



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Timothy 2:5

“A Mediator – The Astonishing Word”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The message this morning gathers around three texts really and I'm going to read them in our Scripture reading, perhaps in the first two or three more than just the one text that is important. But if you will turn first to Job chapter 9 I'd like to read a few verses beginning with the 25th verse of that chapter. Now, if you're having difficulty finding Job you can wait for the second text, it's in the Gospel of John, or perhaps of you want to start looking for John now [Laughter] you will meet us there in a moment. But Job chapter 9, and verse 25, reads this way - remember, Job is having a long discussion with Bildad the Shuhite, and he says in the 9th chapter,

“Now my days are swifter than a runner: they flee away, they see no good. They slip by like reed boats: like an eagle that swoops on its prey. Though I say, I will forget my complaint, I will leave off my sad countenance, and be cheerful: I'm afraid of all my pains, I know that thou wilt not acquit me. I am accounted wicked, why then should I toil in vain? If I should wash myself with snow, and cleanse my hands with lye; yet thou wouldst plunge me into the pit, and my own clothes would abhor me. For he is not a man, as I am, that I may answer him that we may go to court together. There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both. Let him remove his rod from

me, and let not dread of him terrify me: then I would speak, and not fear him; but I am not like that in myself.”

And then in the 1st chapter of the Gospel of John, two texts, John chapter 1, and verse 1, and John chapter 1, and verse 14. In verse 1, the familiar text, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” No question about who this is, of course, for we read in verse 14 in our second text, “And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

And then the last text, 1st Timothy chapter 2, and verse 5, the apostle writes, “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony born at the proper time.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, how wonderful it is to turn to Thee on this, the eve of the celebration of the birth of the Son of God in our society. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. A marvel, a wonder, that will never cease as we reflect upon it. We thank Thee and praise Thee for all that it signifies, we pray that as the days go by that Thou dost give us here upon this earth as it is now. That our understanding and appreciation may continue to grow and further, that our praise, faith, and worship may also grow.

We thank Thee for the greatness of the Son of God and for the way in which he meets our needs so marvelously. We thank Thee today for the whole church of Jesus Christ and may, at this season of the year, we as one great body over the face of this globe, give a true testimony to him who loved us and loosed us from our sins in his own precious blood. We pray Thy blessing upon this local body, we thank Thee for the

commitment and for the dedication of so many within it who have given themselves to serve our Lord and savior Jesus Christ in our day.

We thank Thee for each one, for those who labor in our ministries. Especially we commit them to Thee. Those who labor in the office, we ask Thy blessing upon each one of them and upon their families and loved ones. And especially Lord, do we remember those who are sick and unable to be with us. And for those who are bereaving, we remember them as well. If it pleases Thee, Lord, we pray that Thou alt minister in such a way that healing results. Bless those who have the privilege of ministering to the saints, may Thy blessing be upon them. We pray, too, for all who minister the word of God in Believers Chapel. Lord, touch their hearts and their lips as they seek to teach us the things of the Lord in our meetings and our Sunday School, and in other ways in which we give testimony to Christ. Especially bless our testimony from Monday through Saturday as we meet the world about us as those who have committed themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank Thee for this day, we again ask Thy blessing upon our elders and our deacons, our members, and especially the friends and visitors who are here with us as well. We commit them to Thee, we pray for our President and in the critical days that are these we pray, Lord, that Thou alt give wisdom and guidance to him as he deals with the difficult situation in Panama. We thank Thee for the things that are happening over the face of this globe. May, oh God, the end result be soon coming again of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. In whose name we pray. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is “A Mediator - The Astonishing Word.” A mediator: what does the word conjure up in your mind? Well, some of the common uses are things like labor arbitrators, binding arbitration, brokers, negotiators, negotiations, referees, middle-men, go-betweens, agents, judges, liaison, marriage counselors, mouth pieces in the word of the underworld. But mediator is one of the great words of the

Scriptures. In theology the mediator is Jesus Christ who, by his atoning work, reconciles man to God. It's the writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews who underlines it. He speaks of the Lord Jesus as a mediator of a new covenant. He speaks of him as the mediator of a better covenant.

And then in various other ways we have the Apostle Paul speaking of mediation as well. In 2nd Corinthians, the 5th chapter, in his great chapter on the ministry, he talks about God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. It's remarkable in one sense that both Protestants and Roman Catholics can agree on the term mediation. Even the Council of Trent, the great doctrinal affirmation of the Roman Church, declared, “We were saved through the merits of one mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now that position, of course, is carefully safeguarded in all of the Protestant confessions as well. One mediator between God and man.

The Roman Catholic Church, however, made it difficult for Protestants to follow because they qualified this position by allowing a kind of secondary order of mediators, comprising the priesthood on earth; the angels, the saints, and the Virgin Mary in heaven. The priest was represented as a mediator, as the appointed representative of the church, apart from which there is no salvation. But he has power to offer propitiatory sacrifices for venial sins in the sacrifice of the Mass. That he has the right and power to offer absolution. The Protestant church could not follow those viewpoints and argued that the church is composed not simply of the believers within the Roman Catholic Church, but the believers of the church as a whole, a much larger doctrine of the church. They argued that Christ's sacrifice, not the priests, is the ground of atonement. And they also argue that forgiveness is God's and that a priest is no more an intercessor than a layman is, for all who have believed in our Lord are priests. In other words, there is only one sacrifice and only one mediator.

Ian McLaren, or John Watson, has written some very interesting books that have to do with Scottish church life. There are classics for those who like to read the devotional

literature and who like to read about Scotland. In one of them there is a Dr. Davidson who is the minister of a little town called Drumtochty. And his chief elder is a man by the name of Drumsheugh. And Dr. Davidson, as he finished his last message, went home with his elder and they were discussing their lives. They were speaking about the fact that there were so many ways in which both of them had failed to measure up to what they knew to be God's will for them. And finally, Dr. Davidson said to Drumsheugh, his elder, he said, “It would be a nice thing if we had a friend to say a good word for us both in the great court.”

That reminds me of what Job said in verse 32 of chapter 9 when he said, “For he is not a man, as I am, that I may answer him, that we may go to court together.” Well, that's really what we all need. We need someone who will stand with us in the great court; that is, the court that is to come when we stand before the Lord God, finally. And to use a well warned cliché, that's what Christmas is all about. Not so much caring, as a mediator in a great court.

Now Job is having some arguments with Bildad, discussions I guess would be better. But at any rate, Job's agony is expressed here in the 9th chapter as he seeks to counter Bildad's viewpoint that when a man suffers it's because he has sinned. In his sense Job's suffering, there's no doubt about that, Job must be guilty. But Job, not yet understanding all that he will understand later on, affirms, “I'm guiltless. I'm not going to receive a fair hearing, however, from God. I'm puny, I'm insignificant. I would be overpowered in the judgment. I wouldn't receive a fair hearing.” As he says in verse 16, “If I called, and he answered me, I couldn't believe that he was listening to my voice.” So the greatness of God has so overwhelmed Job and his lack of understanding of the truth has caused him to speak as if he's going to be plunged into the pit, his own clothes will abhor him, “There is no daysman, no umpire, between us who may lay his hands upon us both. God punishes the guiltless, and he also punishes the guilty.”

In this statement he makes in verse 32, “There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both,” is simply expressing the fact that there is no one who will stand as our vindicator. “There is no one,” as Moffett translates it, “There is no one to champion me.” The concept of a mediator, as you can see, is emerging but Job doesn’t, at this point, really understand how it affects him. It will become later on his conviction in the 19th chapter, and the 25th verse. This remarkable man will state, “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that in the last days he will stand.” His exact words are, “As for me, I know that my redeemer lives, and at the last he will take his stand upon the earth. Even after my skin is flayed, yet out of my flesh I shall see God, whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me.” But this is not his conviction now, though it may become his conviction later on. The only thing he can do now is tremble before omnipotence. “There is no umpire between us, and no one to lay his hand upon us both.” You can, if you are a student of holy Scripture, you can sense that this text is one that strongly looks forward to Bethlehem, but Job is still in the dark. “He’s,” as someone has said, “Like an Aeolian Harp across which the wind sweeps, making music.”

Well now we turn to our second passage in John chapter 1, and verse 1. This is not Job’s agony, but John’s astonishing word. In the very first verse he writes, “In the beginning, was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” When we, in our society, and particularly in our society around Dallas, constantly hear over our radio, “Christianity is for caring, Christianity is for caring.” Last year the theme was, “Christianity is for kids, Christianity is for kids.”

Now no one doubts that there is a sense in which Christianity has its application to kids and no one doubts that Christianity is something that ultimately has to do with caring. But these clichés miss the whole point of Christmas. The point of Christmas is, Christianity is for Christ. That’s why we observe Christmas. Christmas is for Christ. We, in at this time of the year, think of him. John in verse 1 of chapter 1 speaks of the

majesty of the incarnate word. No satisfactory exegesis exists that denies that Jesus Messiah is full deity, that there belongs to him divine majesty, the regal word with the fragrance of coronations, thrones, scepters, and palaces, his eternal majesty, the almighty God. One sovereign voice, “Let there be light.” “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” “Thou shalt.” “Thou shalt not.” These are the things that have to do with the name Jesus of Nazareth. The one voice pronouncing the word verdict in the final day will be the voice of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. As the Scriptures say, “God has committed all judgment into his hands.” “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” We never grasp the significance of Jesus Christ if we do not grasp the majesty of the second person of the trinity.

There is an old story repeated by many about an - that came ultimately from an ecclesiastical historian by the name of Woodrow, a Scottish man, he tells of an English merchant who visited Scotland and on his return to London was asked the news from the North. He said, “News?” “Great news. I went to St. Andrews where I heard a sweet, majestic looking man Robert Blair, by name, who showed me the majesty of God. After him I heard a little fair man, Samuel Rutherford, by name, he showed me the loveliness of God. And then I went over to Irvine, on the coast, where I heard a well favored, proper old man, David Dixon by name and he showed me all my heart. All of that’s bound up in, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.”

You may think that there is no practical value in this great truth of the majesty of the second person of the trinity. But just reflect for a moment. If it is true that God is just and we, I presume, would not deny that, God is just. How marvelous it is to know that the one who is just is also a majestic God and can see that justice ultimately has its day. Or, we know as the Scriptures set out for us, that God is wise. And if God, being wise, is also the supreme authority, then wisdom wears the eternal crown and all things are dominated by its infallible dictate. So that everything ultimately will testify to the wisdom of our great God. And, of course, if God is love, as the Scriptures do say, and incidentally

we do not mean sentimentality, we do not mean romantic love, we mean the love that's gave the Son as the propitiation for our sins, as the apostles defined it. If God is love and if he is also vested with absolute an illimitable power, then everything, both on the earth and in the heavens, is in the hands of one who is Lord of all. And consequently his will in that area will be carried out as well. How great and how practical is it to know that the Lord Jesus, the second person of the eternal trinity, is the majestic God?

The 14th verse follows with something that looks like its quite different. We read, “And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” If we talk about the majesty of the incarnate word we can also talk about the glory of his humiliation. In fact, if you were looking for an ideal Christmas text to put on one of your Christmas greetings, nothing could be better than, “And the word became flesh.” There is depth, there is mystery, there is humanness and tenderness in, “The word became flesh.” In fact, the Son's life story as we know is inscribed in flesh and blood. As one has pointed out in verse 1, the word is with God, in verse 14, the word is with us.

Men express themselves in various ways. Our great men of the past have expressed themselves in granite. Portrait painters and other painters have expressed themselves in oils. Michelangelo expressed himself in marble. Shakespeare has expressed himself in ink. But God has selected flesh as the ideal vehicle for self expression, “The word was made flesh.” The only quality with which God has endowed man and which he did not himself possess was flesh. And he therefore has selected flesh as the hallmark of man's humanity as the supreme vehicle for the revelation of his love. Flesh: how eloquent flesh is. Perhaps you haven't directed your thinking to it or maybe you have much more than I have. But just think of how a person expresses himself in flesh when the soul most aches for expression, one speech becomes broken. Sometimes incoherent, revealing the status of the being. In the crises of life we do not express ourselves in the lines that a Shakespeare would use, but we express ourselves in

awkwardness. Awkwardness of our hands and arms and feet, in confusion of face, in the welter of embarrassment, and even in the simple experiences of life, flesh is revealing. A young man speaking to a young lady and something is said and suddenly his face becomes red, he's blushing, and he has told us something about himself when that happens. Or when an accident occurs and our faces suddenly become pale, that reveals us as well.

The word became flesh. The expository value of flesh as expressed in the word of God is so great that the Lord Jesus could say, “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.” In all of the experiences of life, our Lord is the revelation of the Father. And consequently, in flesh he has revealed himself in the tears that stream down his face. In the anger that characterized him, in the various other ways in which he expressed himself, he revealed himself. The word became flesh. Was it not Browning's *Saul* who said, “Tis my flesh that I seek in the Godhead.” He wanted some indication that God was the kind of being that he could, in his own flesh, relate to. That's why our Lord Jesus Christ has come. And let me also point out one thing too. That if the Lord Jesus is not God come in the flesh, we don't have any knowledge of God. We don't have any sure knowledge of him. Only God has the power and the authority to reveal God. We are all men most miserable, no prophet could tell us about God if not ultimately there would come a Lord Jesus Christ who would stand behind that prophet and the word that he spoke and affirm that it was true. How dependent we are upon the incarnate God, for otherwise we don't know God. And we don't know what may happen at the time of the great court.

Now Paul's final answer is given in 1st Timothy chapter 2, in verse 5. If Job had just known this great text. The apostle is calling upon the church for prayer in 1st Timothy chapter 2. And in the midst of it we discover that Job's longed for friend in the great court is found. It's true, as the pastor at Drumtochty said, Dr. Davidson, “We would be none the worse, Drumsheugh, if we should have a friend at the great court.” Listen to

the text, “For there is one God and one mediator also, between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Let’s divide it up for just a moment. He says, “There is one God.” Now Job would surely have affirmed that. There is no indication in his writing at all that he would not have said just as plainly and just as emphatically as the Apostle Paul. There is one God. Why, even the Muslims believe there is one God. There is one God and Mohammed is his prophet. So Christianity, the Islam, and others agree: there is one God. To reject this is to affirm a purposeless universe. The puppet of chance in the plaything of fate is what we become if there is not one God who is in control of the affairs of our society.

But Paul goes on to say something else that is even more important for us. More clarifying perhaps, “There is one mediator also, the man Christ Jesus.” Not angels, not Moses, not Mohammed, the man Christ Jesus. And it may be the he doesn’t allude to his Jewishness, not that he denies it, he does not at all, it’s very evident he builds greatly upon it, but the term man is inclusive of all, gentiles and Jews. And that’s what he’s talking about in this entire passage.

So there is one mediator also, the man Christ Jesus, and it’s here that Paul and Job, as he stood at the time he made that statement in chapter 9, “Part company.” For Job, no umpire. For Paul, one mediator. Or, as a matter of fact, one umpire. For Job, none. Paul, one. When Ian McLaren is talking about Drumtochty and Dr. Davidson and Drumsheugh, his elder, he goes on to talk about the fact that this was Dr. Davidson’s last day and last day of life. And he said that that night, Dr. Davidson died the next day, that he was found and life had passed from him, his dog, Skye, was in the room with him and the only person who heard the last conversation of Dr. Davidson was his servant. And his servant said that as he walked into the room shortly after Drumsheugh had left, he heard Dr. Davidson speaking to Skye, his dog, and this is what he said. He said, “You’re a bonnie beastie, Skye, for a thing he made, is very good. You’ve been true and kind to

your master, Skye, and you'll miss him if he leaves you. Someday you'll die also and they'll bury you, and I doubt that it'll be the end of you Skye.” He means, “I'll doubt not that it'll be the end of you, Skye. You never heard of God, Sky, or the savior, for you're just a poor doggie. But your master is minister of Drumtochty and a sinner saved by grace.” Those were his last words. In the morning his servant walked into the room, the doctor was still sitting in his chair, Skye was fondly licking a hand that would never again caress him. Skye, the noblest dog in the world, had no sense of sin and no sense of grace, no need of a good, no need of a savior, so the person who recounted it said. How true it is, for it's the redeemed who have the sense of sin. It's the redeemed who have the knowledge of a savior. And it's the redeemed who at Christmastime truly enjoy what Christmas is all about.

One God, Paul said, just one. Multitude of gods, that wouldn't do. You may offend some of them, you could say, but some of them I won't offend. And you could escape the great court, but just one God. And one mediator. Just one. The beauty of it is that one's enough. One's ample. That's all we need. One God, one mediator. No desperate man petting for God could resent Paul's ones. If he were to say to Paul, “Well, one is rather parsimonious Paul. Just one? You mean God is like that, just one?” But the man who's looking for a savior doesn't need a host of God's if he has the God of hosts. Acts chapter 4, in verse 12, clarifies it all when Peter says that, “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” The difference between Job's none and Paul's one, between no God and one God, between no savior and one savior, is a difference so stupendous as someone has said that, “All the immensities and infinities seem to repose within it.” None means nothing, one means everything. None means failure, one means facility. None means perdition, one means paradise. Merging all into this great statement, “There is one God, one mediator between God and man.” The difference between all eternity stands within it.

Where do you stand? Is Christmas to you, Christmas for kids? I don't deny that there is a sense in which you can say that, but it's so far down the scale of significance as to be insignificant as over against the Son of God. Christmas for caring, well of course. But so far down the scale as to be nothing in comparison with the infinity of a savior who is the eternal God who has, in his own words, offered to sinners eternal life. When Bunyan's Christian came to the cross there were three shining men. One offered forgiveness of sins, and there were other things that they offered, a coat of righteousness to clothe them, a scroll to put in their hands, that's what we have when we have a mediator. A mediator between God and men, a mediator who will stand with us in the great court so that when we pass into the presence of God he stands for me. Do you know that truth? Is that really your conception of how you stand before the Lord God. That there is nothing in you that would enable you to stand before the Lord God for a moment but that your whole hope rests in the one mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. The one representative, the last item, for there is no other item, who will within his broad and great arms, gather all who have believed in our Lord Jesus Christ. Is that your faith? Is that your trust? May God in his marvelous grace enable you to recognize your lost condition and flee to the cross, as Christian did, where you'll find your burden roll off of your back, into the tomb with the forgiveness of sins. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, how grateful we are that there is one mediator. He is enough. One only mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. One of us but the eternal Son. Oh Father, if there should be any in this audience today who have never believed in him, touch their hearts. Enable them to see their need. Enable them to see their lost condition. Enable them Lord to see that they have no friend in the great court if they have not Christ. And cause them by Thy grace to flee to Thee. We thank Thee for the love that gave us an atoning savior. And we praise Thy...

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