



## **BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“Eternal State and Eternal Punishment”

TRANSCRIPT

We are turning to our last study in our series on eschatology and the subject is the Eternal State, the New Heavens and the New Earth, and Eternal Punishment. When we turn to the subject of the new heavens and the new earth, we are coming to the concluding portion of our study of eschatology because all of the teachings of the Bible concerning the future ultimately merges in what the Scriptures have to say concerning the eternal state and the new heavens and the new earth.

The new heavens and the new earth are the dwelling places of the redeemed and the redeemed of all the ages. It's natural to speak also of eternal punishment because that happens to be the destiny of those who have refused the message concerning the Lord Jesus. So these two things go together.

Throughout all eternity, the saints enjoy the presence of God in the new heavens and the new earth, living upon the new earth under the new heaven and those that are the damned, the condemned, they suffer throughout all eternity, the eternal judgment of God. We know, of course, that men are inclined to accept very easily the doctrine of the eternal state, the doctrine of heaven, the doctrine of the new heavens and the new earth, but they are not nearly so inclined to accept the doctrine of eternal punishment. And probably the doctrine of eternal punishment has fewer adherents today than it has ever

had in history because many of those who do affirm their faith in the Lord Jesus as the Savior from sin, also affirm that there is no such thing as eternal punishment. That is, the doctrine of universalism has become a doctrine that has infiltrated all of our denominational churches which we call mainline denominational churches. And it’s not only in our denominational churches but even in our independent churches.

I think I mentioned one time a long way back in our studies when I was in Basel, Switzerland, just a few years ago and ministering on Wednesday nights in one of the churches in that city, probably as sound a church as found in that part of Switzerland in which, so far as I knew, all of the members of that congregation were believers, loved the doctrine, that the church was troubled over the doctrine of universalism, or universal reconciliation as they were speaking of it.

And that was one of the first questions I was asked by one of the elders who served in that city. Do you believe in the eternal punishment of the Lord? And then I was told after I said, of course I do, that there were a number in the congregation who were disturbed over it and some had actually left the congregation over it including some who had at one time been elders. So this is a doctrine that is not easily accepted by the world today.

One of the well-known theologians of the past generation has said, “No one is surer of applause than the man who discovered some new method of evading justice under the pretext of humanity.” And it’s only natural that if a person could make a case for universal reconciliation or universalism, he would, it seems, gain a hearing. I read a symposium of articles on the hereafter sometime ago, and one of the writers of the symposium had a story about a man who listened to his pastor as he painted in vivid color what he conceived to be the awful condition of the law. And finally the man got up and he said, “Hold on, Pastor. If hell is as bad as you say, the people just naturally wouldn’t stand for it.” I think that’s the way many of us feel when we hear hellfire and damnation kind of preaching.

This morning I had a very interesting conversation with one of you. I don't see him here, but he may be here in the audience. And he mentioned the fact that he had been brought up under hellfire and damnation preaching. Well, there's a whole lot -- there's a whole lot of preaching that is worse than hellfire and damnation preaching. And it's true, some may overemphasize it, but if that note is not found in our preaching, then it surely is not biblical preaching.

Let's look now at the eternal state as we have it set before us in Revelation chapter 21. John has now seen the doom of the damned in hell in the last of the 20th chapter in which he has presented for us the Great White Throne judgment. And now he looks at the bliss of the blessed in heaven.

We know of heaven largely from what we find in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. I heard in a meeting in Scotland about fifteen years ago, a man got up in a meeting, and he was calling out a certain hymn for the congregation to sing. It was a big meeting in Glasgow, and he introduced it by saying this hymn is about heaven, and then he went on to say that our hymnbooks tell us more about heaven than our Bibles do. And he made the point that our Bible has not a great deal to say about heaven. It has enough so that we know there is a heaven, and it has some very definite statements concerning the afterlife, but the Bible does not tell us a great deal about heaven.

I thought about that a great deal, and I feel I know exactly why the Bible does not tell us a great deal about heaven. And the principle reason is that you and I could not possibly understand it. If you had told us about heaven, we do not have the capacity in our present state to appreciate what it is like. So we shouldn't be surprised then when we read in these two chapters only a little bit really about the character of the new heavens and the new earth.

Let me read, first of all, the first eight verses of chapter 21 in which John describes for us the new heavens and the new earth. But you will notice that there is not a full description nor are all of our questions answered about it.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

This dream of a new heaven and a new earth witnesses to a number of things that are true of human nature. First of all, it witnesses to the fact that man has within him some longing for just such a faith as is suggested here. It occurs that deep down within the heart of men, hearts of men, there is something of what Shakespeare spoke about

when he put in the mouths of one of his characters, “immortal longing are within me.” It is, essentially, a testimony to the fact that God has implanted within human nature the desire for just such a thing.

Eric Fowler has said on this passage, “The other side becomes this side and eternity transfigures time.” So we look at that which we deep down within our hearts have a natural desire for. I think this also testifies to man’s inherent sense of sin, because he knows that this kind of life is not the permanent life. It’s surely would not be very wonderful thing to think that we had to live upon this earth for the rest of our lives.

Now, some of you people who are young, you may think that it would be just bliss itself to be able to stay on the earth. But some of us who have been here a long time can think of better things than being left here on this earth throughout all eternity. I’m looking forward, I must say, to the new heavens and the new earth. And I fully believe that we shall be utterly satisfied by the beauty and glory and the enjoyment of the new heavens and the new earth. John says that he saw new heavens and a new earth and he saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven. It is adorned like a bride adorned for her husband. The sea has passed away which, incidentally men, means, of course, there will be no more fishing when we get to heaven. All Isaac Waltons look at this and wonder if this could really be heaven. But I assure you there will be something better than fishing, even though I’m sure that you will not be able to understand. I have a great temptation to name some names in this audience [laughter], but I am going to pass by it because of my beautiful good nature. [More laughter]

Now, the apostle goes on to write in the third verse, “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying behold the tabernacle of God is with men and he will grow with them and they shall be his people. And” -- I want you to notice the remainder of verse 3. It is a most interesting verse. I wish I had time to expound it in detail, but there are one or two points that I want to make. When you look at those last two clauses, “And God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”

Now, I want to introduce my comments by reminding you of something that perhaps has puzzled you a little bit, for, I must confess, it has puzzled me. You’ll remember in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, when Matthew cites the prophecy from Isaiah chapter 7 about the virgin birth. He says, “The virgin shall conceive and she’ll bear a son, and thou shalt call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted or translated is ‘God with us.’” Now, all expositors, when they come to that, comment upon the fact that the Bible nowhere gives the Lord Jesus the name Immanuel. It is striking. It is said he shall be called Immanuel, but he’s not called Immanuel.

Now, there is no problem here because in the preceding context, Joseph is told that his name should be called Jesus, too. But his name is named Jesus by Joseph and never is he called Immanuel. So expositors have concluded that that verse simply means that his name shall be called Immanuel, which means God with us, in the sense that all of the ministry of the Lord Jesus is an illustration of the presence of God in our midst. And it is true that at the end of the Book of Matthew, he says in one of his greatest promises, I want you to go into all the world, and I want you to proclaim the good news, and know I am with you always even to the end of the age.

Now, that, of course, is the force and meaning of Immanuel, God with us. So, there is a fulfillment of that prophecy in the sense that the Lord Jesus is with all of his saints till the end of the age. And that prophecy, incidentally, is more beautiful than you realize, because the original text means that he not only is with us part of the time to the end of the age, but the text suggests that he is with us throughout the whole of everyday through the end of time. But still he is not called Immanuel.

In the original text of Revelation chapter 21 in verse 3, there is some question about the manuscript and their readings at this point. Now, you know of course that the New Testament was written in Greek. You know, of course, that that would be expected after the apostles and others wrote the original texts of these books. They were copied. They were first sent to their addressees which often were churches, sometimes

individuals, sometimes addressed to the whole of a particular territory in the world such as our gospel in the earlier part of the New Testament.

Now, it was natural for the early church to copy these messages from the apostles, because the apostles were the authoritative representatives of the Lord Jesus. And just as you like to get a taste of a good message, so they wanted to get a copy of a good message that had been given to them. So the early church began copying the manuscripts that the original authors had written.

Now, these manuscripts, found through the years, were continually copied and recopied and the copies were copied. And as you might expect, just as you do when you try to copy something, you make mistakes. Sometimes you skip whole lines because there is a word that appears in this line that also appears in this line, and you copy right to that word on your paper, you look up, and your eye catches the next line instead of that line, and you begin from there. Have you ever done that? Have you ever copied a word twice? Have you ever omitted a word? All of these types of errors occur in the copies of the manuscripts which the scribes are responsible for. So naturally you need to check your criticisms in order to discover from our many manuscripts that which is most likely the original text at any point, for we no longer have the original manuscripts.

The technical term for them is “autographer,” you can spring that on one of your biblical friends. The autographer. We don’t have the autographer of the New Testament. We shouldn’t be embarrassed about that. We don’t have the autographer of any ancient writing, so it’s not surprising that we should not of the New Testament. But we do have more manuscripts of the New Testament and earlier manuscripts than of any other ancient writing. By earlier I mean that are closest to the original text. That’s to be expected. This is the best literature of the ancient world. The facts of the New Testament are the best attested facts of ancient history. We have more testimony to them than any other ancient facts. We have more testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ than we do have of any other ancient fact.

Now, I am saying all of this because I don’t want you to be disturbed when I tell you that there are differences of readings in the manuscripts at this point. Some of the manuscripts read this way, however, and it’s likely that this reading is the correct reading. And it involves also a re-punctuation.

And now remember also in the early days, when the apostles wrote their manuscripts, the original manuscript, when they wrote the autographer, the writings themselves, they did not punctuate as a general rule. Almost all the ancient manuscripts are void of punctuation, the early ones. A few little marks here and there, and that is the extent of it. So one looks at a manuscript and he sees letter after letter, following one after the other, and words are all run together so that you have to learn to read with all of the words together. Now, that’s not as hard as it seems. Once you get practiced in doing it, you can do it. But might be surprised to learn that in the early days men read out loud and not silently. Because it was easier to read an unpunctuated manuscript in which all of the letters were run together if you read out loud than if you did it silently. Some of the early fathers marveled over certain individuals who were able to read without making any noise.

So when we come to this text, the last two clauses probably are to be rendered in this way. Let me read first, I heard a great voice out of heaven saying behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he who dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God with them shall be there God. That’s the way that should read probably, it’s not certain but it is likely. God with them shall be their God, period. Isn’t it striking? What God with them? That’s Immanuel. God with them, that’s the name. And Immanuel shall be their God.

In other words, here in the Book of Revelation, in the next to last chapter in which we have a description of the new heaven and the new earth, it’s likely that the apostle finally uses the term “Immanuel” of the Lord Jesus and says God with them, Immanuel, the Lord Jesus shall be their God. What an interesting saying that is. That’s

the whole story of the Bible. From beginning to end, it is the story of how a God who is holy and righteous and just and loving and merciful has desired to have in heaven with him created men who know the experience of being lost and who know the experience of being saved, and thus know him as a righteous and just God. And the whole program of the word of God is designed to lead ultimately to the manifestation of God in his grace and loving kindness and in his justice. So the whole program has been sought out by our great God in order that he might be glorified in these two respects.

So the idea of individuals dwelling with God, knowing him as a gracious God and a just God, well that’s the aim of the biblical revelation. That’s what God has been doing all along. That’s why he originally, out of that great gathering of the Trinity in ages past, planned this whole program covenantally so that the redeemed might be gathered into the presence of God. And then God with them shall be their God and throughout eternity. I’m looking forward to that, I must say. And, in fact, heaven would not be heaven were it not for the fact that we were in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

There’s an old story which I have made reference to before in expositions in Believer’s Chapel about a young girl whose mother was very sick. And because her mother was very sick, and because the father found it difficult to care for the child, he farmed out the child to either a relative or a friend for several weeks. The mother was very sick and finally after a rather lengthy illness, she died. The father thinking that perhaps the little girl had forgotten her mother because she was very small went by and picked up the little child and took her back home. And she walked in the house, and the first thing that she did was to run into each of the rooms of the house. She ran into the kitchen, she ran into the bedroom, she ran into the other rooms, calling out, Where’s mama? And finally she went back to the little sewing room that her mother had spent so much time in, and she called out, Where’s mama? And then the father felt it necessary to tell her what had happened. And when he told her what had happened, she said take me away from here, take me away from here, I don’t want to be here if mama’s not here.

Now heaven is like that. We wouldn’t really want to be there if the Lord Jesus who loved us and saved us was not there. The greatest blessing of heaven is the presence of God. God with them shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. That does not mean there will be tears in heaven. That means that the things we did not understand down here, this cause of tears, will be explained to us in heaven. Just like a storm that comes during the night, and the sun rises the next morning, and the leaves are still dripping with the rain of the night before. And so when we get to heaven, there is going to be a great deal of answering of questions about things that we do not understand down here.

There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crime, neither shall there be any more pain for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me write, for these words are true and faithful. And he said, It is done, evidently, a reference to the carrying out of judgment so that the new heaven and the new earth may be properly instituted. But notice the next word, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

Now, when the Lord says this concerning himself that he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, well that’s all that can be said. That means that he is the eternal God. In the Old Testament, these are expressions that were applied to the Yahweh of the Old Testament. I am the first and the last. I am the beginning and the end. Everything is compassed within this great God. And then he adds, and it’s rather surprising, I think, to put these two things together, I will give unto Him that is athirst out the fountain of the water of life freely.

Now, the preceding expression of the greatness of God might of suggested that we are just flies on the windowpane in comparison to such a great God who is the Alpha and the Omega and the beginning and the end, but right in the same context he speaks about giving the water of life freely to the one who is thirsty. Divine sovereignty is not opposed to the most generous promises of the gospel. And we have divine sovereignty

here in the greatness of God, but we also have the most generous promises of the gospel. For the one who is thirsty, he gives of the water of life freely. Now, we don’t need any more invitation than that.

Now, you may accuse me of being a strong Calvinistic preacher. I thank you for the compliment [laughter]. I wish that I were even stronger if Scripture is that strong. But I want you to understand that the Bible, in its strongest passages concerning the divine sovereignty of our great God in heaven who saved his elect, in the strongest of these passages, the prettiest and most generous invitations are given to the hard hearts of men who reject the grace of God. So there is a universal utter of the gospel, and will you notice it is freely, freely. That word is found in Romans chapter 3 in verse 24 where the Apostle Paul says, Being justified freely. Sometimes it is translated in the New Testament “for nothing,” being justified for nothing; that is, nothing in us, God having done it all. And so here I was given to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. This is a great salvation. And the preceding word guaranteed his ability to do just that, for he is the beginning and the end. No question about whether he can do it or not. The only question is, will we come.

Now, let’s read verses 9 through 21 in which we have John’s description of the new Jerusalem,

“And there came unto me one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come here, and I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written on the gates, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the

south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates of it, and its wall. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: -- Incidentally, that term foursquare is the only thing that is Scriptural about the foursquare people, it is a word found in the Bible. -- and as he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall of it, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. -- Now, notice that expression especially, it was light, it was pure gold, like clear glass. -- And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprasus; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each one of the gates was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.”

Notice again that expression, the street of the city was pure gold as if it were transparent glass. This is the New Jerusalem. Cain built the first city independent of God. Cities since that time have not distinguished themselves. Bismarck, the great German Chancellor, said that, “Our great cities are great sores in the body politic.” This is the metropolis of the new creation. It is a liberal city, but it is a glorified city. It is so described only symbolically.

Now, I want to explain what I mean when I say that, because I know there are lots of people who like to say this city is a literal city. And when we read that its streets are of gold, we are to understand that they are of gold. Now, I don’t know whether you

mean 14 karat or 21 karat gold, that’s beside the point. Although I might just out of fun ask you. What kind of gold?

But I wanted you to notice those two clauses, because you’ll notice from the statement in verse 18 and the statement in verse 21 that this gold is not gold like the gold that we have. You cannot see through our gold. This gold is different.

Now, the reason that John describes this as streets of gold, the reason that he says the building of the wall with jasper and the city with pure gold is because he wants to stress the preciousness of this city. But he uses our terms because there is no other way for him to describe what the city is like. But he also modifies them so that we should understand that while these give us clues about the character of this city, they do not tell us exactly what it is like. The kind of gold that we have in heaven is not the kind of gold that we can have in order to defend ourselves against inflation. It’s different. It’s not the same. What we have then here is a city described in a kind of glorified way.

Now, let me explain what I mean. The history of a man’s body and its redemption is a very interesting history. As you know, we are all born under the curse. We are born in sin. We dwell under the curse and condemnation of God because of our sins. The message of the gospel comes to us, and we are born again. We are redeemed. Now, of course, our bodies look the same. They don’t change. Our spirits are redeemed but our bodies are not. The Scriptures say we await the adoption, the redemption of our body. I don’t have to argue that. You can look at me or you can look at yourself. And you know your body is the same but your spirit is new because you have been born again.

What is the third state in your life history? You were under the curse. You are now redeemed. The third stage is the time of the resurrection, when you receive a resurrected body. That body, the Scriptures say, is a glorified body. Now, we are taught in the Bible that in the Book of Genesis when Adam sins, the creation came under the curse. Now, the creation is not headed for redemption yet. It has not had its

glorification. Its stage is one stage behind man's stage. Because the creation is dependent upon what happens to us. Therefore, though we today have redemption, the creation still abides under the curse. Every time you stick your finger upon a thorn, that's a little message to you, the curse is still in our creation.

Now, when the kingdom of God comes and the Lord Jesus establishes it upon the earth, the creation is redeemed. That's described in the passages of the Old Testament which describes the things that happened during the time of the kingdom of God upon the earth. Isaiah chapter 35 is one of those beautiful passages that describe it. Isaiah chapter 11, when the wolf lies down with the lamb, things like this, the desert so blossoms as the rose, that's the redemption of the creation. But now the resurrection of the creation, the glorification of the creation, does not occur during the time of the kingdom. It occurs at the institution of the new heavens and the new earth.

Now, when your body is redeemed, and my body is redeemed, it's going to be different from the body that we have, it will be the same body and yet it will be different. I will be able, I imagine, to walk up to Billy Crump who is sitting here in the third pew, in heaven, and I will know him. But, praise the Lord, he won't look as he looks now [laughter]. Nor will I look as I look now. He's a good friend, so I can say that. We will be glorified, but yet it will be the same person. There is identity and continuity, but yet there is glorification.

Now, that is what John is trying to tell us here in Revelation chapter 21. He is saying that this city is a glorified city. Notice the 11<sup>th</sup> verse: Having the glory of God. So in other words, what he is saying is that I am describing this city in terms that you understand, but we must think of these things in the sense of a glorified city. We cannot understand what it's like. It's all right to say the streets are of pure gold, but it's the kind of gold you can see through. There is reality here, but it is symbolically represented. A true city, a liberal city, but yet so magnificent we cannot understand it. The only thing we

can gain is some idea of the beauty and glory of it by the description of these terms which are human.

Now, let’s read about the new paradise in verse 22 through chapter 22, verse 5,

“And I saw no temple in it: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the lamp of it. And the nations of them who are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no way enter into it any thing that defileth, neither ye that worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they who are written in the Lamb’s book of life. -- the elect -- And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bore twelve kinds of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no lamp, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

It’s almost impossible to expound this. Who could expound such a thing as this? Perfection of all worthwhile things is found here. Worship – why, everybody in heaven is going to be an Enoch walking with God. There is to be perfection of knowledge, perfection of fellowship, perfection of all of the things that characterize divine life. We shall not see the skirts of our Lord. We shall not touch his hem. We shall not lie at his feet only. We shall not see his back parts as Moses did of the theophany which he had

the privilege of seeing. We shall see his face, the Lord Jesus. And I would assume from this that we shall look directly into the face of the glorified Son of God and see his face. And in seeing his face we shall understand his heart, not completely, but we shall understand his heart. We shall understand his work. We shall understand ourselves in the light of that work.

Now, we know that Augustine and Luther and Calvin and John Owen and Chafer and all of the rest of these great men of God who were theologians were great men. But do you know that the moment you get to heaven, probably you will know more about theology than any of those men ever did while they were on the earth? That's a great thing to think about, isn't it?

Now, we shall see his face. We shall know in that perfected sense. I think one of the most blessed things about heaven is that we're not going to have the experience we so often have down here. One day we are tremendously interested in divine things, a few days we become indifferent, a few more days we fail. And we go through this constant cycle of being warmed in our passion for the Lord, and then we cool off and then we fail and we sin. There is confession of sin and restoration. And as long as we're in the flesh, there is failure. I'm not suggesting that you don't enjoy this life, we do, of course. But it's going to be great to get to heaven and to find that our life is not like these ups and downs that characterize our life when we are down here. We must take in all.

The eternal punishment: Will a loving God send anyone to hell? That's a perennially current question. And here we need, if we need it at any time, an open mind. Can you not imagine the reasoning of individuals? Do you think that a loving father would ever permit, if he had any control over it, the suffering of his children? Well, then how do expect us to believe that a loving God would ever permit any of his children to suffer for eternity? Isn't it a strange thing that with such beautiful doctrines as everybody

is going to be saved (the Universalists’ prayer) they should have so few adherents to their church?

As you know, a few years back, maybe fifteen or twenty now, the Universalist denomination joined with the Unitarian denomination. They deserve each other [laughter]. They do. They deserve each other. Neither one of them has much Scriptural truth at all. And one group of them has practically none. Well, the Universalists, after they had been in existence, they for a long, long time – do you know how many members that church had when it joined with the Unitarians? Seventy-three thousand. That’s all. You would think with great doctrine like this they would have hundreds of thousands and millions of people who would crowd in to join such a church that promised everybody eternal life forever, everybody. Why did they have so few? Because deep down in the human heart, there is a conviction in the average man’s mind and heart that it’s not true, couldn’t be true. That if there is a God and if he’s a just God, there must be eternal punishment. There are natural reasons, nature itself speaks in such a language that we learn or we think that there must be eternal judgment.

The things that happen in nature are not all beautiful. If you will think for just a few moments about the things that are found in nature, I’m sure you will agree with me that there are many things in nature that suggest the eternal punishment of the Lord. I know there are people who say, look at the beauty of the rose. And then in a few days, the rose petals have begun to decay. If we attribute the beauty of the rose to God and suggest that this is characteristic of him, what shall we say about a fading and the decay and corruption of the rose? Or if we look at the stately beauty of the sky, blue and heavenly, we don’t have to look at it too long, except in Texas, to see forked-streaks of lightning across it and then downpours and storms of rain. Now, in Texas it is different.

Birds, what beautiful things, our birds are. The older you get the more interested you get in birds, I’ve discovered [laughter]. Why in the last ten years I have learned the names of a half a dozen birds [laughter]. I can now point out a blue jay, and a cardinal,

and the mockingbird. I have a mockingbird that calls me by my first name. He stays at my house all the time. That is his territory. Birds have territories. Did you know that? That’s his territory; he chases off anything. He even chases cats. Quite a character this mockingbird. I’ve learned the names of a few birds. Now, birds are beautiful and red birds are my favorites, I guess. But then, there are the hawks. They’re not so lovely. They are a majestic mountain bird, but mountains are the envelopes of volcanoes, someone has said.

There is a mysterious and beautiful sea, but it’s not long before there are typhoons and tidal waves and many people are killed. So in nature itself, there is a suggestion of the fact that there is more than love in God. Nature itself testifies to the judging power of our great God. History also testifies to the same thing. We can talk about the Garden of Eden and speak about the goodness of God, but the history of mankind since the fall in the garden is not the history of goodness in human history entirely. The catastrophe, the wars, all of the suffering of humanity, testifies to the fact that there is in the character of God, a streak of justice and judgment.

I am sure that when Noah first pronounced the message of God to his generation and said to them, God is going to bring a flood, and if you do not crowd into the ark, you are going to be drowned. I can imagine the first member of the Universalists denomination never had the privilege of putting his signature on the membership roles, of course. I can just imagine him saying, wait a minute, wait a minute, Noah; God is a loving God, is he not? Yes, he is a loving God.

Well, if he’s a loving God and he’s created us, do you think that he’s going to drown us all? And I can hear the cheers going off: no, no, no nor the heretics. Imagine an oddball, a fundamentalist, whatever you want to call him, a Calvinist [laughter], but of course we know from history that that is precisely what did happen and eight souls out of that vast number of people are saved. God is a God who does permit just those things to

come to pass. History let’s us know clearly there is no such thing as a God who is only good; he is just also.

There are rational reasons. Just think of the holiness of God. Incidentally, the holiness of God, so far as I know, is the only attribute that is troubled in Scripture. In chapter 6 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of the Book of Isaiah we read, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hope. -- It’s true in the New Testament we read God is love. We also read our God is a consuming fire. And we read, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hope. So the holiness of God, the infinite evil of sin, and the endlessness of its guilt testifies to the necessity of endless punishment. Do you realize that when you commit one sin, that sin represents endless guilt? Sin is not expiated by the passage of time. We think that way. We think time heals this and time heals that, but with God there is no such passage of time. The sin that you committed twenty years ago, if it unexpiated, is just as vivid before the holiness of God today as it was then. Sin is endless in its guilt, because it is sin against an eternal God. We measure sin by the greatness of the person against whom we’ve sin. I may commit a very wrong act against an animal, but that’s not really so heinous as if I were to commit the same kind of act against a human being. And if I were to do the same thing against my mother, that would be even worse. Sin is endless in its guilt.

Finally, the Scriptural reading, there are so many statements of Scripture concerning endless punishment that it’s hard to know where to begin. If you wanted to put some down, you could put down Matthew chapter 25, verse 46. We’ll look at that one; Mark chapter 9, verse 43 and verse 48; 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 in verse 9; and Revelation chapter 14 in verse 11; just of the sake of time.

We’ll read verse 46 of Matthew chapter 25, And thee -- Incidentally, who is speaking? It is the Lord Jesus. Remember the Lord Jesus has told us more about hell than any other person. – “And thee shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”

The testimony of holy Scripture in countless passages, primarily from the mouth of the Lord Jesus, is to the doctrine of endless torment. In fact, the same expressions that are used to describe the length of the new life we have, eternal life, is the same adjective that is used to describe the punishment of the law. So if we do believe that life is endless in the fellowship of God through Christ, then the punishment is just as endless in the case of the law.

Finally, the inevitable consequences. I refer to John chapter 3 in verse 36. The doom of the Lord, the Lord Jesus states in John 3, verse 36 in this very familiar text: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

We have the goodness and the severity of God. Remember Paul said, “Behold the goodness and the severity of God.” The goodness upon those who believe; the severity of God upon those who do not believe. Someone has said that there are going to be three surprises when you get to heaven. Do you know there are going to be some people in heaven that you are going to be surprised are there, so this person says? And then there is going to be a second surprise. You are going to look around and you’re going to discover some that you thought were going to be there are not there. And then this person said, there’s a third surprise, and that of course is that you are there. [Laughter]

Now, I disagree with that. I’m not going to be surprised that I’m there, are you? Why, an Arminian thought up that. If you have truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how can you say that? Do you think the Apostle Paul was surprised when he got to heaven? Do you think he looked around and said, I’m surprised to see you here? And I’m surprised not to see so-and-so here. And I am really surprised that I am here. Does that sound very Pauline? It doesn’t to me. Well, the Apostle Paul doesn’t say anything like that. He says, “For which cause I also suffer these things, nevertheless, I am not ashamed for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that

which I have committed unto him against that day.” You can have those two surprises, but please don’t have that third surprise.

Now, you’ll notice this text there is to him that believeth not the wrath of God abides upon him. There is no escape except through the finished work of the Lord Jesus received as a Savior in an act of faith. If you’re here and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus, you are headed for endless punishment, eternal torment. A loving God will send men to eternal separation from his presence. May God deliver you if you don’t know him. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] We are thankful to Thee, Lord, for the privilege of the study of holy Scripture. And these are certainly solemn truths, eternal punishment, eternal life.

And, O God, if there is someone here who has not yet believed in Jesus Christ, we do pray that, through the Holy Spirit, they may be brought knowledge of him who shed his blood that men might be saved.

For his name’s sake. Amen.