



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 28:17–31

“At Home in Rome”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] For the Scripture reading this morning, we’re turning to the last chapter of the book of Acts, and we’re reading verse 17 through verse 31. This is the last of our series of messages on the book of Acts, so our lengthy series comes to an end today. In one sense, it’s a very triumphant end as you will notice from the final verse that Luke writes, and we’ll comment upon it in a more appropriate place. But now, if you have your New Testaments, turn to Acts 28 in verse 17, and remember that the apostle has finally made his way to the city of Rome, as a result of God’s promise, and as a result of his desire. He is there as a prisoner of the Romans, attached to one of the guards by some chains, as he will mention in his letter or in his words that he speaks here, as Luke has recorded them.

So now verse 17, “And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together, and when they were come together he said unto them, ‘Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet, was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar, not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause, therefore, have I called for you, to see you and to speak with you, because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with

this chain. And they said unto him, ‘We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee.’ But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest, for as concerning this sect.”

Now notice this is the body of believers, the Christians. So the children of Israel referred to here, throw that word around like we throw that word around concerning others today. As you can see, it’s a relative term.

“We know not, we know that everywhere, it is spoken against. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. But when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word.”

You’ll notice now, that this prophecy is gathered into that expression “one word.” There are quite a few words actually, but it is one prophecy derived from Isaiah chapter 6.

“Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers saying, ‘Go unto this people and say, ‘Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive. For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.’”

May I interject this word? It is sometimes thought, that this is something of an accident; that is, by virtue of the unbelief of the nation Israel, and that generation of the nation Israel, it is thought that somewhat as a move un contemplated, the gospel goes out to the Gentiles. But this gospel going to the Gentiles was included in the fundamental Abrahamic promise in the line, if you remember from Genesis 12.

“In thee,” God said to Abraham, “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So the Abrahamic promise is comprehended, not simply the blessing of God upon Abraham and his natural seed through Jacob, through Isaac and through Jacob, and so on, but also blessing to the Gentiles. The way in which that would come to pass, history unfolded.

And verse 29, “And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house.”

You might ask, “What was Paul doing?” Well, he was writing the prison epistles for one thing. He wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon while here in his own hired house, or a house that he had rented, or some way was available to him; chained, or at least under the guard of the Romans. There is no telling how many Roman prisoners were converted by being chained to the Apostle Paul; couldn’t think of anything worse for an unsaved man. If he didn’t want to get saved, be chained next to the apostle, and particularly when he reminded the Jewish people in the city of Rome who were unbelievers of the prophecy of Isaiah, and divine retribution. I could imagine that he reminded some who didn’t respond also, of divine retribution.

There is a story about a man, a Scottish man by the name of Baird, who in the end of the eighteenth century was taken prisoner in one of the campaigns of the British in the east, and when word came back to Scotland to Davey Baird’s mother that he was in prison, and that all of those who

were taken prisoner were chained individually to guards, she said something like, “Well, God help the man who’s chained to my Davey,” because he was such an outgoing witnessing Christian, that the person who was chained to him, if he was not a believer or didn’t want to become a believer, he would have a very uncomfortable time day after day. “So Luke says, ‘He received those that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.’” That’s the note of victory. “No man forbidding him.””

Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and we give Thee praise for the assurance, that by divine providence things proceed according to the plan of the ages. We thank Thee for that great word that the apostle wrote while he was in prison, that Thou dost work all things according to the council of Thine own will. As we think of the apostle chained to the Roman soldiers, and reflect upon the things that he wrote of divine providence, it encourages us; reminds us again, over and over, that the affairs of our daily lives are affairs that are ultimately in the hands of our great triune God. We thank Thee for working all things according to the counsel of Thine own will. We thank Thee for the sovereignty that Thou dost exercise in the affairs of men, and we especially give Thee grace, give Thee thanks and gratitude for the things that Thou hast accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know, that humanly speaking, wicked hands took him and nailed him to the tree, but we also remember that, from the divine standpoint, it was by the determinant council and foreknowledge of God, that they, the wicked men, nailed him to the tree. And we thank Thee for the way in which Thou hast so marvelously used the wickedness of men to glorify Thee. We thank Thee for the day in which we live Lord, and we pray that we may be faithful in the proclamation of the gospel. Give us boldness, and give us courage, for we need it to give a testimony to the way in which Thou hast worked in our lives, and in the lives of others; of our friends and acquaintances. And give us courage Lord to speak to the members of our family and to our friends, the Word of life. We

know that there is no salvation in any other, than in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Deliver us from the cowardice of never witnessing and testifying to the grace of God that has saved us. Forgive us, Lord, of our sin, of keeping quiet when the Holy Spirit may have been prodding us to be an instrument in the blessing of others.

We give Thee thanks for the other blessings of life as well. Thou hast richly poured them upon us. As we think of our status, the status of this nation, of the whole church of Christ, how grateful we should be. We thank Thee for the United States of America, for the president and others associated with him in government. We ask Thy blessing upon us as a nation. May, by Thy grace, we be able to follow that which is most pleasing to Thee in our relationships with other nations. We thank Thee, Lord, for the church of Christ, and pray Thy blessing upon all members within it. We thank Thee for every individual who by Thy grace has been brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and joined with us in the one body.

And Lord, pour out Thy blessings upon the whole body of Jesus Christ, the church today. And we pray, Lord, for those who may be associated with the church organizationally, but who may not have personal faith. May the day of today be the day when many make their intellectual knowledge a personal knowledge as well. We pray for those whose names are listed in our Calendar of Concern. We know that many of the believers are suffering, undergoing trials, have experienced tragedies in their own lives, have great needs. We commit them to Thee. We pray especially for some whose names were mentioned to us this morning after the printing of the Calendar of Concern. We pray for them. Thou knowest who they are. Now, Lord, be with us in our meeting. May it honor and glorify our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Bless the preaching of the Word.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today as we conclude our series of expositions of the book of the Acts is “At Home in Rome.” Acts reaches its triumphant conclusion here. You may remember that back in the beginning of the book of the Acts in chapter 1 in verse 8, the Lord Jesus had said to the apostles when they asked him, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” he

said unto them, “It’s not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” Incidentally, that statement is no denial that it would be restored to Israel, but simply, it was not for them to know the time. But he then adds, “But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Well, the story has reached its climax and its conclusion. The apostle is in Rome. The gospel has traveled from Jerusalem to Rome, and now in the concluding statement, Paul is pictured as, “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.” And that one adverb *acolutos*, “unhindered,” is a word that falls like a victor’s cry, as God has accomplished his purposes through the apostle, in seeing that the gospel has traveled over the whole of the Roman Empire. So wide was the spread of the gospel, that the apostle, writing in the letter to the Colossians, which he wrote from prison during this time, in verse 23 of chapter 1, of that epistle the apostle wrote, “And which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.” Now, that probably should be read as, “In the whole creation under heaven, whereof, I Paul am made a minister.” So one can see how widely the gospel was preached by the time the apostle had reached Rome and been there.

One of the curious things about the ending of the book of Acts, is the fact that nothing is said about the end of the life of the Apostle Paul. Of course, nothing is said about the end of the life of Peter, or Barnabas, or John; other important figures in the story that Luke has written. We sometimes forget that Luke is not writing a history of Peter or Paul. What he is doing, is writing a history of the gospel, and, therefore, the gospel having reached Rome, and is the thing in which he is particularly interested. When Paul reached Rome, Rome was in the latter days of its highest glory. When Rome was a republic, there were things that could be said about that great empire that could not be said now. As is so often the case, those who assumed power, assumed more and more power, and now Rome is under the emperors.

Some of them were nothing more than low class dictators, and Nero was one of them. And when Paul arrived in the city of Rome, Nero was the emperor. About twenty-five years of age, he was a man who has been called by historians: cruel, lascivious, and weak. If you remember your ancient history, you may remember that he was responsible for the murder of his mother. He was probably responsible for the murder of his wife by the time the apostle was here. In addition, Rome had lost its other glory. When you think of Rome today, you normally think perhaps, of the central architectural wonder of Saint Peter, the cathedral in Rome today, but when Paul arrived, there was no Saint Peter's. When he arrived, there was no coliseum. When he arrived, the capital, upon the capital was the temple of Jupiter, and the Great Citadel, and on the Palatine, the three houses respectively of Augustus, and Tiberius, and Caligula, which had been joined together until they were united as the Palace of Caesar. When one came into Rome, he particularly remembered the Temple of Mars, and if you remember that god, Mars was the god of war, then you can see why there was such attention paid to it, because the Roman Empire was built upon force and power. It was the center of paganism.

There's a brief sentence, yet it's full of suggestiveness in Coney Baron Hausen's *Life of the Apostle Paul*. They, Englishmen write, "Rome was like London with all its miseries, vices, and follies exaggerated, and without Christianity." That of course, is the greatest thing that a government or a country could possibly like—Christianity. When Paul arrived, Rome had two million people as its population. One million of them were slaves. The result was, that is so often, as is so often the case in many of our societies over the world, there were many people who were very rich, and there were many people who were very poor. On the one hand, those who were poor were begging for bread. That was what they were interested in. The others who were well off, they were interested in the circus, the coliseum kind of things, the games that would be played, and of course, in Nero's time they were interested also in the things that happened in the public arena, where the Christians were fed to the lions, and many other ways in which Nero persecuted the Christians.

The Christians were handy because he could use them to excuse the failure of his rule. Occasionally they would, for example, take the skins of animals, sew up a Christian inside the skin, and then feed the dogs upon the Christians, and so the dogs would tear the skin and, the skins of the animals, and also tear the Christians within. He had many novel ways of persecuting Christians. Now, we don't do that today. We just simply say that they're weird or peculiar, and make fun of them, and we scorn them, and we say they're irrational, or various other kinds of things that we might do.

This past week in one of the cartoons, I was amused to notice that there was a picture, someone had drawn a picture of the Coliseum, Romans around in the stadium, all around, and down on the stadium floor, the lions are rushing out from one side, and the Christians are rushing out from the other side, and there's a lion and a Christian out in the middle who are in a melee of some kind, and one Roman jumps up in the crowd, dressed like a Roman and says, “A bench clearing brawl,” as they all meet in the center and start fighting. Well, Rome must have been a terrible place in which to live at that time if one were a Christian.

When Paul arrived there, he had the necessary freedom by which he could invite the chief Jews of the community to come and visit him. It's very striking, is it not, that Paul still considered himself to be the true fulfilled Jew. He regarded himself as defending the ancient faith, and that of course, is what he was doing. He was defending the ancient faith, but he was also adding one thing, that those who held to the traditional faith could not accept, and that is that the ancient faith found its proper fulfillment in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Paul was right. We know he was right. The Scriptures show clearly that he was right, but there were many people who did not believe he was right, and the Jews who came to see the apostle, some of them believed finally, that he was right, and some believed that he was not.

At any rate, he invited them. He was chained to his Roman guard or at least under the guardianship of the Roman, but he had enough freedom so that they could come and talk with him. And when they came he spoke to them, reminding them of the fact, that there was no cause of death in him. As a matter of fact, he had done nothing wrong. However, when the Romans were ready to

free him originally, the Jewish people in the city of Jerusalem objected, and it was necessary for him, in order to preserve his life, to appeal to Caesar, and that’s why he was there. And he finally added, “As a matter of fact, I’m here simply because of the hope of Israel, the doctrine of the resurrection, and the doctrine that the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in our Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified.”

The Jewish men who came to see Paul in his house said to him, “We’ve not received any letters out of Judaea concerning you. As a matter of fact, no one has come from the brethren there and has spoken any harm of you at all. But we have heard about this sect, and so far as we can tell, everywhere it is spoken against. So we’d like to know what you really think.” And so Paul said evidently, “Well, let’s take some time, and if you can make an appointment at your convenience, you can come. I’m available, and I’ll be happy to talk to you about the facts of the Word of God as I have been brought to understand them.” So they made an appointment, and after that first interview, they arrived again. Luke describes the situation in the twenty-third verse, “When they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodgings, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.” Now, this was not the kind of sermonette that you ordinarily hear on Sunday morning, as you can see. Paul began expounding and testifying to the teaching of the Old Testament concerning the kingdom of God, and he began in the morning, and he did not conclude until evening. He gave messages, a message that was taken from the Law of Moses, or the Pentateuch, and then from the prophets, and obviously from those statements what he sought to do, was to explain the messianic promises, as they pertain to the kingdom of God.

Now, we often in thinking about this, do not reflect upon what Paul is really saying about the kingdom of God, because no details are given. In other words, it simply said that, “He expounded and testified the kingdom of God.” That word “to expound” is a word that really means something like “to set out.” So he set out the facts of, and he also gave testimony to, and evidently he emphasized the things that he was saying. No doubt, from the way in which Luke describes it, what

Paul did, was to go back to the five books of Moses, or the beginning of the Bible, and then expound the things that had to do with the rule of God on the earth. And he continued his exposition on through the five books of Moses, and on through the prophets, and then as was his custom, as is evident from other instances in the book of Acts, he pointed out how the Lord Jesus Christ and his ministry, is the fulfillment of the things that are spoken in the Old Testament concerning the kingdom of God, because he says, “persuading them of Jesus.”

Now, many people, I think, do not really understand the term “the kingdom of God” in our Christian church. One of the reasons for this, is that in the exposition of the Word of God, the kind of exposition that you normally hear in a church service is a sermon on some text, or perhaps some idea that the preacher would like to develop, which he would like to hang on certain parts of the Word of God. The result, is that frequently, by the time this is done over a period of time, the great doctrines of the Word of God, since they are not constantly being tested by the Word of God, tend to have their own beginnings and live off of themselves. So the result is that men will talk about the church as if it is the kingdom, and the work of the church as if it is the work of the kingdom. It’s surprising that the Scriptures never say that the church is the kingdom. Now, believers in the church are in the kingdom. Nor does it ever say, so far as I can tell, that the work of the church itself is necessarily the work of the kingdom, but those identifications are made, and the result, is that the teaching of the Word of God is sometimes lost. Our Christian traditions overlay the Word of God just like the ancient traditions of Judaism overlay the Old Testament with the result, that the truth became clouded and hidden.

What does the Bible say about the kingdom? Well of course, we don’t have from morning until evening, and I must say I envy the apostle, because he was able to begin at Genesis, and systematically expound the Old Testament, and come to a reasonable conclusion, which no doubt was quite convincing to those whose minds were open. But I’m going to take five minutes, and try to point out the highlights of what Paul may have said, because the Scriptures are very clear on the kingdom of God. I don’t know whether any of you have ever done this or not, but when I read

through the Bible, I like to take some particular doctrine, some particular word sometime, and read through the whole Bible thinking of that. Now, obviously it has to be something important. I’ve done this. I’ve taken the word “kingdom,” and read through the whole of the Old Testament looking simply for teaching concerning the kingdom. Now, of course, you can broaden it. You can study, for example, the word “dominion, rule, reign, kingdom.” They all belong to the same general doctrinal background.

Now, if you read through the whole of the Bible, and look for the doctrine of the kingdom, the first thing you notice, you expect it to be a prominent theme, and it is, but the first thing you may notice, is that it appears in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. When God created Adam, he gave him “dominion” over the earth. The first king of the earth was Adam, and he was king in the kingdom of God, for he served under the Lord God as king of the earth. So the doctrine of the kingdom of God begins in the Garden of Eden. There was the first expression of the kingdom of God. Now what happened, as we all know from the biblical story, is that when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he was cast out of the Garden of Eden, and in a sense, the kingdom was stolen from Adam, and the administration of the kingdom was taken away from him through the satanic temptation and the resultant fall.

But God’s purposes concerning the kingdom still held, and so he began to make promise. He gave promises to Abraham, and in the midst of those promises was a little phrase, “kings shall come out of thee.” The doctrine of the kingdom, the kingdom after the fall, began to develop with further revelation from the Word of God until finally to David, we’re given the great promises of the kingdom of God upon the earth, with David and his descendants sitting upon the throne. Now, those promises are expanded in the Old Testament, and the prophets particularly spoke about them. Some time, read Micah. Read Isaiah. Read Zechariah. Read even the little prophecy of Haggai. All of those great prophets, almost without exception, lay stress upon the coming kingdom of God.

Now, when the Lord Jesus arrived on the scene, he had a forerunner. His name was John the Baptist. Now, speaking out of the context of the Old Testament, the message of John the Baptist

was, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.” The Lord Jesus came along shortly after, and his message is given by the evangelist Matthew as, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.” The Lord Jesus gathered all of his teaching around that theme of the kingdom of God, for the kingdom, as a result of the Fall must be grounded in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross. He was the king, and it is he who offered the sacrifice. It’s he, who acting as a royal priest-king, offers the saving sacrifice for the people of God. Now, as a result of that, the reign of the kingdom of God upon the earth, as a result of the failure of the nation, or the failure of that generation to respond, the Lord Jesus had to make a very significant statement in his earthly ministry. He said to the rulers of that generation, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” Israel was the administrator of the kingdom as a nation, but the Lord Jesus said their administration is coming to an end due to their unbelief, and it came to an end. As a result of that, the administration of the kingdom of God has been given to the church of Jesus Christ, composed of both Gentiles and Jews.

Now, we know that the history of the Christian church for say, nineteen hundred years, has been largely the history of the administration of the kingdom of God under the administration of the body of believers known in the New Testament as the church. There are Jewish believers; the remnant, and there are Gentile believers, and they make up the church. We know, of course, that the fulfillment of the promises with reference to the kingdom, because of the nation’s unbelief, has been put off. Romans 11 explains it all, as the apostle speaks about the way in which those promises shall be fulfilled to the nation. In fact, in Romans 11 in verse 11, Paul says, “I say then, have they Israel stumbled that they should fall. God forbid, but rather through their fall salvation is come under the Gentiles.” But notice the last clause, “to provoke them to jealousy.” Why do you think Gentiles have been saved today? Why, they been saved today in order to provoke Israel to jealousy. That’s what Paul says. That’s what the Old Testament says, for he cites the Old Testament, and in Deuteronomy 32:21, that is precisely what is stated. So we today have been, by the grace of God, included. We were

included in the Abrahamic promises, but in the outworking of them in history, included through national unbelief of Israel, and the preaching of the gospel going out to Gentiles.

But that is part of the divine program. We should never think of that as an accident. It's part of the divine program, and designed to have its culmination in, “and so all Israel shall be saved,” as Paul says. That is, the nation as a whole and the kingdom of God brought to pass upon the earth.

There is one last thing that the Bible says about the kingdom of God that is very interesting, and that is, that in the last days there will be an attempt to set up a kingdom that is a false kingdom, in a sense to fulfill prophecy not in accordance with Scripture. And it's the story found in Revelation 13, of the beast or anti-Christ attempting to set up a worldwide kingdom, but at the same time deny the truth of the Word of God. But the book of Revelation goes on to point out in chapter 11 in verse 15, that, “The time is coming when the Lord Jesus shall establish the kingdom,” and the words that John gives of the vision of the seventh angel are these, “The seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven saying, ‘the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he shall reign for ever and ever.’”

Now, that, I think, is essentially what the apostle was preaching and teaching in the hired home in which the Jews came to see him. So he testified of the kingdom. Now notice it is the “kingdom of God.” It's not a kingdom of any other person. It's not a kingdom that exists at the caprice of a human king, such as we still have today. It's not a kingdom that exists by decision of parliament. It's not a kingdom that exists by the agreement of the will of the people. It is a theocracy. It is the kingdom of God.

I read pretty constantly *The Wall Street Journal*, and find it a very good way in which to keep up with things that are happening here upon this earth, and I confess that I enjoyed it, enjoy it very much, and find it very profitable for me. But there is one issue of *The Wall Street Journal* that invariably gets under my skin. I guess it's one of the signs that sanctification is not yet complete in me, and I know that each of you who know me have some other signs that you could speak about as well. But every year around Christmastime, the editors of the Wall Street Journal have a little

Christmas editorial. I think they have two, and they do them on alternate years, and this one that I have before me is one that is entitled, “In hoc anno domine.” “In this year of the Lord.” And every year I say I’m going to write a letter, but I never do, and I notice that no one else writes a letter either, but here are some of the marvelous little spiritual truths that appear from this editorial. “Then,” he’s describing Saul of Tarsus setting out on his journey to Damascus, the whole of the known world lying in bondage, *et cetera*. And then he says, “Then of a sudden there was a light in the world, and a man from Galilee saying ‘Now what text would you think of to sing aloud from the four Gospels to say was the important message of the Lord Jesus Christ?’” Well, they pick out, “Render unto the Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.” You could hardly, in a nicer way, avoid the gospel than that, and the voice from Galilee which would defy Caesar offered a new kingdom in which each man could walk upright, and bow to none but his God.” Now a text to support that, “In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Now, what connection that has with what he has just said, only the angels know. I surely don’t.

And then this statement, and this in the one that gets under my skin, “And he sent this gospel of the kingdom of man into the uttermost part of the earth.” How much farther from the Word of God could you get than, “He sent this gospel of the kingdom of man?” That expression never occurs in the Bible. It’s the kingdom of God that Paul talks about, not the kingdom of man, but that’s the way that we like to twist the Word of God. I’m waiting for someone to write a letter to *The Wall Street Journal*. Be on the look out for it. If you read the *Journal*, it will appear a few days before Christmas or the other one which is just as difficult to understand.

Paul said he also “persuaded them concerning the Lord Jesus.” Now, what he meant by that I’m sure, what Luke meant by that, was simply that he found Christ in the Old Testament, and there was an Old Testament Christology that arose out of these magnificent statements of the Word of God. Now, the response that the apostle got, was the kind of response that all preachers get if they preach the Word of God in purity or faithfulness. We read, “And some believed the things which

were spoken, and some believed not.” Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians in his second letter described exactly the kind of response that you may expect if you preach the gospel. He says, “We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish. To one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other, the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient of these things?” And Paul’s point is simply this; that when the gospel goes out, some respond, some do not. Some are, find the gospel a saver of life, for the Holy Spirit has prepared them to receive it. Others find it a saver of death, for they are unprepared to receive it, and Paul rightly says, “And who is sufficient for these things?” Such a solemn privilege granted to an individual, to give the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to realize that out of the preaching of the gospel come the issues of life. Death or life. It is a solemn thing. It’s a solemn thing to preach the gospel. It’s a solemn thing to tell your friend, or your relative, or your neighbor about the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, because it’s a saver of life unto life, and a saver of death unto death. That’s the nature of the gospel as a result of the fallen condition of man.

Well, those who listened to Paul, some found the message convincing. Others did not, and then when they could not come to an agreement, they left debating among themselves, but only after Paul had added one final word. And this one final word was the announcement of divine retribution. He said, “Well spake the Holy Ghost of, by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers. He said unto that generation ‘Go unto this people and say, ‘Hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive. For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing. Their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.’” And Paul made the application, and we’re not amiss in making the application today. It is possible for individuals to hear the gospel over, and over, and over again, and finally, as the generation in the day of Isaiah, and as the generation in the day of our Lord, and the generation in the day of the apostle, those words have become words that they hear, but do not understand, that they see, and do not perceive, because their heart has waxed gross. It has become indifferent. They have covered over

their eyes and, therefore, they are unable to respond as a result of the divine disciplinary judgment set upon the nation.

So Paul reminds his hearers of the fact, that judgment follows disobedience. Only the remnant believes in the nation Israel in Paul's day. The nation, that generation, has rejected him. They rejected him in Galilee, our Lord spoke about it, through Jerusalem and Antioch. Paul spoke about it in those places. In Corinth, Paul spoke about it there, and finally in Rome. And as he says in the Epistle to the Romans, “This is God's way of working out his eternal purposes.”

Now, the final two verses of the chapter describes his continuing ministry, when Paul was busy in his own hired house, writing his letters, and also receiving people who came to talk with him. Luke, Aristarchus, Timothy, Mark, and others were with him. We know from Paul's letters, not from Acts. And he spent his time “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ.” Preaching the kingdom. Rome appeared to be the mistress of the world, but Paul reminded them, “No, Rome's not the mistress of the world. God's the master of the world. Rome may have prided itself in its kingdom, but there is another kingdom, another king.” And the same thing may be said today. We sometimes forget that the kingdom of God is ruled by the Lord God, and that the true king, the true master, the true president, the true prime minister is the Lord God, who is the prime minister, the president, and the king of this whole universe, and all the things that happen in the east, and in the west, and in the Third World. All of these things are under the sovereign control of the Lord God in heaven.

Now, to the disciples it says, “He taught the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ.” Oscar Wilde once said, “You're young only once, but you can stay immature indefinitely.” Unfortunately, many in our Christian churches have followed that pattern. They have come to the knowledge of the Lord, but so far as development in the things of the Word of God, they're not interested in that. In fact, they often like to say they're not interested in the doctrines of the Word of God.

Last night, the Career Class very marvelously entertained the widows and the widowers in Believers Chapel. There was a very, very marvelous gesture, and in order to make it really entertaining, they had a country band, and they came. They were called “Country Silver,” and when you looked at them, you realized why, except for one young man that I happened to know when he was just a little, little boy; now a doctor on the staff down at Baylor. They were all at least fifty, and one or two appeared to be about seventy-five, and they could play the fiddles, and the banjos, and all of the other things. And they had a Baptist preacher as a master of ceremonies. He also sang, and when he came to the end of the program after they’d sung a number of, of their country tunes, they announced that they were going to sing some gospel tunes. And he knew I was there. He’d already said a few things to me, and I, I don’t know whether he made this for my benefit or just said it just to say it. It’s so common. He said, “Now, we’re not going to sing any doctrines. We’re not interested in the doctrines. We’re interested in the realities, and we’re not going to sing that. We’re going to leave those to the, leave the doctrines to the seminary professors and all that stuff.” That’s kind of the way he said it. And then, “The first song,” he said, “we’ll sing is ‘This World is not our Home.’” And I, I didn’t have a chance, but I wanted to raise my hand and say, “Wait a minute. That’s a doctrine. This world is not my home.” And then every one of those tunes that was sung was a doctrinal tune. Everyone of them. I had, they wouldn’t let me get [my] hand in and say, “That’s a doctrine. We can’t sing that.” But that’s kind of the attitude that people have. They’re not interested in what the Scriptures teach; not the least to say, that to say, “Doctrine is unimportant” is itself a doctrine. Is it not? Well, of course it is.

So we cannot get away from that, and so the apostle taught those things that concern the Lord Jesus Christ. I would imagine he expounded the contents of the Epistle to the Romans. He expounded the contents of the Epistle to the Ephesians, which he had just written; the contents of the Epistle to the Colossians, and then for those of you who like the experimental side of Christianity, incidentally, the series that begins next Sunday will emphasize that for awhile, because, I think, we need that emphasis. For those who like the more experimental side of things, the Epistle to

the Philippians, which he also wrote from this prison house, the Epistle of Joy gave that emphasis as well. But what Paul did, was to teach the believers, and build them up in the faith that they not stay immature indefinitely, and he concludes with, “no man forbidding.” One might say, “Paul’s in prison, no man forbidding.” Unhindered, even though in prison. Nero’s on the throne; that terrible despot, but God is working even with Nero on the throne. And the way that Luke finishes the Acts, he almost, you feel closes it in the midst of a sentence. The reason for that is simply, he’d like for us, or at least the Holy Spirit would who guided him, they would like for us to know, that the Lord Jesus is continuing to do and teach in the present day, and you are part of it.

Now, I can close with just a few comments. May I make you the object of a bit of persuasion as we close, particularly, for you who accept the facts intellectually, of the gospel of Christ, but have not appropriated them personally. Mr. Spurgeon, in a sermon on one of these texts here says, “O my hearers, if you believe that Jesus is the Savior, why is he not your Savior?” That’s a question we could ask ourselves. If you believe the Bible is the Word of God, and if you believe Christ is the Son of God, and if you believe that he has offered the sacrifice that saves sinners; if you believe that Christianity is true, why is not Christ your Savior? Why is he not your personal Savior? Mr. Spurgeon also says, “Their belief holds the truth as spices and linen preserve a mummy.” And we have all seen Christians, professing Christians, who affirm that they are believers, but so far as their life is concerned, it’s empty, it’s dead, it often is positively rebellious against God; if not in the mind, in the daily experiences of life. Rebellious. Contrary to the Word of God, and yet on lips, “I believe the Bible. I believe Christ is the Son of God.” Age is stealing over some of you in this audience. I can tell. You can tell if you look at me. Age is stealing over me. It’s been stealing for a long time, seventy years. It’s stealing over you as well, and have we made an advance in Christian life? Have we grown? Do I look at you, and are you in the same spiritual condition you were in nineteen hundred and sixty-five? Am I? This is a legitimate question for us.

The time is coming when everyone of you in this auditorium, if Jesus Christ does not come, you’re going to go upstairs, and you’re going to get in your bed, and you’re going to be there, and

finally you're going to face the fact that you will meet with those who have gone on before you. As Christians, you will go to be with the people of God. As non-Christians, the Scriptures make it very plain. You will enter into eternal torment. That time is coming. Some of you very young ones, the time will come when you too must go upstairs, “be gathered unto the fathers,” to use the Old Testament expression.

I can remember when I preached a sermon on this about twenty years ago, my father was still living. I read this particular statement, “The time is coming when you're going to go upstairs and be gathered to your fathers,” and I wrote by the side of it, “Daddy,” because he was about seventy-eight or seventy-nine years of age at that time. That's happened to him since then. I looked back at that sermon, and I see the note on the side in which I was thinking about him, and now I think about you. That time is coming for you, and it's coming for me, and have we settled this question of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? You intend to believe, but not now like Felix. Elijah had a word for the people of his day, “How long halt ye between two opinions? Who's God: Baal, or Jehovah?”

And I ask you the same question. How long will you fail to make this decision that means eternal life? And you who are seeking salvation the wrong way; you who are trying to make the light go on without turning on the electricity. You're like individuals who seek to be saved by your good works, by your church membership, and I, may God forbid, but if some of you think that, “It's possible. I will go to heaven because I attend Believers Chapel,” may the elders and all the members of the Chapel forthrightly and loudly say, “No, there is only one way to heaven. It's the way of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” “To him that worketh not”; that is, no getting to heaven by joining the church, no getting to heaven by education, no getting to heaven by culture, no heaven by religion, no heaven by baptism, no heaven by sitting at the Lord's Table. “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned unto righteousness.”

May God grant that you receive the message of your own sin and lost condition, and the message of the Lord Jesus Christ's death for sinners, and may the solemnity of the issue so steal over your heart, that you flee to the Lord Jesus, as the refuge from eternal condemnation. Come to Christ.

Believe in him. Do not allow a moment to pass until in your heart, you’ve thanked him for what he’s done for you, and by his grace said to him, “I want to live to please you.” May God help you to make that decision.

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are very grateful to Thee. What can we say to Thee, Lord, other than “We thank Thee. We praise Thee.” We thank Thee for lovingkindness shown to us. We thank Thee for turning on the light figuratively, enabling us to understand ourselves and the peril in which we stand, and Christ, and the blessings that come through him. Lord, if there should be someone here who has not yet made that decision, O God, give grace so that the unwilling naturally become willing, and flee to Christ. May at this very moment, there issue from the hearts of any in this auditorium who are not assured of the forgiveness of sins, the words, “I thank [End of Tape]