



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 12:4-11

“The Horrors of the Careless Professor”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the opportunity to study this evening. We thank Thee for the word of God. We thank Thee for the sufficiency of the Scriptures for our lives and we thank Thee for a divine teacher, the Holy Spirit, who instructs us in the things of our Lord, guides our steps and protects and keeps us throughout our Christian experience. We pray that our study this evening may honor our Lord and glorify our Triune God and may be of help and benefit to all of us who are here in this auditorium.

We pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, I ran off from my house and left my notes back on my desk, so we will see how we will do tonight, just looking at the text of Scripture. So we're turning to Hebrews chapter 12, and our text is chapter 12, verse 12 through verse 17. The author writes,

“Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of

bread or food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”

When we think of this passage, this particular passage, I think of this passage as a passage that underlines the fact that in the Christian life, the most important thing is having the Lord God constantly before us. And, I think, that the illustration of the opposite in the case of Esau is something that underlines that very fact, because that is the one thing that Esau did not do.

Our author, now, has given us the doctrine of the High Priesthood of Christ. He has, in a sense, given us the exhortations that follow as a result of that teaching, and now he’s going to further bring home to us the practical implications of the truths that he has been setting forth. You notice, he begins with, “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”

Now, remember, this chapter begins with some words concerning the Christian life as a race. He had said, “Therefore we also since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin, which so easily ensnares us; and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” So he thinks of the Christian life, here, as a race. And then, if that is true, these words of verse 12 are particularly appropriate because if anyone has ever noticed races, marathons, particularly, how appropriate is this exhortation in verse 12, “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, the feeble knees make straight paths for your feet.”

Have you ever noticed in a marathon how the runners appear at near the end of the race? These very things are characteristic of them except the opposite of them. Their hands are hanging at their sides. They’re hanging down. Their knees are wobbly and often it’s really the work of fellow marathoners who get some of them across the finish line. And you’ve seen in the Boston Marathon and in the marathons that you’ve looked at on TV, near the end of the race where the ones who are the “also ran” so to speak are trying to reach the line, the one thing that is of concern to them is not

whether they’ve won the race. The race has already been won. But they want to finish and so, as a result, you will see marathoners linking arms together, trying to get each other over the finish line. This is what he’s talking about when he says, “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, and rather be healed.” He’s talking about the fact that it is necessary for some to strengthen their hands, to make straight paths, in order that the whole body, those who are lame within the body, may be able to reach the finish line -- in his language, “rather be healed.”

What this is is an exhortation to a church; that is, that in the church itself, it’s a common task for the believers to be concerned for the other believers. That’s what he means when he says “strengthen the hands that hang down, the feeble knees, make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.” The common concern of all the saints in the race that each of us is running, that we all may reach the finish line.

That’s a very interesting kind of thing because, I think, that what we have in the United States of America is the cult of individuality. And the cult of individuality is something that has affected the Christian church. It has certainly affected the evangelical church. Churches are thought of today, now, not as bodies of people, that have common interests, common concerns, common cares for one another. The churches are very frequently thought of in the light of one man who stands in the pulpit Sunday after Sunday. The cult of individuality is something that has affected us in evangelicalism. And so you turn on your radio, you want to listen to one man. Or you listen or look at your TV screen and you want to look at one person. Or, when you think about a church, you want to know who is the pastor, who is the preacher. But that is so different from the New Testament picture of the local church. The New Testament picture of the local church is of a body of believers, who have common concerns; and not only is it a body of people who have common concerns, but even their ministry is a varied ministry. It’s a multiple ministry. You do not have in the New Testament any example whatsoever, I defy you to find it, defy anybody to find it, the picture

of a local church as the pastor as the head of the church, such as a man who may be heading one of our great institutions; that is, one of our business institutions.

You do not find any Ross Perots; that’s not, by the way, my viewpoint concerning the debate last night, at all. But you do not find Ross Perots, you do not find presidents of IBM or whatever, in the picture that the New Testament gives us of the local church. You find a picture of a body of believers who are commonly concerned, one for another, and also, in that body, generally speaking, there is a plurality of the ministry of the word of God. There are pastors; there are teachers. In those days, there were prophets, also. Multiple gifts, multiple ministry, and consequently, the common concern of a body.

Now, my feeling is that we will never be the kind of body of believers that we ought to be until we gather and are gripped by this concept that is found in the New Testament. If we are going to reach the finish line, your hands must be strengthened. They must not hang down. Your knees must be strengthened. You must make straight paths. But you also must be concerned for the others, for the lame and the handicapped spiritually in order that they, too, might reach the finish line. We have a lot of such, since I’m getting old, I hope you’ll remember this and take care of me when I’m old and get me to the finish line. Well, that’s what, I think, the author is thinking about here, when he makes this exhortation to strengthen those hands, which hang down and those feeble knees.

Now, the text, of course, that he uses is not something that he invented. If you’ll take your Bible and turn back to Isaiah chapter 35, in verse 3, I think that you will see that this is something that in the Old Testament is found, as well. In chapter 35 in verse 3, this text, which was obviously upon his mind, Isaiah says, with reference to Israel, “Strengthen the weak hands, make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, “Be strong, do not fear! [The fearful-hearted are the lame.] Do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.” So the concept of a body of people with care and concern for one

another is the concept that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has which he derived obviously from Isaiah chapter 35, because his text alludes to that.

Now, secondly, he says, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” To “pursue peace” to follow after peace in the sense of “make an effort to obtain the peace.” Bible interpreters always ask the question, when they read this text “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness,” what kind of holiness is the author speaking about? Because the Bible tells us that there is more than one way to look at holiness.

In the New Testament, for example, we have a kind of holiness that could be called preparatory holiness; that is, it’s the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to the knowledge of the Lord. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to the cross of Christ. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to faith. It’s expressed for us in 1 Peter chapter 1 in verse 1 and 2, when the author writes, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

Notice the order. We have “elect according to the foreknowledge of God.” He knows, of course, who are the elect, because he has foreordained the elect. But notice that “in sanctification of the Spirit” precedes “obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” In other words, there is a work of the Holy Spirit by which we are brought to faith in Jesus Christ, and he calls this “sanctification of the Spirit.” The same thing is found in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 in verse 13 through verse 15. If you have your Bibles, turn over there. 2 Thessalonians 2 in verse 13, where the apostle writes, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.” So there is a form of sanctification, a setting apart for God, which begins before we are saved. That’s what we call “pre-salvation grace.” It’s known as effectual grace, by which we are brought to the Lord. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit. It can be called sanctification.

He’s setting us apart for belief in Christ. Then there are other, we can call that preparatory sanctification.

But we are also told in Scripture that the moment that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are sanctified. Now, that’s why we are called saints; for the term saints simply means “a sanctified one.” It’s the same word. So when you look at your fellow Christians, they may be called saints. You are saints. We speak of the members of the body of Christ as the saints, generally. Now, in that sense, they are those who are already sanctified. They are saints. That’s their name. They are qualified. They are members of the family. And the moment we believe in Christ, remember, we have the position of those who have been sanctified. We are saints.

Now, the common use of the term sanctified is a third use; and that’s the use by which we describe our growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. So we can speak of an individual as being positionally sanctified, but practically he’s a long ways from what God will, ultimately, make him. And so the Christian life is a matter of growth. The growth is sustained by the word of God.

Are you reading the Bible? I have a, some announcement to make tonight, which I told Martha gives me great self-esteem. I finished my third reading through the Bible this afternoon. Maybe that’s why I forgot my notes. I don’t know. [Laughter] But, anyway, maybe reading the Bible causes you forgetfulness. But, at any rate, the word of God is one of the means by which we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord.

Observing the ordinances. Do you observe the ordinances? Well, the Lord’s Supper, the baptism is the ordinance we observe once, but the Lord’s Supper is something that we observe constantly. The early Church observed the Lord’s Supper every Lord’s Day. Historically, what we know from early church history supports that. It’s also reflected historically in the fact that the Roman Catholic Church observes the Mass every Sunday. That’s a reflection of that tradition that comes from nineteen hundred years ago. Say what you will about the Roman Catholic Church, but they have reflected in that, the tradition of the Apostle Paul and others, for they observe the Lord’s Supper every Sunday.

Isn't it striking that so many of our believing Christian friends so rarely observe the Lord's Supper? Do you know, in Believers Chapel we have many people who come, attend the Sunday school, and leave, and rarely ever attend the Lord's Supper. That's astonishing, especially when our Lord Jesus, and the apostles, make it very plain that this is one of the commands of the word of God. That's astonishing.

Now, it's astonishing, of course maybe less astonishing in our fellow believing churches about us or this land for that matter. But it's especially astonishing in a church that has set the Lord's Supper at the center of its worship as a church. When the Lord Jesus said that we were to observe the Lord's Supper and our believers, our believing friends, do not attend, what should we think? We can only think that there is something lacking in the commitment of our fellow believers. This is very significant thing. And it's of great concern, I think, to our Lord. It's not nearly the concern to us as human beings; we are sinful human beings. But I'm sure it's of great concern to our Lord in heaven, to see us not paying careful attention to the things that are set forth in Holy Scripture.

So sanctification, growth in grace, how can we expect to grow if we do not observe the ordinances that have been left for us. Read the Scriptures. Get down upon our knees and have a time of earnest, sincere prayer. These are the things that make for active, vital, effective running of the race. Otherwise, our knees are wobbly. Our hands are hanging down. We are tired of spiritual things. And it will be very difficult for us to get to the finish line unless some of our fellow Christians put their arms under our arms and carry us across the line.

Now, there's one final aspect of sanctification; not only is there sanctification that brings us to faith in Christ, pre or preparatory sanctification, pre-salvation sanctification and not only positional sanctification, all of us are holy, positionally. That's where we stand. It's like justification. All of us are just, righteous, but we are not righteous in practical life. There is the progressive sanctification, which is the third aspect.

And then, we know from the word of God, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, there is a time coming when our experience will match our position. And we, who are saints, will truly be saints, and we'll not be saints until then. Remember that Martha. We'll not be saints until then.

Now, the question I'm asking you is this, when he says “pursue peace with all people and holiness,” or sanctification, for those words are the same “holy” and “sanctified” “saints,” what kind of sanctification is referred to here? Is this the holiness that should progressively characterize our lives? Or is this the positional sanctification which all believers enjoy and, thus, would this be an exhortation towards salvation?

Well, I think, it's a very difficult question, of course, to say which is which here. And, commentators have had a lot of difficulty over this particular thing. But, in the light of the context as a whole, in this practical part of the epistle, I'm inclined to think that what he has primarily in mind is that we are to pursue practical holiness. But then, what about “without which no one shall see the Lord?” Well, I think, it's very evident that anyone who has truly been converted, who truly has new life, there will be an inevitable manifestation of that life.

Now, perhaps, you will say, well, I know some people who have made profession of faith, in which there doesn't seem to be any evidence of life. Of course, the first question you want to ask is, can it be seen in you? But, anyway, let's assume it can be seen in you. But you look at your fellow believer, and you do not see any evidence of new life in him. Or you see things that contradict what you might expect. Well, it's helpful, I think, to remember that when we talk about the inevitability of the manifestation of life, our Lord talks about it in a number of his illustrations, we must remember that the inevitability is not related to what we see, but it's related to what God sees not what we see. So we are not justified in passing judgment on other people. In fact, Paul tells us to “judge no one before the time.” He doesn't even judge himself. He said, “I know nothing against myself, but I'm not justified in that. I don't know anything in myself,” he said, in 1 Corinthians 4, that is contrary to the will of God, at the present moment, but I'm not justified in this, at the judgment seat of Christ. I'll be subject to divine judgment, also.

So I'm inclined to think then “pursue peace with all people and holiness” is the practical kind of holiness that characterizes the ongoing growth of the Christian. And it's true that the genuine Christian will, inevitably, have evidence of life in his life that is seen by the Lord God, even in cases in which we may not see the evidence, without which no one shall see the Lord.

Does not the Apostle John say that, “those who have been born of God do not practice sin?” So in other words, it's inevitable. If you have new life, it will be manifested. There will be evidences of it. But those evidences may not be seen by me or others. Maybe my eyes are too blinded, spiritually, to see the truth about the spiritual life of others. But Scripture says that true believers will have fruit. That's why we were converted. So pursue peace with all people with all, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness without which no one shall see the Lord.”

Now, then, in verse 15 through verse 17, this is the heart of what we want to talk about tonight because I was talking about, I gave a, I've even forgotten the title of the sermon I gave Lorrie, but I think it was something like “The Horror of the Careless Professor,” because this is precisely what Esau was. Listen to what our author says about that possibility. And you'll notice, that these verses 15, 16, and 17, are characterized by the threefold occurrence of the word “lest.” “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God.” Well now, how do we fall short of the grace of God? Well, just what we were talking about. We were talking about falling short of the grace of God by not giving ourselves to the reading of Holy Scripture and the pondering of it because, just reading it is not the same as pondering it. I've learned a lot about reading the Scripture, reading through the Bible three times this year. You know what I've learned? I know I knew this before, but I have really learned it this time, because I was anxious to read through the Bible three times this year. And so I was reading pretty rapidly. I was reading in my Bible about ten pages a night. Now ten pages are not so much but when you do that for one hundred and fifty nights straight, it becomes a bit of a problem. So I find myself at times, once or twice I fell behind two times, so I had to read twenty pages. But I found this that I could read the Bible and think about other things at the same time I was reading the Bible.

You know, that’s an astonishing thing! I could actually be reading the Bible and thinking about the Cowboy’s last game. [Laughter] You can. You can do that. You can actually read the Bible, those words are going in your mind and coming out as you move down, but you are thinking about other things. And I found, that I often have to go back and read the passage twice and make an effort now to pay attention to what you are reading. I was so anxious to finish. I’m glad I’ve finished because I’ve finished now and let’s see, it’s November the 11th, isn’t it? It’s November the 11th or 10th? Is it the 10th? Tenth. Let’s see, that’s twenty days, and then the thirty-one days of Christmas so fifty-one days before I start reading again. I don’t have to read the Bible for fifty-one days. [More laughter]

I learned a lot. I learned that you can read the Bible and be not reading it at the same time. So how do we as he says here, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God,” well, one of the ways is not reading the word of God and when we are reading the word of God, not paying attention to it; thinking about something else. I know that you can get down on your knees and be praying and think of something else.

Mr. Spurgeon used to talk about that. He said he would get down on his knees, and he would pray, and pretty soon the thought came into his mind, “I surely am making progress in the life of the Lord. My other friends are not praying like I am. I’m spending time in prayer.” And he called that as a “buzzard flying across the sky” putting in his mind that thought. So while he is talking to the Lord he can be thinking of how much progress “I’m making in the spiritual life.” You ever have you ever had that experience? Come on, now? Three people in this audience, my, what an audience of saints we have tonight. [Laughter] But that is the experience of all of us, I believe. Or at least, most all of us.

Well, that’s one way. We don’t pay attention to the word of God. But, of course, our author has been talking about things that pertain to the other saints. He said, for example, in chapter 10, he said, “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.” So evidently in the assembly to which he was writing, primarily, they themselves were doing some things

that were causing them to fall a bit short of the grace of God. In verse 25 of chapter 10, he states it, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the day approaching.”

So to fall short of the grace of God, well, that’s to be unhelpful with reference to the other believers; to not put your arm under their arm, to help them get to the finish line. It’s not to be engaging yourself on your knees in prayer to the Lord or in whatever position you are lying when you do pray, reading the word of God, and also taking advantage of the opportunities that you have to communicate the word of God to those with whom you come in contact; your friends, as well as the acquaintances who cross your path.

“Looking carefully,” that word is the word that is used for the oversight of an elder. In other words, being a kind of bishop of your own life, “lest anyone fall short of the grace of God.” And then, secondly, “Lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” This is a rather serious list. Look at it again. “Lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”

Kent Hughes, who’s the pastor of College Church of Christ in Wheaton, is a very fine expositor of the word of God. I’ve been reading his expositions of the Epistle to the Hebrews, along with the things that I’ve been saying to you. And he makes the comment that I think is absolutely true. He said that there is “no church,” to his knowledge, that does not have what our author is talking about, “roots of bitterness” within them. It’s so easy for people within a congregation to do precisely what the Israelites did when they were moving from Egypt to the Promised Land.

The characteristic word, remember, is “murmuring.” Murmuring. Israel murmured on those occasions. On those occasions, it was necessary for the Lord to deal with them. And he dealt very severely with them. For example, when they murmured or were disobedient, he sent those serpents in among them, that bit men and women and they died. When they murmured, they found difficulties as they made their way into the land.

“The root of bitterness” that springs up in the congregations is something that we should be on guard about. It’s just like your garden house. The pecans have fallen and so, it’s nice to have a few pecans, not too many, but a few pecans. But the rest of the year, I’m digging up pecan trees out of the flowerbeds.

Now, to my mind, those are “roots of bitterness” because have you ever noticed a pecan’s root? A pecan’s root starts toward Hell and gets a fairly good way along the way before you notice it. Because pulling up a pecan root is a good way to get another hernia, I can assure you. [Laughter] I don’t know that that’s where I got my hernias, because I’ve had a couple of hernias in years past but that’s an easy way to do it.

“Roots of bitterness?” All those things are what our author is talking about. He says, “Lest any root of bitterness.” But he’s talking about people, because people in a congregation can certainly be a bitter root, who talk but do not seek to build up the saints, who murmur against the elders, against other believers, against the ministry of the word of God, and all of the other ways in which we minister, because look, we are not sanctified yet. Believers are not sanctified. The local church is not a sanctified church. The local church is a body of people who constantly have problems. And so, consequently, to be a helpful saint of God is to be one who is seeking to help the lame that they may not be “dislocated” but rather be healed and be brought to the finish line. He’s one who is digging up the roots of bitterness, by dealing with them and seeking to keep the trouble that our author is talking about from spreading throughout the congregation because not only is the person responsible, the one who will have difficulty, but as our author says, many others may become defiled.

Now, the third “lest” is the important one. You know, I think, I would have accomplished more if I had my notes. But, at any rate, I may have stuck more to the subject. But now he says, verse 16, “Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for” a change of mind, “though he sought it diligently with tears.”

Now, I'd like for you to take your Bibles and turn back to Genesis chapter 25, and Genesis chapter 27. Won't be able to expound both of these passages, but hopefully you know the story of Esau. It's a very interesting story and our author knew it very well, and it's his illustration.

You remember, in chapter 25, “Isaac is forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, and Isaac pled with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children wrestled with one another, fought with one another in the womb. And she said, ‘If all is well, why am I like this?’” Jacob and Esau were already struggling in the womb. Rather astonishing, isn't it? And so, she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.” Notice that line, “The older shall serve the younger.” There the story of Jacob and Esau is set out by God. One people will be stronger than the other. The older shall serve the younger. And so what happened, of course, is when her time was fulfilled, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red. “He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau.” Red. And then the other. And afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Supplanter. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

So the boys grew and Esau was a skillful hunter; a man of the field. But Jacob was a mild man. That word means something like a solid fellow, or a levelheaded fellow. Dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he ate his game. And Rebekah loved Jacob.

Now, Jacob cooked a stew and Esau came in from the field and he was weary and Esau said to Jacob, “Please?” You can see, Esau coming in, Esau is your television beer commercial man. He's hairy, he's macho kind of strong. What is he interested in? He's interested in the suds and women. Have you noticed that? All the TV screens advertising the beer: suds and women. There's Esau. So he comes in and Jacob's home, and Esau says, as he sees this pottage, he says, “Please feed me with that same red stuff.” Actually, he repeats it twice. Some of the red. This red. For I am weary. Therefore his name was called Edom or “red.” And so, Jacob, don't think of Jacob simply as

a clever man. He was, but there's a fundamental difference between these two men. Both unsanctified but a fundamental difference between them. Jacob said to Esau, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.” Esau says, “Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?” Get it while you can. That's the kind of attitude people have today. Get it while you can.

Incidentally, Esau is called a fornicator by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. That's not in the Bible. But there are outside traditions to that effect. Palestinian Targum says the same thing. Fallow says the same thing. There may have been and, evidently, were some sources that were known to people at this time that were regarded as truthful. And he was that kind of man. In fact, there is one story of Esau coming in and bragging that he's been out and he's been having adulterous relationships with various people; and he had one with a person who was engaged to another man. So when the Bible calls him a fornicator, that's the source of it.

So he's a man who is interested in fun, hunting, food, a stew, the beer the suds and females. Fun, food, females. Now, do you think the men of today are like that? Do you think the people of today are like that? That's about as accurate a picture of our society as one could find. Sit in front of your TV screen a little while and watch the Cowboys. Watch one of the other football games on Monday night. Watch the Monday night football game; that'll give you an insight into the kind of society that we are a part of. Fun, food, females, as far as the men are concerned.

So Esau sold his birthright to him. Jacob said, “Swear to me,” so he swore by him. Sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils. Then he ate and drank, arose, and went on his way. And underneath there you can put Budweiser or whatever it might be that was being drunk in those days. But notice the last line. “Thus Esau despised his birthright.” That's the fundamental fact. The fundamental fact is he is a man who doesn't care for divine things. He's a man who had the birthright and the blessing that went with the birthright. It was all his. Number one, he is the firstborn. The firstborn had the birthright. The right to be the one who led the family in the things of God. As a matter of fact, the promise was associated with him. The Genesis 3:15

promise is carried down through the birthright and the blessing that characterized it. It's all his. He despised it.

Now, Isaac is a man who doesn't pay any attention to the Bible either. Not totally. He was a man of God, but like all men of God when they don't pay attention to the word of God, they're in difficulty. So Isaac has become an old man and his eyes are so dim that he couldn't see as chapter 27, verse 1, tells us. So he calls Esau his older son and he said to him, “Esau, I'm old. I don't know the day of my death.” But it, obviously, he feels it's soon. He said, “Make me savory food such as I love and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.”

Wait a minute, Isaac. Weren't you told the promise that the older shall serve the younger? Not the younger shall serve the older; the older shall serve the younger. But Isaac, also, has forgotten the word of God.

And so Esau, of course, goes out to do his hunting. But unfortunately, Rebekah was listening. Ah, men, how often it's true. We cannot get away with it. Often, it's true. Our wives are by the Lord God often placed in positions where they hear. And in this case, Rebekah heard. And so Rebekah is not without her faults, either. She's anxious for Jacob because she loves Jacob. Isaac loves Esau. And so they engage in a little subterfuge, a little deceit, and you can just see Jacob coming in with the skins all over him; and Isaac cannot see, he's an old man. He's probably in his seventies. And he cannot see and so the result is it works. And just when it's over, Esau comes in. And, of course, he has to learn the facts that Isaac has already blessed Jacob. So after Isaac has said in verse 25, “Bring it near to me and I will eat of my son's game so that my soul may bless you.” That's where, of course, he's violating the word of God; going contrary to what he had been told earlier. So he brought it near to him and he ate, and he brought him wine, and he drank. And then, Isaac said to him, “Come now, and kiss me my son.” And he came near and kissed him and he gave him the blessing of the firstborn and expressed again the Messianic promises. Verse 29, “Let the peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who

bless you.” That was given to Abraham, remember, and now it’s confirmed to Isaac and to Jacob. And just as he’s finished the blessing, Jacob is scarcely gone out of the presence of Isaac, his father, that Esau, his brother, came in from hunting. He, too, had made savory food. He brought it to his father and the father, Isaac, asked him, “Who are you?” and he said, “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.” Then Isaac trembled exceedingly.

That’s an evidence that he really belonged to the Lord God because he’s trembling now under the conviction of sin. He trembled exceedingly and said, “Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came and I have blessed him.” And then, notice, “And indeed, he shall be blessed.” Isaac recognizes the sovereign hand of God in what has happened.

“When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, ‘Bless me, me also, O my father.’” What a picture this is! That would tug at any man’s heart, to read this despairing cry of Esau. “But he said, ‘Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing.’ And Esau said, ‘Is he not rightly named Jacob?’” In other words, he’s not sanctified yet. “He has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright.” He took away his birthright? Wait a minute? Esau sold him his birthright. He didn’t take it away. “He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing.” No, no. He didn’t take away the blessing; because the blessing went with the birthright. As a matter of fact, he has given them away. He gave them away. He wasn’t interested. He was more interested in food, fun, and females than he was in the divine blessing.

And so Isaac has to say to him, “Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?” And Esau said to his father, ‘Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me, me also, O my father.’ And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.”

It is a sad picture, but it’s a picture that our author interprets in this way. “For you know,” Hebrews 12:17, “For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was

rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” You know, it’s possible to actually, as he did, to break out in bitter weeping in sin. The evidence of it is plain. Why if you look back again at chapter 27 you read that after the father has blessed Esau, in verse 41, of Genesis 27, we read, “So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, ‘The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob.’” So all of the bitter cry, the bitter weeping, the complaint against Jacob, is not the cry of a truly repentant individual. It’s not the cry of the individual who has put God first in his life. It’s the cry of an unsaved man who doesn’t really care for spiritual things.

That’s why this is such a terrible chapter, such a terrible section, for as our author says, “Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food, one morsel of food, sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”

What is Esau? He’s the perfect illustration of what our author talks about through the Epistle to the Hebrews of the apostate. He is precisely the one of whom he speaks in chapter 6, the individual who has great, great blessings have been poured out upon him but the things of God mean nothing to him, in the most significant sense. So what a warning. He was rejected.

If you turn back to chapter 6 and you read in chapter 6, these things about the apostates. And we read things like this, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come and have fallen away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” To renew them again to repentance? No, Esau had his opportunity. He passed it by. And there are some things that cannot be regained. That’s the author’s lesson. It’s a very important lesson for us. The horror of careless professing of the Christian faith is Esau.

I don’t have any doubt but that in many of our congregations of believing people there are Esaus. I’m speaking from experience. Since I have preached in Dallas, now, for over forty years,

and in the congregations that I have been associated with, which we’ve, I’ve been a part. There have been many, many individuals who gave you the impression in the days of their attendance at meetings that they were genuine believers. But, today, there is no evidence, humanly speaking, of their faith in Jesus Christ. It is a horrible thing to make a profession of faith and a profession that is not a real possession of the truth.

So let me conclude by just, again, reading this last section, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”

May God enable all of us to search our lives, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and if we, any of us in this room, stand in the same kind of position that Esau was in, a person who has never really come to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior—may that decision be made immediately. For those of us who believe that by God’s grace we have been truly brought to our Lord, these passages that our author has written are encouragements and they are warnings. Strengthen the hands which hang down; the feeble knees. Make straight paths for your feet, you are running for the finish line, so that what is lame, may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Our responsibility is not simply for ourselves. Our responsibility is for all of us, in the body of Christ, and especially those with whom we constantly meet, in Believers Chapel. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no man shall be able to see the Lord. May that characterize us.

Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for Thy word. We thank Thee for the warnings of Holy Scripture. We thank Thee for the illustration of Esau, for we know that the author of this epistle, guided by the Holy Spirit, thought that this would be edifying and admonitory for those who find themselves in similar position with Esau; opportunities for spiritual blessing before us, but at the

“The Horrors of the Careless Professor” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

same time, we not coming to terms with the promises of God and coming to terms with our great God in Heaven. Acknowledging our sin and our need, and casting ourselves upon Thee. We pray, Lord, for each one in this auditorium. May the word of God strengthen us, enable us to make our way to that finish line. We know that we have the promise of the Holy Spirit. We have the promise of the presence of our Lord. We have the promise of the providence of God. But we also know our responsibilities. Gives us submission and faithfulness.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.