



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 16:11–15

“Invincible Grace, or God’s Heart Surgery”

TRANSCRIPT

We turn to Acts chapter 16, verse 11 through 15, for our Scripture reading; and will you give attention now, remember that the Apostle is on his second missionary journey. He attempted to go into Asia; the Spirit suffered him not. He attempted, then, to go into Bythinia; the Holy Spirit forbade him to preach there. And then, finally, he was forced down to Troas; and there he had the vision of the man of Macedonia, who prayed Paul, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” And then, Paul and Silas and Luke and Timothy and many others who may have been with them, as they put everything together, they gathered that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel to those who were in Macedonia. And so, here the gospel goes to the continent of Europe, for, so far as we know, the first time by an apostle.

So, the Apostle determines to leave Troas and to sail over to Macedonia. And we pick up the story in verse 11:

“Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, (that was an island in the northern Aegean) and the next day to Neapolis; (that was the port of Philippi, about ten miles from the city). And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: (That is, a Roman colony) and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the Sabbath we went out of

the city by a riverside, (no doubt the Gangitis River, which is on the outskirts of the city) where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshiped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word.

[Message] The subject for this morning is “Invincible Grace, or God’s Heart Surgery.” The Bible is crammed with accounts concerning remarkable women. There is Eve, or the prototype woman, there is Lot’s wife, a friend of Susie Knickerbocker, siren of the society pages, she’s known by the Lord Jesus Christ’s words concerning her, “Remember Lot’s wife.” She was escaping the city of Sodom, as it was being destroyed and looked back, and became a pillar of salt, as the things that were exploded into the heavens evidently began to fall upon her, and there she stood as a statue and a testimony to love of material things that causes an individual to look back to the old life. Those three words by our Lord Jesus, in that magnificent sermon that He preached, tell the story of Lot’s wife. Remember Lot’s wife.

There is Ruth, the Moabitess, proof that a woman can make up her mind. Ruth said, “Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

There is Deborah, the first female public servant, the Golda Maier of her day, the Margaret Thatcher of her day, the Jean Kirkpatrick of her day, of whom the Scriptures say, “The inhabitants of

the village ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I arose, a mother in Israel.” One of the great judges of Israel; a woman.

Just as today, if I had to vote for my favorite for president of the United States, I think I’d vote for Margaret Thatcher, or Jean Kirkpatrick. I just like their viewpoints.

There was Delilah the devilish, wife of the rakish Rob Roy of Israel, Samson. And there was Abigail; a beauty and a brain, that’s proof that they do go together, a beauty and a brain. It’s said with reference to her, in 1 Samuel 25, in verse 3, “Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings...” It also, I guess, is illustrative of the fact that you cannot understand why some people marry some other people.

Elizabeth, whose son was the noblest of all the women—er—of all the men of his day; John the Baptist.

And then, the noblest woman of them all, perhaps, Mary, the mother of our Lord.

The woman of our story is a prototype of modern woman, because she was a career woman, who might well have been the Jane Addams of the [indistinct] Cape May of her day. But this liberated woman becomes truly liberated; the first European convert from the Apostle, the first to be baptized in Europe, of which we have reference, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Lydia’s conversion is a model conversion; and, no doubt, is given as a model conversion simply because it was the first in Europe. And to give you an insight into the way in which conversion takes place.

I don’t know whether you’ve been paying a whole lot of attention, as we’ve been going through the book of Acts, most preachers usually are somewhat disappointed when they speak with people who’ve listened to them preach, Sunday after Sunday. Some morning, I would like to get everybody in, shut the doors, lock them, and say, “This morning we’re going to have a little examination.” [Muffled Laughter] And have the deacons pass out examination papers.

I can remember, years ago, when I was teaching in Ft. Worth and usually they had not been given examinations in these schools in the Ft. Worth Bible Institute, which was held in the Westminster Presbyterian Church, many years ago. So, I announced that we were going to have a quiz, and the attendance dropped to half [Laughter] that day. And the others complained bitterly about having to do. So much so, that I said, “All right, don’t sign your names to your paper.” And even then, not everybody tried the exam.

Well, remember, in the book of Acts, we are told, in Acts chapter 2, that those who receive the Word of God form part of the church of Christ. Then in Acts 13, we have a further development, because Luke says, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” And, now, of course, we come to the ultimate, “Whose hearts the Lord opened.”

So, you can see, if you just follow the progress of Luke’s understanding and the progress of his story that he’s telling us the things that happen when an individual is saved. True, they’ll receive the Word. True, as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And we learn that faith is the product of election and not election the product of faith. And now, we learn that when God carries out His eternal purposes, He does it; He opens the heart.

Now, the Apostle and his little company have arrived at Troas, puzzled and perplexed because they tried to go into Asia, tried to go into Bythinia, the Holy Spirit in various ways—Luke doesn’t tell us how—forbade them to go. And so, as they, in Troas, were thinking by the side of the Aegean Sea, they reflected upon the things that the Lord had done with them over the past weeks and, perhaps, a few months; and they came to the conviction that evidently the Lord wished them to go elsewhere, particularly in the light of the fact that Paul had had a vision that a man of Macedonia had appeared in the vision to him and had said, “Come over and help us.”

I can see the Apostle and his friends, setting forth the things that had happened. Paul saying, “I had a vision last night.” Apostles can have visions. Lots of people today try to have visions; almost always they’re wrong. They’re destructive. They upset others. They’re not scriptural. I must confess, I

don’t believe people have visions today. Almost all of them ultimately turn out to be not divine visions at all.

But, the Apostle; that was different. He lived in an era of spiritual gifts, of miracles, impressing their ministry, and he spoke to the men and he said, “Last night, I had a vision of a man from Macedonia, who said, “Come over and help us. And, it seems to me that this may be where we should go.”

And Luke said, “Yes, perhaps that’s why we were not able to go into Asia.”

And Silas said, “Yes, that’s probably why we couldn’t go into Bythina.” And, as they reflected upon these things, as Luke says here, “They assuredly gathered.” They put two-and-two together, that the Lord was calling them to preach the gospel to the men in Macedonia.

Now, you’ll notice that three simple movements here, but we’ll lay stress on the third one, from Troas to Philippi in verse 11 and verse 12. And then from Philippi to the Gangitis River. And then the last one—the most important—the description of Paul’s ministry and the results of it from religion—that which Lydia had before Paul came—to salvation, that which she had after the Apostle came.

So, from Troas to Philippi. We read and loosed, “Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.”

Now, reading that carefully, you’ll notice it took three days for them to go from Troas to Philippi. You haven’t come to this in the exposition of the Word, but in chapter 20, in verse 6, going the other way, it takes them five days—to go from Philippi to Troas—it’s obvious that they had prevailing wind—favorable wind—and so, as they went from Troas to Philippi—I can just imagine the Apostle and his little company, out on the deck of the ship, saying, “It looks to me as if God is really with us because we have the wind with us, and we’re going to make this journey in about three

days, instead of four or five, which we ordinarily might take to make it.” And it illustrates the simple fact that the forces of nature often help the purposes of grace.

And, you can almost see God’s interest, in the things that are going to happen in Philippi. Philippi was a city that was well-known for several things; in the first place, it was a colony—that means it’s a little bit of Rome away from Rome—people were proud of their citizenship in Philippi because they were not simply citizens of Macedonia, they were citizens of the great empire of Rome. The reason for this is that one of the greatest battles of ancient history was fought right near Philippi. And if you’ll remember Brutus and Cassius fought Octavius Caesar. Octavius won; and universal empire crouched at the feet of Caesar. And that battle, in 42 B.C. or about a hundred years or so before the time the Apostle came, was one of the great battles of ancient history. And when Roman generals and colonels and others retired, they frequently went to Philippi. And they had special privileges there. And, as the reward for what happened there, the citizens of Philippi were given citizenship in Rome. And they were very proud of that. They were so proud of it that when Paul wrote his letter back to the church at Philippi a little later, he said, “Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, who’s going to come and change our vile body.”

So, he reminded the Philippians that while they may be proud of their earthly citizenship, there is a citizenship that is even more significant—the heavenly.

Well, then, that Apostle and the little company came into the city of Philippi, and I can imagine that they didn’t look too well. They didn’t have the modern conveniences that we have. They didn’t have the baggage system of American Airlines, for example. They can put one bag in Los Angeles, one bag in New York City and one bag in Rio de Janeiro, on one trip of some individual. So, they probably didn’t look too well, when they came on shore in Philippi and it was—my guess is they were a rather bedraggled looking group of people—they didn’t have a whole lot of money, probably. And, if you had approached some of the Philippian citizens, perhaps, a former general, or somebody else who had retired there, and you had said to him, knowing what you know now.

“Look, you fellows think that Philippi is an important place, and what happened here is really significant. And, furthermore, you think that what happened here is something that’s going to be remembered for years and years, I would just like to suggest to you that that little company of people here are more important than anything that shall ever come out of Philippi.”

They would have looked at you as if you were crazy. But, of course, that’s true. How many citizens of Philippi do you know? Well, the chances are that you wouldn’t know very many citizens of the city of Philippi, except those mentioned in the Scriptures, Euodia and Syntyche. Everybody knows Euodia and Syntyche because Paul wrote about them in the letter to the Philippians. Those two ladies are more famous than all of the generals that retired in Philippi.

So, you see, God does things differently from men. As a matter of fact, usually, God causes great things to arise from little insignificant beginnings. Take our Lord’s life? Our Lord, born of a simple family, a carpenter’s son, laboring at a carpenter’s bench, from the despised city of Nazareth, born just by the accident of divine providence in the little village of Bethlehem; and yet, what magnificent, great things have come from that small beginning.

Usually, when you find people blowing trumpets and beating drums, usually, it’s something that will turn out to be a big flop. And that is particularly true in Christianity. If you find people beating drums and blowing horns, you can be sure, most of the time, it will never measure up to what people who are advertising it think that it is.

Just think for a moment, what is a drum? Why, the reason it makes such a beautiful sound and such a loud sound is, it’s empty. And think of a horn, what does a horn do? It takes wind and blows it. It’s wind! It’s emptiness!

And if you look back over the history of evangelical Christianity, you’ll see a lot—and you still see it—a lot of beating of drums, a lot of blowing of horns, but we often don’t stop and evaluate it a little later. It’s usually largely fruitless activity. And, often, not guided by the Holy Spirit at all.

So, it may have looked like a little thing, this little crowd of people that came off that little boat, but this was a big thing, because it was in the will of God.

Now, the second movement in verse 13: “And on the Sabbath (day) we went out of the city by a riverside, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.”

Now, wait a minute! This is about as perfect an anticlimax as can be imagined. The Apostle has had the romance of a heavenly vision, and the romance of a heavenly vision was the vision of a man from Macedonia, saying, “Come over and help us.”

I can imagine Paul, if he was like so many preachers, he might have thought, “The crowds in Europe are waiting to hear me. They’ve heard about me.” And so, he comes; and the day comes to go out to the synagogue, and they discover they don’t have enough men of Jewish extraction in the city of Philippi to have a synagogue. It was required in rabbinic law that if there were ten Jewish men in one locality, they had to form a synagogue. So, there were not even ten Jewish men. They had a little prayer enclosure, by the side of the Gangitis River, probably a dirty little enclosure, and there the women were meeting. And instead of the man of Macedonia, and the crowds of men before the Apostle’s eyes, what does he reach? A few women sitting by the river, the synagogue’s ladies auxiliary.

That often happens to a preacher, you know. A young man, going to seminary, he’s all fire, “God has called me to the ministry,” and he thinks, “I have a great a great ministry to perform.” And so, he goes out to his first position and he discovers, he comes in on the middle of the week, and he comes in in time for the prayer meeting and he goes in with a great deal of enthusiasm and expectation and finds 22 people in the prayer meeting, of which, 18 are women. So often true in our churches—where are the men? Where are they? Well, they have more important things to do than prayer. They have their business to think about. They have to think about that; after all, everything depends upon them and what they do in the business world. Doesn’t it? Doesn’t it? Come on! Doesn’t it? No. Of course, it doesn’t! They would do a whole lot better in business if they were in the meetings of the Lord.

Now, sometimes it takes a little while for us to learn things like that. Well, there was an up-to-date prayer meeting. The women were present, and, apparently, Euodia and Syntyche were there, too because the apostle, when he writes the Philippians a few weeks later, he says, “The gospel has born fruit in your midst from the first day until now.” So, Lydia and Euodia and Syntyche were some of the first converts on the continent of Europe. And, God it seems has laid His hand upon those women, for our spiritual good.

Now, the third move and it’s the really important move; it’s found in verses 14 and 15, and here, of course, we have the message that the Apostle preached. And, remember, last week, I said that God had called him to the land of Europe, to preach the gospel unto them. That’s what men need! They need the gospel! They don’t need good advice. They don’t need the kind of council that usually comes from the pulpit today. They do not need psychology; they do not need psychology with a Christian perspective. What we need is the gospel, and the gospel is inclusive, not simply of the way of salvation, but the way of sanctification and the way of edification as well. In other words, we need the Word of God.

The Word of God is that which is sufficient for us and the reason the people are fleeing to other things for help is because they are not sufficiently exposed to the Word of God, either in the meetings that they attend or in their own private study of Holy Scripture.

Now, you know of course, that I like theology, because theology is nothing more than the teaching of the Bible. That’s all it is. In fact, the Bible is composed of 66 books, and I don’t know how many thousands of verses, and all is simply theology. Every verse of the Bible is a theological proposition. Of course, it is something into which we are to enter personally. And, you can make a fetish of things that are not really all that important.

A long time ago, there was a little cartoon, in which Linus participated with—I read again yesterday for the first time in I don’t know how long, it was in some older notes that I had of this very passage—and Linus comes and Lucy is, she’s jumping rope, paying no attention to him, with a look of real concentration on her face. And he says, “Here’s something I’ll bet you didn’t know. The

Bible contains three million, five hundred and sixty-six thousand, four hundred and eighty letters; and seven hundred and seventy three thousand, eight hundred and ninety-three words.” And Lucy continues to jump rope, paying absolutely no attention. And, finally, Linus says, “You’re just not interested in theology, are you.” [Laughter]

Well, that’s the kind of theology people think of as theology, but that’s not the kind of theology that Paul talks about.

Emil Brunner, the famous Swiss theologian, spoke of theology as that which protects the church from “food poisoning”. And that’s precisely what it is. Right theology is right thinking about scriptural truth. Right theology is necessary for right living; and the reason that so many of us are not living the way in which we would like to live, is because we haven’t really imbibed the teaching of the Word of God and made it our own. It really goes back to that for so many of us.

Well, let’s see what Paul has to say. He says seven things. Now, it’s very difficult to do that in 15 minutes but we can try to make an attempt to do it. First of all, this one word about Lydia. Lydia came from Thyatira? Isn’t that interesting? Paul tried to go into Asia and he was forbidden. Thyatira is in Asia. Here is a woman from Asia, and this is a place that Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to enter into and preach. But here is an Asian, located in Philippi. Now, if Paul had had the whole texture and God had given him all the explanations that he might have thought about, He might have said, “Look, Paul, I want you to reach an Asian, but the Asian I want you to reach is not in Asia at the present time. He’s over in Philippi. And this is My provision for the elect of God; and it’s My intent that Lydia come to faith in Jesus Christ and that’s why I’m sending you on this journey, over to Macedonia, because the Holy Spirit has been working in her heart, and she is reaching the stage where she is prepared for the reception of the message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Lydia was a wealthy woman. She had a household; that usually means servants and workers, a successful businesswoman—dealt in purple, the most expensive kind of materials that you could deal in—a pound of this kind of material sold for the equivalent of hundreds of dollars. So, she dealt in the most expensive materials and, if she was still from Thyatira, this may have been one of her

branch offices. But, if it was not, she still was a very successful businesswoman; but, also, very concerned about spiritual things. They can go together, you know.

Now, one can distinguish seven stages in her conversion and her Christian experience. And, I’ll just mention them to you and say just a word about them. First of all, it says, in verse 14, that she worships God. Now, that’s an evidence of common grace working.

What is common grace? Well, common grace is God’s general blessing to all creatures; he gives us food, he gives us drink, he gives us clothing, spoken of in Acts chapter 14, verse 17. This has reference to the general operations of the Holy Spirit in moral—in moral type of work, curbing of sin, promoting of civil justice and civil righteousness—the fact that we have a stable government in the United States of America, and have had it for two hundred years, which gives foreign investors confidence in us and causes them to send their money over here—that’s evidence, ultimately, of the common grace of God. Why don’t they send it to Venezuela? Or, why don’t they send it to Mexico? Or, why don’t they send it to Iran? Or, why don’t they send it to the other kingdoms on the face of this earth? They concentrate it in places where God has promoted civil order, places like Switzerland, West Germany, Britain; preeminent is the United States. Two hundred years, and we’ve had stable government in spite of the Democrats [Laughter] and, in spite of the Republicans. [More laughter] You thought I wasn’t going to add that, didn’t you? But that’s the reason. That’s common grace. We should be thankful to God that we live in a country, and we can get along with each other, even when we differ and we all differ with one another on some point or another.

And, it also has to do with the general operations of the Holy Spirit in influencing men towards redemption. That kind of grace is resistible; and men do resist it. Those who do not come to Christ resist that kind of grace. You can resist common grace; you cannot resist effectual grace. That’s why it’s effectual.

So, she worshiped God. We don’t know if she was a proselyte to the Hebrew faith, or whether she was—we know that she was monotheistic, we don’t know whether she was a Hebrew or

not. It’s possible she was. But we know this, that Paul’s coming was not the beginning of the work of the Spirit in her. She was worshiping God, but she was not yet saved.

Don’t you think that was possible? Well, yes, it’s possible to be a worshiper of God, what you understand to be God, and to not be a believer, a Christian.

Second thing: we read here, “Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” The Word of God! That’s what Paul preached. If you look back at chapter 13, and examine the kind of preaching he did, what he did was to go into the Old Testament, unfold the history of salvation, then apply the history of salvation to the events in our Lord’s life, and then call for decision. So, it’s the Old Testament or the Scriptures; for that’s what they thought were the Scriptures. The Scriptures enlightened by New Testament events, in the life of our Lord—that’s what he preached. He didn’t preach psychology. He didn’t preach political action. He didn’t preach social welfare. He preached the gospel of Christ, and told the story of the preparation for Him.

And then, he said, “These Scriptures were fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and, from it, on the authority of the Word of God, forgiveness of sins when men believe those great teachings of Holy Scripture.”

Third point: it is said in verse 14 that Lydia “heard us.” That’s the general calling. That’s the calling that goes out to everyone, to respond to the gospel. We say that certain men will respond, but we issue the invitation to all men, general calling, the preached Word, convincing ministry of the Holy Spirit, given concerning the things of Christ, God works in seeking to persuade men to come to the knowledge of the truth. And, when we turn away that common grace and that special work of the Holy Spirit in bringing them to the conviction of truth concerning Christ, we have no excuse. We cannot say, “Well, I wasn’t one of the elect.” We have not responded to the revelation that we have been given. You cannot require God to give more when you don’t respond to what is little. If I could give you a dime, and you should throw it away and say, “I want a quarter,” and you haven’t even taken the dime. So, when I say, common grace and general calling, we’re talking about things that are

set forth in the Word of God as the teaching of Holy Spirit, as God’s universal appeal to men to come to Jesus Christ, that’s the third thing.

Now, we read in verse 14, this most significant thing—not only is there a general calling, there is a special calling—and, not only is there common grace, there is invincible grace, effectual grace—whose heart the Lord opened. Now, if you read that and said, “Who opened her heart?” That would sound pretty good, wouldn’t it? Who opened her heart? That would sound pretty good. That’s really what He did; He opened her heart. Well, that’s one way to look at it. But, it’s really God who opened her heart. She didn’t open her heart, fundamentally and ultimately, it was the Lord! It wasn’t her prayers that opened her heart and surely it was not Paul who opened her heart. It was the Lord who opened her heart. That’s what Luke says, when he began his book of the Acts, he said he was going to tell you the things that the Lord continued to do and teach, and it’s still working and it still opens hearts and even opens them in Believers Chapel. And so, here, whose heart the Lord opened.

Now, some years ago, I was in a particular seminary and students got all excited over something, they thought this was a real great idea. Students we have to remember are always students. They haven’t graduated yet, but they have a little saying—a little saying that they wrote out and put a little sticker on; and they want to stick it on everybody’s lapels so it would make us go out and evangelize. And so, the little message was, “When love is felt, the message is heard.” “When love is felt, the message is heard.” That sounds good, doesn’t it? That’s good philosophy, perhaps. Good psychology, perhaps. But, bad theology.

Let me show you how bad theology—that theology—is, and why I wouldn’t put one on my lapel. In the first place, who loved more than our Lord? How well was His message received? Well, they hung Him on a cross and crucified Him. Or, think of the Apostle Paul, was he a man of love? Why, he was such a man of love that when he wrote the Thessalonians, he spoke about how they were [indistinct] from his heart and how he gave himself whole-heartedly to them. He lays stress upon that. Did they respond to him? No, they didn’t respond to him. They kicked him out of one city; they stoned him in Lystra. As a matter of fact, when love is felt, the message is not necessarily

heard. I’m not against love. I think that’s the way the gospel ought to be preached. But you need to know that, ultimately, the response to the message of God does not come from the lungs of the preacher; it comes from the fundamental work of the Holy Spirit in opening the hearts of men. And, as a matter of fact, it does not come simply from the Word of God, though the Word of God is necessary.

Let me illustrate it. If it came from the Word of God alone, we should expect it would be from ordinary response to it—some measurable response—some standard response. So, what we would expect is, experience tells us, that children’s hearts are generally more open to the things of the Lord than young adults. And, young adults more responsive than adults. And, middle aged more responsive than those hard-hearted older age people. That’s true! In measure—but only in measure.

As a matter of fact, there are many exceptions to it; so many, that it’s obvious that the Word of God does not save by itself. There is a working of the Holy Spirit. And, we see an individual who is, like one of these young men sitting up here on the front pew, who are looking at their Bible, wondering where in the world is this in Scripture, that Dr. Johnson is talking about. At any rate, there are young men here, and they hear the Word of God and then they grow up to teenage, and they hear the Word of God, haven’t responded yet. And then—this is not reference to you young men here, I hope you are very responsive. But, anyway, they grow up to be men, they are still unresponsive. They grow to be middle aged, they’re still unresponsive. Their hearts are getting harder and harder and harder. They get less and less out of what they hear in their ears; and, finally, they’re old men and their heart is hard as stone it seems, and then suddenly—one morning or one evening—or, through a conversation with one friend—there is a tremendous transformation and, like Nicodemus in the Bible, these old hard-hearted men are converted.

Now, what does that tell you? That conversion is not traceable simply to the Word of God. It’s traceable to the Word of God as an essential, but used by the Holy Spirit.

Now, I’ll give you a human illustration. Let’s suppose that in theological seminary, when I just began to teach about thirty-five years ago, forty years ago or so, I said to my theology students—

because they’d just planted a nice little sapling out in the grounds of the theological seminary—“By the way, men, after the hour this morning, I want you to know I’ve been lifting the weights recently. And, I’ve gotten pretty strong and I’d like to show you how strong I am. You know that little sapling they planted out there last year? I want you to follow me out this morning, and I’m going to jerk it up from the ground.” And so, I go out there and my students are gathered all around. And some of them are snickering. They didn’t realize how strong I was. [Laughter] And, so, I reached down and I jerked. And I feel that’s the first hernia I think I’ve had to this point. But, anyway, I’m unable to do it. And they all have a big laugh and we go back and, thirty-five years later, we have a reunion. And, about half the class is back again, some of them are in the presence of the Lord. But about half of them are back, and we gather around and have a good time and I say, “By the way, fellows, I’m going to take you out and I want to pull up that tree.” And they all die laughing.

I said, “No, I’m serious. I’m going to pull up the tree.” And they said, “Dr. Johnson,” I can hear them punching each other and saying, “He’s got a loose shingle on his roof.” [Laughter] “Gone. Gone.” And so, they follow me out and it’s very embarrassing to them. They hate to see this; they hate to see somebody that they really like make a fool of himself.

So, they are all gathered around and they’re really sad. They’re not making any jokes at all. And so, I reach down—and the tree, by the way, now, is about like this—so, I reach down now, I put my arms around that tree and I jerk it—and the whole things come up. And these fellows are astonished. And they say, “That’s a miracle! That’s a miracle!”

Well, that would be a miracle. But this is a perfect illustration of whose “heart” the Lord has opened. And that indicates, of course, that when the Holy Spirit works through the Word is when a man comes to Christ. And, last year, they had a man in our audience, he has gray hair, he had listened to many a sermon here. He’d heard me a number of times. Troubling [indistinct] isn’t it? I don’t know how many hundreds of times he’d heard me. But there was a Sunday morning, or some other time, and maybe it wasn’t even I who was speaking, maybe it was somebody else. But that man came

to the knowledge of the Lord. That’s like pulling up that oak tree. That’s something that God does. That’s what happens when a man is converted, whose heart the Lord opened.

Not Lydia, not a prayer, not a friend, not even the Word only, but the Word in the hands of the Spirit. And, ultimately, by the determination of God!

Why do you think Paul was an apostle? Through the will of God! That’s what he says, through the will of God. He traced it to God’s activity. That’s why we say salvation is of the Lord.

Now, I can just imagine Lydia, as she listened to Paul, and as he went back over the Old Testament, starting with the *Protoevangelium*, in Genesis 3:15, that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. And, as he traced down through the Old Testament all those great messianic promises, came on into the events of the New Testament. And he said, “John the Baptist came on the scene and he was the ambassador of the Lord, and he said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.’” And Lydia had sat there and she had had all of the kinds of feelings that people have; rebellion, here is a person who has been condemned by his headquarters in Jerusalem; he’s gone over the area, he’s turned the world upside down, he’s been stoned in places, he preaches Jesus of Nazareth, people that my church—that is, Judaism—my church condemned and put on the cross with the Romans. And I can see her passing from rebellion, through doubt, perplexity, as Paul takes the messianic passages of the Old Testament and points to events in the life of our Lord from them; a rising interest in which the Holy Spirit puts the thought in, “Maybe he is right. Maybe what he is telling you is the truth. Maybe the people in Jerusalem were wrong in what they did.” Excitement, firmly, as he unfolds Isaiah 52; and then, when he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,” a joyous cry arises in Lydia’s heart. “I must have this Savior, too.” He’s evidently my Lord and my God.

“Whose heart the Lord opened...” Lydia, to use the words of our Lord, “is good ground.”

So, what do you do when you’ve come to the knowledge of the Lord? You raise your hand in a meeting? Sign a decision—a decision card? Come down front and weep and pray?

No, you know what you do? You do what Lydia did; she went to the apostles, they didn’t have a church yet. Ordinarily, you go to the elders and she said, “I’ve come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus as my own Savior. I want to give testimony—public testimony—to what He’s done in my heart. I want to be baptized in water, identifying myself with Him.”

So sad to find people who have been Christians for months and years, and have never done the simplest thing in testimony to the Lord, something that pleases him, asked the elders to baptize them in water. They go to meetings on the victorious life, they talk about the victorious life, but they haven’t done the first thing the Scriptures teach; to be baptized in water. It pleases the Lord.

That’s the way you confess your faith; that’s the biblical way to express your faith. If you, by the grace of God, have come to faith in Christ, express it in water baptism. It doesn’t save; but it’s a great testimony, invented by the Lord Jesus Christ for believers in Him.

And, finally, she said, verse 15, “And when she was baptized...she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there.” She did good works. Her good works didn’t end in the water.

And so, love—to God’s people—love to the Lord first, love to God’s people, secondly, is the distinguishing mark of the elect of God. That’s what marks us out. Love for God, love for God’s people: those two things! They mark out the elect of God.

And if you, by the grace of God, have been brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, these are the things that will characterize you. A love for the Lord, because He opened your heart so that you responded to the gospel; and a love to others who have been brought together with you into the family of God and share the same life.

Lydia, then, was a woman who illustrates the fact that you may be very near and yet far from God. Religious, zealous, attended religious meetings, probably a prayer warrior—it was a prayer enclosure—wealthy, influential and cultured, intelligent—she could have been a citizen of Dallas. And yet, unsaved.

What she needed was the new birth that arises from the open heart and is brought about by invincible grace. That’s what you need. That’s what I need. And if you have not had the experience of the opened heart by the Lord God; God surgery, then that’s your spiritual need. May God help you to see that the Lord Jesus has offered the atoning sacrifice by which God works in effectual grace in the hearts of men?

If you have any question about whether you are one of the elect, you can settle it right now, come to Christ. Believe in Him! And receive the eternal life that He offers and go out and say, “I’m one of the elect!”

If you don’t want to do that, then you have no complaint. You did exactly what you want. Come to Christ! Believe in Him! Don’t leave this auditorium without settling that matter, for now and for eternity.

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, how gracious Thou hast been to us. We are so grateful to Thee. When the prophet Ezekiel said, giving the words of the Lord God, that He would take away our stony hearts of our flesh and give us a new heart of flesh, he was expressing the same thing that Luke expressed when he said, “Whose heart the Lord opened.” We thank Thee for the opened heart. We thank Thee for God’s surgery, which is necessary for eternal salvation. We thank Thee for the apostle, that faithful apostle of the ancient Hebrews, who ministered the truth in spite of opposition, in spite of all kinds of suffering, but who was faithful to Thee. And, for the others who were associated with him and, especially, for our Lord and Savior Himself, of the Tribe of Judah, the promised Messiah, who made it possible for men to be saved. O God, may salvation take place in our meeting today.

For His sake. Amen.