they shall never be able to do. It will be easier to nail a drop of water to a wall than for them to prove their point. So this text is all smoke.

And then it becomes a wonderful revelation of the love and affection of a great God who in the midst of his sovereign purposes loves and has genuine affection for even those who reject the gospel message.

Well, the section concludes with, your house is left unto you desolate. A solemn final goodbye closes the public ministry. Yahweh, the Father of the theocracy, abandons them, and Judaism from this point on is only Judaism. Some time ago, I read an article by a man who is one of our finest younger theologians. He was describing what happened one night at his home as he was looking at the David Frost Show, whether it was at night or in the morning or in the afternoon, he did not say, but he said he was looking at the show and Madalyn Murray O’Hair came on.

And as you might expect, what developed was that Dr. Frost, contrary to his usual custom, became a great champion of the Christian faith, and as so often happens with Madalyn Murray O’Hair, she is a skillful debater. She’s a female. [Laughter] She has some of those virtues and excellencies that belong to that sex. Well, she got him, finally, so mad that the only thing he could do was to turn to the audience, and so he asked the audience how many of you believe in some kind of supreme being, some kind of higher power, something greater than yourselves, and of course everybody in the audience raised their hand.

So my friend said he waited breathless for what Madalyn might say. She said, “Well, what do you expect from the masses who come to this studio? What do they know? Give ’em time to catch up with modern knowledge and this myth will disappear.” And my friend who is a thinking man said, “I wish I had been there to phrase the kind of question she should have asked the audience.”

Now I hope Madalyn doesn’t hear of this, because she’ll be even more difficult. But anyway, he said, this is what I would say for her. He said, I know that some of you believe in something than yourself, some higher power, some faceless, nameless, contextless unknown God, who makes no claims on your existence, who never stands in judgment over your morality, who doesn’t demand the sacrifice of your life—anybody can believe in that kind of God. But do you believe in Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel, who thunders from Sinai, you will have no others gods before me? Do you believe in a God who demands obedience to his perfect law and calls men to repentance? How many of you believe in a God who makes absolute demands on your life? And I think I would have added something there, too, to my friend. I would have said, How many of you believe in a Yahweh who says there is only one way of salvation and it is through the Lord Jesus Christ and the sacrifice he accomplished on the cross at Calvary, and all other interpretations of how we should come to God are wrong—how many of you believe in that kind of God?

And the chances are there would have been very few hands go up in the audience, because you see the title, supreme being, or ground of being, or ultimate concern, all these are nonthreatening titles for God. People can say easily I believe in a ground of being or I have some ultimate concern, but when you talk about a God who judges us, that’s different.

There are people, incidentally, who often say, the reason you’re religious is because being religious is part of human nature. We are all human beings and we have a desire for someone to help us, someone to lean on. And that’s why the Christian religion rose, that’s why non-Christian religion rose, they all are just ways by which we satisfy this basic need of human nature. And Christians who don’t think go for that too; they go home wondering, “Well, yeah, I guess that’s right. I guess the human being is a religious animal and that explains everything.”

That doesn’t explain Christianity at all. That might explain all these other religions that have a God who is like a Santa Claus, who every now and then stops and looks down on what’s happening down here, among the frolicking and cavorting about on the earth and says, “Well boys will be boys.” See the God of the Bible is an entirely different kind of God. He’s a God who does thunder from Sinai, and he not only thunders from Sinai and says you shall have no other gods before me, but he says if you have other gods you shall come under divine judgment.

Men don’t naturally flee to that kind of a God. That’s what makes Christianity unique. The fact of Christianity that makes it unique is that these individuals who are sinners, who cannot respond, have responded, and responded to a God who is holy omniscient and sovereign. That’s contrary to our nature. That’s the thing that makes Christianity unique, and that’s something you won’t find in your books of sociology and psychology and philosophy, when religion or philosophy of religion, when religion is spoken about.

Now my friend he also had something else to say, because he wrote a book on the psychology of atheism, and in this book he worked through three attributes: the holiness of God, the sovereignty of God, and the omniscience of God. And he said, “I remembered a sermon that Jonathan Edwards had written, and it was called, ‘Man Naturally God’s Enemy.’” He said, “I wonder what Edwards had to say about why men hate God, so I went back and read that sermon,” he said, “after I had done my studying.

“And Edwards said there are four things about (I should say there are four things about God that make men hate him). Four things,” he said, “what did I miss?” So he began to read Edwards’ sermon. “Edwards said the first thing that terrifies man is God’s holiness.” He said, “Ah, I got that one right. He said the second thing about God that makes man hate him is his omniscience.” He said, “By this time, my opinion of Edwards as a scholar was rising.” Then he said, “I read on in Edwards, and he said the third thing that men hate about God is his sovereignty. And I could hardly believe he said that. I put my finger on the three things that Edwards said.”

He said, “Then I turned the page and I read (perhaps you are wondering what the fourth one is),” he said, “He took the words right out of my mouth. I was wondering.” And he said he read on, and the fourth thing about God that men hate is his immutability. Immutability, he said. Why should that be so threatening? Why should his unchangeability mean so much? Why should that bother us? And then he read on and Edwards said, “Man faces this dilemma. Not only does he know and know clearly that God is holy and omniscient and sovereign, but he knows that God will always be holy, will always be omniscient, will always be sovereign and there is nothing we can possibly do to make him less holy less omniscient less sovereign.” These attributes are not open to negotiation. That’s the kind of God that we have.

And when the Lord Jesus says, “Behold your house is left unto you desolate,” that’s judgment. And that has come to pass. The temple in a short time was desolated, but the passage does not close on judgment. “For I say unto you you shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, ‘Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.’” There is a time coming when Israel shall respond, when as a result of the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the nation, they shall be returned. He shall work in their hearts. They shall look upon him whom they have pierced by means of the spirit of grace and supplications that shall be poured out upon them, and they shall believe in this Lamb of God that they have crucified.

Well I’ve gone overtime. I cannot speak about what a beautiful picture of the grace of the Savior is found in this. Why should we, incidentally, want to flee to him? The chicks flee because of imminent danger of judgment, of destruction. That’s one reason why we ought to flee. But we ought to flee to the Lord Jesus like the chicks flee to the mother hen because of the associations we have in the family of God. There is nothing greater than being a member of the family of God let me assure you. The saints have ministered to me in such a way through the years that I could never cease to thank God for bringing me into the family of God.

The safety that I possess because I rest under the wings and feathers of my great Savior God is something of which I could never full—I could never fully expound that. The interest of the

mother hen in the growth of those little chickens is the interest that the Holy Spirit in building me up into the kind of person that he wants me to be throughout all eternity. What more wonderful incentive could we have than to come to our Lord Jesus and trust him? And so I say to you in the audience as I close, you’ll have to pardon the brevity of this invitation. Come unto Him. Put your trust in Him who has made it possible for sinners to come avoid the coming judgment by fleeing under the wings and feathers of our great Savior God. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father how wonderful it is to reflect upon the metaphors that our Lord Jesus has used to describe his own relationship to us and to Israel. Lord we do pray that through the Holy Spirit Thy would work, and may there, as a result of the message this morning, be gathered to him some who have been straying from him.

May grace mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.