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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“Systems of Eschatology: the Post-Millennial System”

TRANSCRIPT

We are in the second of our series of studies on “The Theology of Prophecy, or Sanity in Eschatology,” and I have already had one objection to my title. Someone came up and said, if we’re going to study sanity in eschatology it seems to me we should have a sane professor to teach us. [Laughter] But I ignore the backbitings of the rabble and proceed to our topic.

We’re going to study the Post Millennial System of Eschatology. We are considering the system of eschatology, and of course, there are three that are significant: the post-millennial system, the amillennial system and the premillennial system. And these systems of eschatology, post-millennial, amillennial, premillennial are defined by the relationship that the Second Advent has to the kingdom of our Lord upon the earth.

Now what I mean by that is simply this, that when we say that there is such a thing as a post-millennial system of eschatology, we mean simply that this system of eschatology is gathered around the so-called truth that Jesus Christ is going to return after the millennial kingdom upon the earth.

Post-millennial is derived, as most of you know, from the Latin adverb *post* which means after, the word, millennium, which comes from two other Latin words, *mille* a numeral meaning one thousand; *unus* the noun for year, so post-millennial means, after

the thousand year reign. So the system gathers itself, then, around the claim that Jesus Christ is to return after the kingdom of God upon the earth.

The amillennial system, unfortunately in this case, that term is not derived wholly from the Latin, but from the Latin and the Greek. Millennium, of course, means "the thousand year reign." But the A in front of it, amillennial, is an alpha privative, derived from the Greek language, which is the way the Greeks had of negating words. When we want to negate words, we use, usually a word like, un, before our word. Like we say if something is eaten, if we want to negate it, we say "uneaten." If we want to negate, known, we say of course "unknown" adding the U-N. In Greek, the normal way to negate something was to add or attach a prefix of A or alpha in front of the word. So amillennial means, no thousand year reign or no kingdom of a thousand years, no thousand year period. So the amillennial system then gathers itself around the claim that there is not going to be a kingdom of the Lord Jesus upon the earth at all.

This system is usually traced to the great church father Augustine. Amillennialism is probably the second most popular of the systems of eschatology and has become particularly popular in the last century or so. There of course have been other days in which men were amillennialists, but it has reached its zenith in the last century or so. Many have claimed that amillennialism has arisen because of the fact that post millennialism, which was popular for a number of years, became an impossible theory to hold as a result of the world wars, and so some have said amillennialism is disillusioned post-millennialism, and that those who were post-millennial became amillennialists because they could not see anything in history that indicated that we really were going to bring in the kingdom upon the earth and that the Lord Jesus would return to a world which man had in a sense made pure.

The premillennial system you can, of course I'm sure, gather from the term, premillennial means, is a system that gathers itself around the fact that the Lord Jesus, it is

claimed, will return before, for the prefix *pre* means before, before the thousand year reign upon the earth.

So amillennialism, premillennialism, post-millennialism are theological systems defined according to the relationship of the second coming of Jesus Christ to the kingdom upon the earth. One saying he shall come after the kingdom, one saying there shall be no kingdom upon the earth at all, one saying he shall come before the kingdom.

While there is some debate over this, premillennialism is traceable to a number of the early church fathers. It was not the only system that was held by the early church fathers, but it is a very early system. It is also claimed that amillennialism is early, and I think there is some evidence in some of the writings of the fathers to justify that. When some of the premillennialists criticize other views, they do acknowledge, occasionally, in some specific instances – we will deal with these later on – that there did exist a denial of the premillennial system, and evidently it must have been something very similar to an amillennial view of the kingdom.

Well then these are the terms that we are going to be using constantly over the next five or six weeks. Amillennialism, there is no kingdom of our Lord upon the earth. Premillennialism, the Lord Jesus is going to return to the earth and establish the kingdom himself. Post-millennialism, the view that by virtue of the preaching of the gospel and the work of men, we shall bring in a kingdom after which or at the conclusion of which the Lord Jesus shall come to the earth, and we shall enter into the new heavens and new earth.

Well I hope as a result of this simple little description of these terms that you know more than the high school boy who was once asked, what is the millennium? He said "Well he thought it was an insect with ten times as many legs as a centennial."

[Laughter]

Is the discussion of the millennium worthwhile? If it's simply a matter of satisfying curiosity about the future, the answer of course is no. But this is not the case. Involved

in the discussion of the millennial issue are several other extremely important issues, the first of which is the proper approach to Scripture itself. Because you see, as we shall see I hope, post-millennialists and amillennialists follow a different hermeneutical principle; a different interpretative principle.

They do not believe that we should take the words of Scripture literally or normally. They believe much more in figurative, symbolical, spiritualizing or allegorical means of interpreting the Scripture. I don’t know exactly which word would be acceptable to all amillennialists. I don’t think either one of any one of the ones that I mentioned would be acceptable to all, but I think by just stating them all, I am sure that we are being accurate.

Amillennialists and post-millennialists do not take the word of God literally or in its normal sense. They lay much more stress upon the figurative, much more stress upon the symbolical. They tend to allegorize or spiritualize the great prophecies of the Old Testament, finding their fulfillment in the history of the Christian church during the present age. So you can see that this approach to Scripture does not simply touch the question of the millennium, but actually touches the interpretation of great sections of the word of God.

There is one other thing that is extremely important in this discussion of systems of eschatology. Involved in it is the understanding of the course of the age in which we are living, the meaning of our history.

Now if it is true to say that this question is a problem of hermeneutics, it is also true to say that this question touches the problem of the philosophy of history. All Christians who have thought at all have a philosophy of history. There is in the Bible a philosophy of history set forth.

Philosophies of history gather around three primary things. There is first of all a view of the beginning of the creation or the beginning of history. Second, there is a view of the goal of history. And there is also a view of the regulative principle by which

history unfolds. Christians have views concerning the Origin of history, they have views concerning the goal of history, and they have certain specific views of the regulative principle of human history.

Now you can see I'm sure that the question of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus upon the earth is a question that touches our philosophy of history. What we believe about that will determine to some extent what we believe about what is happening in this world in which we are living. If, for example, we are post-millennialists, we must believe that things are getting better and better, and so we would interpret history along those lines. If we are amillennialists or premillennialists, we would agree that things are not getting better and better, and we would interpret things along that line. If we were amillennialists, we would not believe that because Jesus Christ suffered in history that there must be in history a consummation of the redemptive program of God to demonstrate what he is doing, but rather that is bypassed entirely, and we pass from catastrophe of great tribulation directly into the new heavens and the new earth.

Premillennialists have a different view of what is happening and what God is trying to do. Amillennialists would not believe that the promises of the word of God in their literal sense are necessarily to be fulfilled and so they would not read the Abrahamic promises as premillennialists would read the Abrahamic promises. They would not see this present age as an age in which some of those Abrahamic promises were beginning to have their ultimate fulfillment. They would see things differently.

In other words, what I am saying is that what we believe about the millennium is not simply a matter of curiosity, but it determines some much greater issues in the study of the word of God. The apostles, remember, after they had been taught by the Lord Jesus for forty days following his resurrection asked him the question, Wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? The Lord Jesus, you remember, did not question the legitimacy of that question at all, but answered them with reference to the time. He said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own

power." He did not say, now the kingdom is never going to be restored to Israel at all; how did you ever get such an idea in your head. But rather, it's not for you to know the times or the seasons.

I comment upon this because it appears evident from this particular incident recorded in Acts chapter 1 verses 6 and 7 that having been taught by the Lord Jesus for forty days following his resurrection, giving them a course of study that surely would be almost as good as you could get at Dallas Theological Seminary, having given them this tremendous instruction and by the way, Luke describes it as instruction in the things that concern the kingdom of God, they ask the question, Wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? So it is evident that a large part of the ministry of the Lord Jesus to the apostles following his resurrection, when they were much better able to bear his teaching, concerned the prophetic things and specifically the kingdom that God had promised to Israel in the Old Testament.

So this was not really a question of curiosity. It was not that they studied prophecy because prophecy was popular. It was because this was the key to the unfolding of what God is doing in the age in which we are living, and I must say that if a person does not understand the prophetic word, he has a view of holy Scripture that is most inadequate, and as far as I'm concerned, I find it difficult to see how a Christian could be happy in the age in which he lives if he doesn't understand the prophetic word. I find it very difficult to see how he could understand what is happening around him if he does not understand these things that have to do with prophecy.

Therefore I do not agree with D. C. McIntosh, who wrote with reference to premillennialism, the whole obsolete idea of a literal visible return of Jesus to this earth. To him this was an obsolete idea that was no longer a valid thing.

We want to take a look at post-millennialism. It is held by some men today. For example, Loraine Boettner, who was written an excellent book on predestination, *The Reform Doctrine of Predestination* is a man who holds still and actively promulgates the

post-millennial interpretation of the prophetic word. Charles Hodge is generally regarded as having been a post-millennialist. A. H. Strong, the great Baptist theologian, was a convinced post-millennialist. And so post-millennialism is not dead and was at one time a very widely held system of prophetic interpretation.

The history of post millennialism. The system is not old, although some of its principles are early. There are three men who are important for our study. I want to say just a few words about each of of them. The first is the church father by the name of Origen. Origen was born in 185 AD, and so he lived about a hundred years after the apostles. He died in 253. He was an Alexandrian. He was in his day probably the leading student of the word of God. He was not a post-millennialist, but Origen was particularly prominent and is remembered particularly for his allegorical method of interpretation.

Now this allegorical method of interpretation which Origen enunciated as well as his denial of premillennialism are steps along the way to post-millennialism. Origen not only denied premillennialism and not only promulgated allegorical interpretation, but he so enunciated allegorical interpretation that he even came to a denial of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Augustine is our second man. Augustine is probably the greatest of the church fathers, the greatest theologian of them surely and the great opponent of Pelegius and others. Augustine is the one from whom Luther and Calvin obtained their finest ideas, and fortunately in the case of Calvin, particularly some of the evils of Augustine's viewpoints Calvin did not imbibe. But his prophetic interpretation is something that generally the Reformers followed, very generally.

Augustine I say was born in 354, died in 430. He taught that the millennium was to be interpreted spiritually as fulfilled in the Christian church. In other words, in his system, the millennium is not a literal reign of our Lord upon the earth of a thousand years, but is to be interpreted as a time of spiritual blessing fulfilled in the Christian

church. There are some who feel that Augustine taught that the millennium was going to end around 650 AD. I'm not sure really that Augustine taught that, but nevertheless it is claimed that some statements lead to that. If that's so, of course, when 650 came men learned that Augustine was not right. He could be called a post-millennialist as well as a premillennialist, because since he believed that the millennium was to be interpreted spiritually, you could say that he was an amillennialist. But at the same time, since he believed in a millennium and that it was spiritually taking place in this present age, and that Christ would return afterwards, then you could say that he was also post-millennial.

Generally speaking, Augustine is thought of as the father of amillennialist. The reason is that amillennialists like the name of Augustine, and they like to think that they follow him because the great principles of grace are derived from Augustine. Augustine is the man who taught us, for example, that the will is not free, and all good Christians love that doctrine at least if they understand the principles of grace. They love the doctrine of the bondage of the human will, because they know that they have been freed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

So since Augustine taught that, and since he effectively countered the Pelagian idea that man does have a free will and is saved through the activity of his free will, they like Augustine, and they like to think that Augustine also was an amillennialist. But he can be called a post-millennialist as well. We'll just say he is the father of amillennialism, and I want to read a few words from Augustine because I think it's always better to read the sources for yourself rather than to hear someone else say something about them. So I'm going to read you a few things that Augustine has to say about the millennial kingdom.

There is one thing that I should mention that I forgot. When we talk about the kingdom, we use the term millennium, *mille*, a thousand *unus* year, thousand years. Now in Greek, the term for a thousand years is the term *chilias*, so millennialism is the doctrine that concerns the millennium, the thousand year period of time. Chiliasm means the same thing. It just is a word based upon the Greek language. So you are going to find in this

that reference is made to chiliasm as well as millennialism, or maybe in this paragraph only millennialism, but at any rate the thousand years are here.

Now listen to what Augustine has to say. "Now those who on the strength of this passage got the notion that the first resurrection was to be a bodily one (he's talking about Revelation chapter 20, and the prophecy of the thousand years was to be a bodily one) were influenced in this direction mainly by the matter of a thousand years. The notion was that the saints were destined to enjoy so protracted a Sabbath of repose, a holy leisure. That is, after the labors of the six thousand years, stretching from the creation of man, his great sin and merited expulsion from the happiness of paradise into the unhappiness of this mortal life. The interpretation was worked out in the light of the Scripture text, one day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

"Thus there was supposed to follow upon the six thousand years, taken as six days, a seventh day or Sabbath taking up the last thousand, and to be given over to the resurrecting saints for celebration. One might put up with such an interpretation if it included belief in some spiritual delights accruing to the saints from the Lord's company during the Sabbath rest. In fact I myself at one time accepted such an opinion. (Now he confesses here that he was at one time a premillennialist.) But when these interpreters say that the rising saints are to spend their time in limitless gormandizing with such heaps of food and drink as not only go beyond all sense of decent restraint, but go utterly beyond belief, then such an interpretation becomes wholly unacceptable save to the carnal minded."

Now Augustine got this from some premillennialists who were not very careful in their use of words and further not too careful in their study of Scripture. Because they did promulgate these ideas that living in the kingdom would be very much like a Mohammedan paradise. And I want to assure you that's not the case in case that's the reason you're a premillennialist. Anyway, he goes on to say, "But the spiritual minded

term those who can swallow the literal interpretation of the thousand years, Chiliasts, from the Greek *chilias*, a thousand, or millenarians from the corresponding Latin word. To refute them point by point would take too long. My present obligation will be rather to show how the scriptural passage in question ought to be understood."

Now there are pages and pages of discussion of it, and I won't bother you with the rest of it, but you can see that Augustine confesses that he was a premillennialist but he became an amillennialist or he abandoned premillennialism because of the limitless gormandizing of the views of the premillennialists.

Now we want to come to the third man, Daniel Whitby. Daniel Whitby, who was born in 1638 and died in 1725 is generally thought to be the father of the post-millennial system. Now he, like Augustine, thought of the millennium as fulfilled in the inter-advent period. That is, between the time of the first coming of our Lord Jesus and the second coming. But Whitby's view was slightly different from Augustine's in that he thought of the millennium as being in the distant future. Whitby felt that the millennial kingdom is to be found primarily in the latter part of the church age. In other words, after the time of the cross, the church period begins. Throughout this period of time Satan is bound. Did you know that? Satan is bound.

Now of course, these men were not dumb. They were not ignorant. They taught that Satan was bound, but they said he is not bound in such a way that he cannot get loose in accordance with what Peter says, Satan goes about as a roaring lion. So he was bound, but he has an extremely long chain. [Laughter] So, the church period, the church period consumes this period of time, but during the church period due to the preaching of the gospel, and due to the means of grace and the witness of the saints, we are going to see a gradual transformation of human society with the result that we shall enter a period of time, a kind of golden age, in which the prophecies of the Old Testament with reference to the millennial kingdom are spiritually fulfilled. In other words things are going to get better and better and ultimately we are going to have a millennium.

Of course, Mr. Whitby knew those passages of Scripture. He was a Unitarian, but he knew those passages of Scripture, and some of the others who have held similar views also know those passages of Scripture that describe a period of great tragedy and catastrophe just preceding the Lord’s Advent to the earth, so that period of time is inserted here. After the millennial kingdom, there will be a period of Great Tribulation which will last a little season. Then the Lord Jesus shall come. There shall be the second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the Great White Throne judgment after Armageddon and the incident involving Gog and Magog, and the result of all of this at the conclusion of the millennial age will be the new heavens and the new earth. But of course, the key point is that the Lord Jesus shall come after the millennium, so this is a post-millennial interpretation of the future. Daniel Whitby, then, is important because he is the founder of the post-millennial system.

There are really two types of post-millennialism, and I think we should bear this in mind. Post-millennialism, as you can easily see, is a kind of interpretation that would lend itself very well to the humanistic materialist philosophy of the days since the time of the auf- cleric or the Enlightenment. Because it, in praising what man is going to do, harmonizes beautifully with the humanistic idea, the scientific idea, that we are gradually becoming better and better, and we are going to introduce the ideal society by means of science, by means of our intellect or whatever the means may be.

But the two types of post-millennialism that have developed are, first, a biblical type. Now this is the type of Charles Hodge and Loraine Boettner. They have believed from the interpretation of certain Scriptures. They have based their doctrine upon Scripture that the world is going to become Christianized due to the power of God by the gospel and through the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. For example, those passages in the New Testament which speak of the fact that the kingdom is not of this world, or those passages that describe the gradual sowing of the seed – those passages

that describe the leavening of society – those passages are passages that have to do with the growing kingdom upon the earth.

Now I’m going to turn and at this point read the Scripture reading which I wanted to read earlier, but it really fits at this point. So if you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to Matthew chapter 12 verse 28 and 29 and let me read a couple of verses and then we are going to read a few verses of Matthew chapter 13. So Matthew chapter 12 verses 28 and 29. Now here we read,

“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.”

It has been the interpretation of many post-millennialists that the Lord Jesus, when he came and died on the cross at Calvary, by the blood that he shed and the victory that he won, bound the strong man Satan in such a way that it can be said that he is bound throughout this age. Now let’s read chapter 13. This is the chapter in which we have the parables of the kingdom. And we read in verse 1 of chapter 13,

“The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a boat, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on that shore on the shore. And he spoke many things unto them in parables saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith

they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had not root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up, and choked them: But other seeds fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Now let's look at the interpretation in verse 18 through verse 23. The Lord Jesus has told of a sower who went out to sow seed that fell in four types of soil. This is called the parable of the sower. It probably should be better be called the parable of the soils. Hear therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and immediately with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, immediately he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed in the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; who also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

Now this is thought to be an illustration of passages in the word of God that describe the sowing of the seed throughout the present age, the conclusion of which will be a kind of millennium. You can see this particularly when you come to the parable of the leaven, and I think that we should look at that. It’s in verse 33. This parable suits that doctrine much more closely.

“Another parable spoke he unto them saying The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. All these things spoke Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spoke he not unto them.”

So the taking of the leaven and the hiding it in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened is an illustration of how the gospel is brought into this world in which we live through the saving work of Christ, and how the world shall ultimately be leavened by the preaching of the gospel. This is the biblical form of post-millennialism. This is the form that is held by men who love the Bible and who believed in the power of God.

The second kind of post-millennialism is of a different type. It is a kind that is held by liberals. It is the evolutionary type. The material of this kind of post-millennialism is not the word of God, but it is human reason, and its confidence in man to achieve progress via natural means. It is reflected in the words of the French psychotherapist Emile Coue who is so popular, was so popular when I was growing up, who is best known perhaps for his famous statement, “Day by day in every way we are getting better and better.” That kind of doctrine was the product of the Enlightenment and was fed by the scientific revolution as well as, of course, evolutionary, materialistic, humanistic thought.

This kind of post-millennialism is characteristic of the liberals, and this is why, when you were in your liberal church – if you were ever in a liberal church as I was – this is why you so often heard men in the pulpit on Sunday morning get up and speak about the kingdom and speak about bringing in the kingdom. I used to hear that expression in my Presbyterian church quite frequently, that we were involved in the great work of bringing in the kingdom. This is a reflection of this kind of philosophy and this kind of theology. So you see these questions of post-millennialism actually are larger questions that affect our whole outlook upon the world and life in which we are and which we are living.

Let's think now for a few moments about the system of post-millennialism. It's difficult to set it forth fully since there are diverse elements involved. After all, Whitby was a Unitarian. He was not even a Christian. Unitarians are not Christians. If you are in this audience, and you're a Unitarian you are not a Christian. You may be very religious and very sweet also, but you are not Christian. Christians are Trinitarians. Well Whitby was a Unitarian.

On the other hand, Charles Hodge and A. A. [sic., Strong], they were Calvinists, they were strong, good, Christian men who understood the doctrines of grace. A. H. Strong was perhaps and still is regarded by many Baptists as their greatest theologian. These men were post-millennial. So it's very difficult to take the whole system and analyze it when it has such diverse elements within it. But we'll try anyway.

Capital A, it's attitude to Scripture. Roman two, the system of post millennialism; capital A, it's attitude to Scripture. Post-millennialism is characterized by a spiritualizing of Scripture: the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, the symbolic method of interpretation of Scripture. In other words, those great prophecies of the Old Testament that speak of the blessing that is to be extended to the Nation Israel upon the earth are understood according to this method of interpretation to refer to the spiritual blessings that have come to the church of Christ in the present age. So the prophecies of great blessing in the Old

Testament are not applied to the Nation Israel as they were given in the Old Testament, but are applied to the church of Jesus Christ which is regarded as a kind of new Israel. This is characteristic both of amillennialism and post-millennialism.

The kinds of arguments that are used for this, for after all, there must be some arguments for this position. These men are generally intelligent men are something like this. First, the Bible is an Oriental book, and because the Bible is an Oriental book, it is like the books of the East, and the books of the East have a great deal of figurative and symbolic language in them, and consequently, we are not to interpret the Bible literally like the Jehovah's Witnesses do, but we are to interpret the Bible in the light of the kind of literature it is. And since it belongs to a certain literary genre, then we should interpret it in light of the principles for interpreting that kind of literary genre. And since it is, then, an oriental book we should interpret it, figuratively. This is the kind of reason that is given for this.

Now the Bible is an Oriental book. There is no question about that. The Bible abounds in figurative language. Of course that's true. Even in our language today we often use figures. We say, the Crimson Tide fell before, I'm sorry I have to say this, but nevertheless, we do say this that the Crimson Tide fell before Notre Dame. Now we don't understand that in any other way but that Notre Dame on the football field managed to luck out and win that game thirteen to eleven. [Laughter] Now we have used a figurative term when we say that. There are many kinds of figures of speech that we use. We say, he's off his rocker, as you are probably saying of me at that point. We are not taking that literally. We understand figures of speech. We understand figurative language.

Now the only thing that the premillennialists have said is simply this that the normal method of interpretation is the method that one should follow unless the context demands that we interpret the language figuratively or symbolically. Whereas the amillennialists and post-millennialists on the other hand, tend to go more with a general

rule of interpreting the prophetic language figuratively and symbolically and occasionally, if it’s absolutely necessary, literally. So this argument is one of the arguments that is used.

A second argument is the argument that we saw in Augustine. Literal interpretations are off are often absurd. They don’t make any sense. And they are also carnal. That is, we should not think for one moment that we can have a literal kingdom upon the earth and at the same time have it spiritual. They see a conflict between the literal and the spiritual. That which is literal, a literal reigning of our Lord upon the earth and believers reigning with him – that literal kind of view of the kingdom cannot be spiritual. So therefore we cannot have a literal kingdom.

That reminds me of an illustration which about fifteen years ago I heard Professor McLane from Grace Theological Seminary use here in Dallas Theological Seminary in one of our lecture series. He said, “Let me illustrate how something that is literal can also be spiritual by a little parable.” He said during a church banquet, a group of preachers were discussing the nature of the kingdom of God. One expressed his adherence to the premillennial view of a literal kingdom established on earth among men. To this, a rather belligerent 200-pound preacher snorted, “Ridiculous. Such an idea is nothing but materialism.” When asked to state his own view, he replied, “The kingdom is a spiritual matter. The kingdom of God has already been established and is within you.” Now of course he is using passages of Scripture that post-millennialists use which our Lord uttered. The kingdom of God is within you.

“Don’t you gentlemen know that the kingdom is not eating and drinking (and here he uses Paul’s words in Romans 14:17). The kingdom is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” And then Professor McLane said this preacher reached hungrily across the table and speared another enormous piece of fried chicken. Now you can tell that this is a preacher’s parable by the use of this kind of food. [Laughter] Fried chicken. What preacher doesn’t know about fried chicken, who has not eaten literally scores of chicken through the years?

Doctor Criswell, down at the First Baptist Church says, when a young man comes to him and says to him that he has been called to preach he said my first question to him is, do you like fried chicken? [Laughter] And if he says no, he says then, you’re not called to preach. [More laughter] So anyway this enormous preacher who has insisted now that the kingdom is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit has just taken this great big drumstick and has devoured it.

And then Professor McLane added, “Nobody tried to answer him. As a matter of fact, no answer was necessary. He had answered his own his own argument. As the French would say, he was hoist upon his own petard. At the risk of being tiresome, however,” he said, “let me recite the obvious conclusion. If the kingdom of God can exist now on earth in a two hundred pound preacher full of fried chicken without any reprehensible materialistic connotations perhaps it could also exist in eating and drinking under more perfect conditions in the future millennial kingdom. Personally I’ve always had a very high opinion of the value of fried chicken, but this was the first time I had ever seen its apologetical value as an argument against the inconsistencies of that view of the kingdom based on the platonic notion of spirituality.”

Well I think that effectively answers the claim of the post millennialists who say that if the kingdom is literal it cannot be spiritual. Why that is absurd. We say today that a person born again who is living this material life may be a spiritual person. The fact that we have literal activities in the kingdom does not mean that they are not spiritual. When the Lord Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world he did not mean to say that he would never have a kingdom in this world. He meant simply to define the nature of that kingdom. It is a kingdom that is operated according to heavenly spiritual principles. He was not denying that it shall not be in the world. He said it is not of this world, just as we in a few moments previously, were said to be not of this world. We are related to the Lord Jesus, spiritually. So in our system of post-millennialism its attitude toward Scripture

is that of allegorizing the word of God, and therefore it is, I think, a very, very faulty system.

Second, its attitude to the kingdom itself. The millennium is located in the present inter-advent period, in the case of Augustine or in the case of others who have a similar view, or it is if more literally interpreted referred to the future just before the Lord comes, so that the kingdom according to post millennialism is a spiritual kind of kingdom that is in existence now throughout this present age, or it will be in the end of this age realized when the golden age is brought into existence upon the earth through the activities of men. Its attitude to the present age.

Now as you can see, if we are living in the kingdom, or if we are gradually progressing in this present age to the time when we shall be in the kingdom before the Lord comes, if we are going to bring in the kingdom ourselves, then the attitude toward the kingdom is totally optimistic, as this passage in Matthew 13 has indicated.

David Brown, one of the leading post-millennialists has written, "The growing character of the kingdom taught by the mustard seed, and the penetrating and assimilating character taught by the leaven go on till the whole earth is leavened, and all the world had been brought to lodge in the branches of the mighty tree of life." And so these parables then are taken to be parables of the progress of our human life until we actually have a kingdom of God upon the earth without the Lord Jesus Christ's coming.

Donald Gray Barnhouse, about thirty years ago speaking about post-millennialism said that, "If we were to accept post-millennialism, we would have to rewrite the parables of Jesus Christ, and he suggested that this is the way we should rewrite the parable of the sower." He said, "A sower went forth to sow and some of the seed fell upon good ground took root and grew up producing wheat thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and one hundredfold. More wheat fell on thorny ground but wheat rubbed gently against thorns until all the thorns had been transformed into wheat. Still other grains of wheat fell into shallow ground but the powerful roots pierced the rocky bed and turned the soil into

good ground so that all took root and produced a good crop. Finally, yet other grains fell upon hard ground transformed it into good loam took root sprang up into a good crop, and thus it came to pass that when the harvest came there was nothing in the field but wheat.” That is the kind of picture that we are given by biblical post-millennialism, and it is the same type of picture that we are given by humanistic post-millennialism.

Finally its attitude to the Second Advent. There are several views of post Millennialists regarding the Second Advent. Some affirm a true bodily return of the Lord Jesus after the millennial kingdom, like Hodge, but others speak only of repeated spiritual returns of the Lord Jesus often at just various crises of human history, the Lord Jesus returns then. I presume that one would have said the Lord Jesus really returned when that cloud fell over the English Channel and allowed the allied soldiers to escape to Great Britain in World War II. That type of thing.

We have just about five minutes, and I want to try to analyze the weaknesses of post-millennialism, most of which I have already referred to. These are the prominent ones. First of all, it’s hermeneutical weakness. The spiritualizing principle of post-millennialism leads to indifference to the prophetic study of the word of God. Isn’t it an interesting thing that in the present day of tremendous interest in the prophetic word you can hardly think – I can only think of one well-known preacher who is a post-millennialist. Out of all of the teaching of prophecy there is just one.

Now I think that that is in evidence of the fact that this system which at its heart spiritualizes the word of God, at its heart leads to indifference to the prophetic portions of Scripture. For example, Charles Hodge begins his section on eschatology by saying, “This is a very difficult subject and a person should not investigate it unless he is an expert.” He said, “I admit that I am not an expert, but I’m going to give you a kind of historical treatment of it, and he engages in about eighty pages of study of prophecy.” Dr. Chafer at the Seminary used to tell us as students that “Charles Hodge acknowledges at the

beginning of his eschatological section that he doesn't know anything about eschatology and then spends eighty pages proving it." [Laughter]

Now Charles Hodge was a very godly man whose theology I respect extremely, but when it comes to the prophetic word he acknowledged the same thing that most of the post-millennialists have had to acknowledge down through the years. They had not really studied the Scriptures prophetically as they should have. That hermeneutical principle of spiritualizing the word of God, not taking it in its normal sense, is destructive of the study of the word, and furthermore, that principle, if it were allowed to be utilized in the study of the soteriological sections of the Bible and the Ecclesiastical sections and the other sections of the word of God, aside from the prophetic, it would lead also to indifference to the study of the whole Bible and that of course is precisely what has happened. It's not a necessary thing. I would not blame Mr. Hodge for that, but it is a thing that very easily can happen.

The second weakness is its anthropological weakness. I'm sure that you in this auditorium know enough about human nature to know that the idea or the theology that man is going to bring in a kingdom is surely a suspect one from the standpoint of the Bible. It has a weak view of man. It does not regard man as in bondage to sin to the extent that the Bible pictures it, and furthermore it does not regard human history as it should. The thing that killed post-millennialism for most people was the existence, the occurrence of two great world wars. The history of man just did not follow the post millennialists' dreams, because it is based upon a picture of human nature that is not true to the word of God. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of God. Never forget that. It is not the kingdom of man and consequently it must be introduced by God and not by men.

And finally, its exegetical weakness. It is totally unable to handle the passages that deal with the promises made to Abraham and to his seed, and the promises made to the Davidic seed, the promises that Paul sets forth in Romans chapter 11 – promises that can only be handled if those prophecies are taken in their literal, normal sense. And of

course, what we have seen happen in the 20th Century is a kind of confirmation of the treatment of the Biblical word in its literal, normal sense.

Now we are dropping post-millennialism. We are beginning next week a study of amillennialism which is the prevailing eschatological system of a large section of genuine, biblical Christianity. It is the biblical system, for example, that is taught in such places as Westminster Theological Seminary, a fine theological seminary. It is the biblical principle that is taught in many of the evangelical churches of this country that are not premillennial. It is extremely popular. It has some exceedingly good arguments that may be offered in its defense. What we are going to try to do is to seek to find its good points as well as its weaknesses, and so we will be dealing with this interpreting, specifically passages of Scripture that are said to be amillennial in their true interpretation. Let's close our meeting in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord for the word of God. We are thankful that Thou hast given us this wonderful revelation, and we pray that Thou wilt deliver us from indifference to the study of the prophetic word.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.