



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 13:36–14:11

“Three Puzzled Persons: Peter and Thomas and Philip”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] For the Scripture reading today we’re turning to John chapter 13 and verse 36. We are in the section of the Gospel of John that is ordinarily called the Upper Room Discourse because it contains the last words of the Lord Jesus that he gave to the apostles before his crucifixion, the last words that he gave to them by way of instruction. And in the preceding section last week we read and looked at the new commandment that our Lord had given in the midst of the section on the new commandment he had said in the 33rd verse of John 13, “Little children yet a little while I am with you, ye shall seek me and as I said unto the Jews, whither I go ye cannot come so now I say to you.” Well the Apostle Peter had evidently reflected upon our Lord’s statement there and so in verse 36 we read,

“Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.”

Many of you will remember that in the Gospel of Mark, Mark records our Lord as saying, “The cock shall not crow twice till thou hast denied me thrice.” Well John simply says “the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice.” There has been a lot of crowing by liberal theologians over this cock crowing, and the reason for it of course is obvious, in the Gospel of John it says, “The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice,” whereas Mark says “The cock shall not crow twice till thou hast denied me thrice.” Some years ago when I was attending theological seminary, we used to have a system of bells that was rather interesting. At the forty-five minute hour in a lecture there was a bell and then the final bell at fifty minutes and the student left one class to go to another class, and then at three minutes before the hour there was a bell and then the bell that marked the beginning of the class was on the hour. Now when a person spoke to another person and said to him, “Has the bell rung yet?” It was almost universally understood to be the final bell, the bell that marked the beginning of the hour. The three minute bell was kind of a preliminary bell and it was very useful to let us know that the bell was coming but that was its usefulness primarily.

Now I did not grow up on the farm as most of you know, but I am told by those who have grown up on the farm, that there is actually a double cock crowing. Now I wouldn't know this from getting up early in the morning, I might know it from staying up late at night because that is my habit, last night I managed to get to bed about two thirty, that's about normal for me, maybe a few minutes later than usual. But at any rate, I understand that there is often a preliminary cock crowing at two or three o'clock in the morning. Now where I live I don't hear that, but I'm just sure that out in the country where Merle Weaver lives that at least on the weekends that he might hear something like that. I saw him smile then and I just know that he probably has heard this. Merle, the Latin name for it is the *secundum galle canum*, that means the second cock crowing, but I understand that there is often a preliminary cock crowing and then the cock crowing that we know of about dawn. So when we say as the cock crowed, we are talking normally about that. But actually it's the second cock crowing. So when we look at a text like this it is not that one of these men has made a mistake, one of them speaks about the principle cock crowing, “The cock shall not crow,” that is the time the

cock ordinarily crows that we all know about, “Till thou hast denied me thrice.” But actually Jesus said that the cock shall not crow twice till thou hast denied me thrice and he included both that preliminary cock crowing and the final, the principle, the ordinary cock crowing. So, our liberal scholars need not crow over this cock crowing as they have been doing. Actually the Scriptures are setting forth the truth accurately.

Now we go on to chapter 14 and the apostles continues as he records the Upper Room Discourse, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” It so happens that in the original text, the form of the verb that is used by our Lord here is a form that can be both an indicative or an imperative. And therefore it can be translated as “you believe in God,” or “Believe in God” and the same thing is true of the second believe. Now when you have that many possibilities with two of these verbs and each being translatable in two different ways, one is a declarative sentence and one as an imperatival sentence, or as a command, obviously you have different possibilities of rendering and there is no way to be absolutely sure except to study the context and to say what does the context indicate? It could be rendered, “You believe in God, you believe also in me.” That is you believe in God and therefore you also believe in me. It could be, “Believe in God and you believe in me.” Or it could be, “You believe in God and believe in me.” In fact it may even be rendered, “Believe, believe in God and believe also in me.” All of these are legitimate possibilities of translation of the original text. Sometimes people say “Oh if I just knew the Greek text that would solve lots of problems.” Well it would, but it would introduce you to a lot more that you perhaps had not dreamed were there. And in this case, we do have that possibility. Now I am going to render these both as imperatives simply because I think the context indicates that both from the imperative that just precedes, “Let not your heart be troubled,” which is an imperative, in the original text. And therefore I think the context is suitable for the rendering, “Let not your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. For I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go

and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. (That is, it will satisfy us.) Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] We thank Thee Lord for the privilege that is ours today to open the Scriptures and to listen to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ as given to us by the Apostle John. We thank Thee for the ministry of the Holy Spirit who accompanies the reading and teaching of the word of God with illuminating power. And we pray Lord that as we consider this magnificent section of the Gospel of John that we may have the privilege and the benefits of the illumination of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to understand the things that the Lord Jesus spoke originally to the apostles and which the apostles have preserved for us. Lord we thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ and for the saving work of his life and death and resurrection. We thank Thee that he is the one mediator between God and men and we thank Thee for the fact that he is the only way of salvation, for thus it has seemed good in Thy sight through this method to save us. We thank Thee for the marvelous grace manifested to us who are sinners in the gift of the Son of God whose blood shed on the cross covers our sins delivering us from wrath and condemnation. We give Thee praise and thanksgiving for the

hope that we have and surely Lord, all of the other promises which accompany the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ should encourage our hearts today as we think about them.

We pray for everyone present in this auditorium, and we especially pray for any who may have come in and who do not have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, of membership in the body of Christ. We ask Lord that as we consider the words of the Lord Jesus that thou will guide them into the full assurance of faith in the Lord Jesus who is sufficient for all of our needs. And Father we would pray not only for the saving ministry of the word of God in this service, but in all of the services in the church of Jesus Christ today where the Lord Jesus is lifted up.

We thank Thee for the ministries that go forth from the Chapel and we ask Lord especially that Thy hand may be upon them for good. And we pray for the church of Jesus Christ and ask that it may be strengthened and built up and encouraged today as we reflect on the things of the word of God. We pray for our elders and our deacons, for all of the ministries here. We remember the radio ministry, the tape ministry, the publications, the Bible classes, the daily Vacation Bible School. We thank Thee Lord for all of these activities, and may they serve to honor and glorify Jesus Christ.

And then Lord, we remember those whose names are mentioned in our calendar of concern, O God we particularly pray for them and those who have great needs, some who are very troubled, some perplexed, some very much in concern over loved ones, we bring them all to Thee, we pray that Thou wilt minister to them as the sovereign, healing God of this universe. We commit to Thee the saints who are troubled and who are sick and ill today, minister to them. Be with us in this service and in the service tonight, we commit them to Thee. We pray thy blessing upon us as we sing and as we listen to the word of God. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] As one can see from the reading of Scripture in our Scripture reading today, there are three individuals who are very much puzzled by some of the things that Jesus is saying. There is Peter who has a problem with our Lord's reference to the fact that he is going to go away. And then there is Thomas who has difficulty with our Lord's statement in which he says, "Where I am going

you know and also the way you know.” And then there is Philip who would like to be sure that he has a good sight of the Father. And so our topic for today is, “Three Puzzled Persons: Peter and Thomas and Philip.”

Some of the great themes of the word of God appear in this section. One thinks particularly of the theme of Heaven. “In my Father’s house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you,” so the Lord Jesus said to the eleven in the upper room. And one thinks about the great theme of Heaven in reading that.

As I mentioned last week in the exposition of the word of God, I have been reading and have now finished the biography of Augustus M. Toplady, the author of some of our great hymns, one of the greatest of the hymn writers. “Rock of Ages” is perhaps his best-known hymn. But he was a magnificent preacher as well as a magnificent hymn writer, and Mr. Toplady also was sound in his theology as I mentioned, holding to very strong views concerning the sovereign grace of God. His life is an interesting life. He was actually never married, died young at only thirty-eight years of age. And died also after he had been finally enabled to come to London and right down in the center of London near Trafalgar Square, he had preached for several years there and had drawn large crowds to Saint Stephen’s Church. One of the things that interested me so much about Toplady’s life was the way he conducted himself in the last few years of his life when he was sure that he was going to die. He knew that he was a dying man for a lengthy period of time.

And in the account that is given in this particular book, there is a man who ministers to him as not his doctor, but as his medical attendant, a Mr. Evans. And some of the things that Mr. Toplady said in his last hours are recorded in this book. He often was so affected with a sense of God’s everlasting love to him that he couldn’t refrain from bursting into tears of joy. And he more than once observed that he had not for some years past the least shadow of doubt respecting his eternal salvation. One would expect that of a man who believes in the sovereign grace of God. Well in one of the last days, Mr. Evans came in, felt his pulse and Toplady looked up to him and said, “Well, what do you think of it?” He said, “Your heart and arteries evidently beat almost every day

weaker and weaker.” “Why that’s a good sign,” said Toplady smiling, “that my death is fast approaching and blessed be God I can add that my heart beats every day stronger and stronger for glory.” Then a little later Mr. Evans came in and he found Toplady sitting in his arm chair and hardly able to move or speak and so he bent over and spoke to him rather softly and said, “Do your consolations continue to abound as they have hither to done?” “Oh my dear sir,” replied Toplady, “It’s impossible to describe how good God has been to me since I’ve been sitting in this chair this afternoon, glory be to his name, I have enjoyed such a season, such sweet communion with God and such delightful manifestations of his presence with love to my soul that it is impossible for words or any language to express them.”

If any man could have expressed them Toplady was one who could have. He frequently called himself in his last days, the happiest man in the world. “Oh,” he said, “How this soul of mine longs to be gone.” He fell into sleep and when he awakened he said, “Oh what delights, who can fathom the joys of the third heaven. I praise God for continuing to me my understanding and clearness.” And then he added in something of a rapture, “For what is most of all his abiding presence and the shining of his love upon my soul, the sky is clear, there is no cloud, come Lord Jesus, come quickly.” Called his friends around him who loved him very much and he said to them, “Can you my friends give me up?” And Elizabeth Sterling who was a friend said, “We can sir,” her eyes were filled with tears, “as the Lord is so gracious to you.” “Oh what a blessing it is,” he said, “that my dear friends are made willing to give me up into the hands of my dear Redeemer and to part with me.” And then his last words, his *nunc dimittis*, “It will not be long before God takes me, nay I feel that I am dying, no mortal man could live,” again he burst into tears of joy, “after experiencing the glories which God has manifested to my soul.” What a magnificent way to die. Well that’s one of the great themes of this section. “In my father’s house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

And then of course we have the theme of the way of salvation, “I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” It’s very exasperating to get on the wrong train or the wrong plane. Don’t know whether you’ve ever had that experience but, about ten years ago or so I was in Charleston, South Carolina and since that’s my hometown, it’s a small airport, they don’t have the kinds of approaches to the planes that you do at DFW, maybe they do now, but I still don’t think so. At any rate, I was standing waiting for a plane, there were a number of other people waiting too and since I had flown out of it a number of times I pretty well thought I knew my way around that airport, and I knew also the schedules. I didn’t, but I mean I thought I did. And so there were two planes out there and finally they let us in, and I was first in line. I always try to be first in line. So I was first in line and I just rushed out to one of those planes and I got about two-thirds the way out and I looked back and I said, “My, those dumb people, they’re going to that other plane.” [Laughter] And this was a Delta plane I was going on a Delta plane, so I walked up and walked in and the pilot was lounging over in one of the seats, and two of the attendants were lounging in a couple of other seats and all were drinking coffee. And I said, “This is unusual for Delta Airlines to welcome you in this way.” [Laughter] And of course it didn’t take me too long to realize that I had gone to the wrong plane, so I walked back out and very slowly walked on the other plane just as if I had known that was not the right plane, so very embarrassing to get on the wrong plane.

Well you know it’s not only embarrassing but it’s fatal to get on the wrong road to salvation. The Lord Jesus says, “I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” And there is one final thing that is set forth in this section that is I think one of the major themes of the Bible, and that is the character of God. That when Jesus says, “Philip I’ve been a long time with you and don’t you know me? If you have seen me you have seen the Father.” So to know the Father is to know the Son and to know the Son is to know the Father. These are magnificent themes, and therefore this section is really one of the magnificent sections of the Gospel of John. Certainly is one of the most important, because it does so clearly set forth the way of salvation

through the Lord Jesus Christ. It's built around those three problems, the problem that Peter had with our Lord leaving them, that Thomas had with the way, and that Philip had with the sight of God the Father.

Well let's take a look at it and we're going to look first at Peter's problem. Isn't it interesting and so characteristic of Peter and of us, the Lord Jesus has just given this magnificent section on the new commandment. “A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if you have love one to another?” Would you not think that the Apostle Peter, if he had any questions to ask at all would ask some question about this great theme of the new commandment? No, he doesn't ask about that, he asks about our Lord's it seems a more insignificant statement, “You shall seek me and as I said unto the Jews, wither I go you cannot come, so now I say to you.” It's almost as if he's more interested in knowledge of where Jesus is going than he is of obeying the new commandment. Well that's characteristic of us. We are more interested in the things that might satisfy our curiosity than we are in obedience to the word of God and particularly to a commandment such as the new commandment that we love one another as we have been loved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, after having asked the Lord about this, Jesus said to him, “Peter, where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you shall follow me afterwards.” And Peter replied, also characteristically, “Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for your sake.” Peter doesn't have any room in his thinking now for, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” He has a very high view of himself obviously; he does not really understand the failings of his nature yet. He's a mighty poor Calvinist. He could stand a lecture on the total inability of man at this point. Peter's composed of two things, self-confidence, chaff, and a bit of wheat. Remember the Lord has said with reference to Peter, “Peter, Satan has desired to sift you as wheat. But I prayed that your faith fail not.”

Well actually, all of us are made up who have believed in Jesus Christ, of wheat and chaff. One of the reason's we're left here so long is in order that God the Holy Spirit may blow away the chaff which is still there. And in Peter's case, he doesn't understand himself, he doesn't really understand that apart from the divine enablement of God the Holy Spirit he can never satisfy the Lord even though he is a believing man. Now he is a believing man because the Lord has just said in this same upper room session with them, “Now ye are clean but not all,” referring to Judas. And in the next chapter he will say, “Ye are clean on account of the word that I have spoken to you.” So, he was a believing man, but there was a whole lot of chaff left in his character. Self-confidence, Peter is wheat, but he has a lot of chaff with the wheat.

Well, we are all like that. If we've believed in Christ, there's a grain of wheat there. Wheat's growing; ultimately we shall be all wheat, when we're in the presence of the Lord. But in the meantime, there is a lot of chaff. And so, “Peter, you of course think you would be able to lay down your life for me, but actually the cock shall not crow twice before you have denied me thrice.” Now of course that this all came to pass, I think John Christendom made a remarkable true comment here. He comments that when Peter says, “Why cannot I follow Thee now, I will lay down my life for Thee,” Christendom says in his commentary, “What sayest Thou oh Peter? I will lay down my life for Thee?” There are many Christians like that too who don't realize the depths of their own depravity and so they really have a tremendous amount of self confidence in themselves and fail to realize that we cannot do anything that is pleasing to the Lord apart from divine enablement. Now in the very next chapter, Jesus will say, “Without me ye can do nothing,” nothing.

Now our Lord answers Peter's question really in chapter 14. And in his answer, there are three notes. I'd like to point out that that little word your in chapter 14 verse 1 is a plural word, and so these words are for Peter but they are inclusive of the others as well. So Peter, what do you need? Well first of all you need faith. “Do not let your heart be troubled.” One is inclined to think at times that the Lord Jesus is very good at preaching because well he's the Son of God, he didn't have experiences quite like we have and so therefore he doesn't really totally understand us. But at least

he’s very good at preaching. And we forget that our Lord experienced life as a true man. Just take this little word troubled, “Let not your heart be troubled.” And it’s a word that was used of the surging of waters on the sea in the midst of a storm, like down in Houston.

Now, this word is a word that is used three times of our Lord in the immediately preceding context. Do you remember? He stood at the grave of Lazarus, in chapter 11 and verse 33 we read, “When Jesus therefore saw her weeping and the Jews also weeping, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled.” In chapter twelve in verse 27, when the Greeks came and he sensed that this meant that his cross was approaching, he said, “Now is my soul troubled and what shall I say, Father save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour.” And then in chapter 13 when he announced that one of the men was going to betray him, we read, “When Jesus,” this is verse 21 of chapter 13, “When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit and testified and said, verily verily I say unto you that one of you shall betray me.” So the Lord Jesus understood what it was to be troubled, he went through the experiences of life. And now he addresses the apostles in the light of the fact that he’s not going to be there and encourages them with this note of faith. The cure for troubled hearts is faith while he is gone.

Now of course one might say, “Well they had faith.” What does it mean when it says, “Believe in God, believe also in me.” Were they not able to reply but we believe in God? Yes it is possible for them to have truly replied, “Yes we do believe in God.” But there are degrees of faith, there are degrees of trust. One only needs the tiniest bit of trust in the saving work of the Lord Jesus to be saved. But the Scriptures also speak of more faith and great faith. The more we believe the more we enjoy our salvation. It’s possible for a person to have believed in the Lord Jesus and be constantly concerned about their salvation, just as if one of the Israelites had put the blood on his doorpost but went in his house with his little first born son playing on the floor and constantly was wringing his hands and wondering if the destroying angel would actually be enabled to pass into that house and destroy the first born. The blood made that infant or child safe, but it’s the word of God that gives assurance to us. It’s possible to be very much troubled and still to be a true believer. You

enjoy your faith so much more; you enjoy your salvation so much more if your faith is a growing faith. And of course when you come to the place like Augustus Toplady and truly rely upon the word of God as that which determines our very existence, you will enjoy your salvation that much more. “Believe in God, believe also in me.” To believe in God is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to believe in him is to believe in God, they are bound together. So “Peter trust in God, trust in me.”

The second thing with which he encourages Peter is this note of the Father’s house. “In my Father’s house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you.” Now there’s no doubt you know from your study of the Bible, the Authorized Version’s rendering of the word, *mones* as mansions is probably not quite accurate. The thought is rather of an eastern wealthy man who had a large home in which were a lot of dwelling places for individuals attached to him in his family. So it’s the picture then of a large house, a wealthy Oriental’s large house with living quarters for all the family. That’s really the thought of it and binds of course the people of God together as something of a unity. So in my father’s house are many, I don’t want to say apartments, but that’s essentially what it is, because that might not make you want to go to Heaven if you knew you were going to have to live in an apartment there. [Laughter] But I cannot even promise you a condominium. But the idea is of a very wealthy person who has living quarters for all, and there they are as the family of God.

“In my Father’s house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you.” That’s one of the things our Lord is doing now, he’s praying for the saints, he’s acting as their advocate, and he’s preparing a place for them. In other words, there’s a sense in which our Lord’s work is finished, his atoning work is finished, but his unfinished work includes his high priesthood, his advocacy, his teaching ministry through the Holy Spirit and preparing a place for us.

And finally, he encourages Peter with a promise of the Second Coming. In the third verse he says, “And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also.” There are many ways in which Heaven is referred to in the New

Testament. The Apostle Paul speaks about what a wonderful thing it is to be with Christ which is, “more by much better.” It’s almost as if he’s exhausted all of the comparatives to express how wonderful it is to be with the Lord. And then there are other ways in which Heaven is referred to, but there is no question about it but this is the simplest idea of Heaven, to be with Christ. “That where I am there ye may be also.” It will be nice to be there with John Calvin, or at least I will enjoy that. Nice to be there with Augustus Toplady, nice to be there with all of the great saints, nice to be there with the prophets, and nice to be with the apostles, and to tell you the truth, I’m interested in taking a good look at a few angels as well, particularly the ones that have been guarding me so successfully. I know I’ve put them to a great deal of tension and exertion, and I’d like to express my appreciation, but most of all we want to be in the presence of the Lord. “That where I am there ye may be also,” that’s the simplest and in a sense the greatest description of what Heaven is like. “The bride eyes not her garments,” we sing, “but her dear bridegroom’s face.” And then of course we conclude the stanza by saying, “The lamb is all the glory of Emanuel’s land.”

Well that’s a magnificent answer to the question of Peter, but Thomas is there too. Thomas, one of the more recent commentators says was, “A loyal apostle, but dull.” We think of him as doubting Thomas. Well he’s a man who always keeps well within the limits of his knowledge, like the students that I’ve had who come after an exam who say, “Oh I did terribly on that exam.” And you look forward to reading their exam to find out exactly what [they] did do. And well sometimes they come up with one of the highest grades in class. And since this happens two or three times you realize that that marks them out, they’re a Thomas kind of character. They’re living well within the limits of their knowledge. They think after they’ve taken an exam if they looked at it actually as the situation is they would know they’ve done real well, but they’re so concerned and worried that they say, “Oh I hope I passed, with a grade of ninety-five.”

Well Thomas evidently was that kind of person, and we need to remember too, that Thomas, he’s called doubting Thomas, was the man who liked the feel of solid facts beneath his feet. But he does rise to the highest expression of faith of all the apostles, for it won’t be long before

Thomas will say to the Lord Jesus Christ, “My Lord and my God.” Well we appreciate of course the things that he says, and when the Lord said, “Whither I go ye know in the way you know,” that’s too much for Thomas, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, how can we possibly know the way?” It’s as if I were to say to you, “I’m going away and you know where I’m going, and you also know the way by which you can reach me if you want to come too.” And you would immediately say, “Well I don’t know where you’re going, so how could I possibly know the way?” If I were to say to you, well I’m going to McKinney; well you would know that you probably if you got on highway seventy-five or whatever it is you would know the way. But if I don’t tell you where I’m going, you don’t know the way, so he has not told where he is going so Thomas thinks and how can we possibly know the way?

Well, I’m very glad for Thomas’ doubt if we may call it that, or his questioning, because it produced one of the great answers of our Lord. And this description of the way is magnificent. It’s one of the great I Am statements of the New Testament Gospel of John, maybe the greatest one of them. But Jesus said to him, “Thomas,” and the others were listening, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Now of course as you analyze this, I want you to be sure not to fall into the trap of thinking that our Lord is just giving a three point sermon. One might think that because he says, “I’m the way, I’m the truth, I’m the life.” Preachers would look at that and say, “I don’t have to think about an outline, there it is.” Point one, I am the way, point two, I am the truth, point three, I am the life. But if you analyze these words more carefully and think about the word way and truth and life, you will see they’re not parallel expressions. The term way is a figure of speech, it means simply road. “I am the road,” that’s a figure of speech. Jesus is not a road, whereas the term truth and the term life are expressions of abstract ideas. That would clue us into the fact that they’re probably not parallel expressions, he’s not saying, “I’m the way, I’m the truth, I’m the life,” three points, parallel expressions, but probably the second and third expressions are designed to explicate in a particular way the first.

And the fact that that is so would indicate that “I am the way” is the important thing. First of all, it’s the proper answer to Thomas’ question which is about the way. “Wither I go ye know and the way ye know,” and Thomas said to him, “We know not wither you are going, how can we know the way?” So we would expect our Lord’s answer to have to do with the way. And furthermore if you will look at the conclusion of the verse after saying I’m the way the truth and the life he says, “No man cometh to the Father except by me.” He talks about the way to the Father. So the important expression is the way. Well what about the term truth and life? Well probably what he means by this is I am the way through the truth to the life. Or perhaps, I am the way because I am the truth and the life.

Now having said that let’s take a look at the words, “I am the way.” Notice he doesn’t say, “I show the way.” There are people who think of the Lord Jesus as simply a person who shows all of us the way. He’s a man such as we are but he managed to succeed a little better than most of us do in spiritual things. And so he shows us the way. There’s an element of truth in this because of course the New Testament says he is an example for us. But there’s far more in this than a way shower. He said, “I am the way,” not I show the way.

Or perhaps one might read this as, “I know the way.” There are those who feel that Jesus’ religious experience is so great that he knows things by virtue of the experience that he had. He’s not really the second person of the Trinity, he’s not really a divine person, but a human person who knows a great deal more than the rest of us about divine things because he lived closer to the one true God. But the Lord Jesus does not say, “I know the truth,” though he does. He doesn’t say, “I show the way,” though he does. He knows the way, he shows the way, but more than that, he is the way.

Now he also says that he is the truth. Not I am true, other people might say that. Solomon might say that he is true in the sense that most of what he said was true or Socrates might say that for though heathen pagan man, he had a remarkable insight into a great deal of human truth. But Jesus does not say, “I am true,” he doesn’t even say, “I am truth.” Though of course all truth is ultimately

related to him, all true philosophy, all true psychology, all true history, all truth ultimately must be tested by the truth that is in Christ. But when he says, “I am the truth,” he’s not talking about all truth, or that he is the only truth, for there is truth in other spheres of knowledge related to him, but not identified definitely and directly with him. But he says, “I am the truth.” Now the chances are he’s talking about the paramount truth that is the truth in the realm of salvation. “I am the truth, I am the way, I am the truth.” And to know the truth is to know the way of salvation.

And he adds finally, “I am the life.” Not I am the living one, though he is the living one, not I am life, others of course live. He’s not all life. But, “I am the life.” That is the life whereby we may truly live. So to accept the truth, receive the life is to be on the way. That’s a magnificent statement of course. You know I think back to the first chapter of the Gospel of John when the Lord Jesus referred to the fact that when he saw Nathaniel he said, “Ah there’s a man in whom there’s no guile.” And Nathaniel who had been meditating on Genesis 32 evidently about Jacob the crooked one and the story of how Jacob was sleeping out in the open air and during the night he had this vision with the ladders ascending and descending upon it. The ladder that reached up to Heaven and then God’s voice that spoke to Jacob, and in that figure of the ladder we have the picture of the Lord Jesus. Because he said to Nathaniel, “Now Nathaniel, you’re going to see greater things than you have seen.”

As you read Genesis 32 you saw that ladder with its bottom rung on the earth, its top in Heaven and the angels ascending and descending upon it, but the time is coming when you are going to see the Son of Man with the angels of God ascending and descending upon him. For he is the ladder, the ladder was just the Old Testament figure of Jesus as the way. That is contact is made between Heaven and earth through the ladder by illustration, but the Lord Jesus substitutes himself for the ladder when he talks with Nathaniel. He’s the true ladder, he is the true mediator between God and man and the only way we can get to Heaven is to climb the rungs of the Lord Jesus Christ’s life death and resurrection for his ministry in order to get to heaven. To put it in other words, “I’m the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father except through me.”

Well now that’s a mighty exclusive way of salvation. Yes it is exclusive, in fact it rules out everything else. The world truly hates the idea of the exclusive nature of Christianity’s claims. They think it is so narrowminded or so arrogant for anyone to suggest that salvation is only found in Jesus Christ. But have you noticed the world in their attacks on this doctrine? They never attack Christ. They always attack his disciples. Sometimes they do that by ignorance, they don’t know what Christ said. But at other times, deep down within their hearts they’re afraid to attack Jesus Christ. And so I would challenge any of you who are not yet a believer and who do not like the doctrine of the exclusive nature of salvation through Christ which Christianity presents, come on out and attack Christ. Attack him. We’re not telling you anything but what Jesus Christ has said. This is what he said, “I am the way, the truth, the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Let me see you courageously attack Jesus Christ. At least attack the apostles. Peter said, “There is none other name under heaven given among men where by we must be saved.” Attack Peter. Attack Paul, who said, “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ.” “There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.” Attack the apostles, attack our Lord.

Yesterday’s paper, there was another instance of this cowardly approach. “I am the way, the truth and the life.” There are so many people who say in essence, we are all going to the same place but in different ways. No, no, we’re not, there is only one way and that way is Christ. Call it narrow minded, it’s Jesus Christ’s way, it’s Paul’s way. Call it arrogant, it’s Jesus Christ’s way, it’s Paul’s way, it’s Peter’s way, it’s the way of the Scriptures. Call it arrogance, call it narrow-mindedness, but identify its source honestly. Don’t be cowardly, don’t attack someone who is simply appealing to the truth of Scripture, attack the Scriptures, attack our Lord, attack the apostles, show your true colors.

Now of course this does not mean that we are suggesting that we are right about everything that we say, we’re right about this. There are many things about Christianity that are not clear to me. I wish I understood everything the Bible says. I don’t. I like Luther’s statement. He said, “If there are any of you out there who think that everything that you say and believe is the absolute truth, then you should reach up and feel your ears, for you will discover that they are the long furry ears of an

ass.” [Laughter] That was Martin Luther. But so far as the way of salvation is concerned, the Scriptures are plain and clear, we trust Christ. And I’m thankful for doubting Thomas who called forth this remarkable statement, “I’m the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”

Then our Lord added, “If you had known me you should have known my Father also and from henceforth ye know him and have seen him.” Well that’s too much for Philip. Philip is a man different from Thomas and Peter; he is the man who had the anxiety of an unenlightened faith. And so he replies, “Lord, show us the Father, and it will satisfy us.” And Jesus replies very simply to him, “Philip, the father and I are united.” He had already said this, he had said, “I and the Father are one,” absolute unity. And so here he says, we are one Philip, the Father and I.

“Have I been so long time with you and yet has thy not known me Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, how sayest thou then show us the Father? Believeth thou not that I am in the Father and the words that I speak unto you I don’t speak of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me he doeth the works. (That is he speaks the words. Notice, our Lord puts preeminence on his words, but then he adds,) believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me or else believe me for the very works’ sake.”

In other words, if you cannot accept my words, at least take a look at my works and you can see the hand of God in them. But, “I and the Father are one, and Philip if you want to see the Father, take a good look at me.” He’s the true, the final Theophany. A great man once said, “If God is not like Jesus Christ then God ought to be like Jesus Christ.” Well, God is like Christ, and if you want to understand what God is like, take a look at the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the men that I have always admired who is now with the Lord was Dr. Alva McClain of Grace Theological Seminary. And I had the privilege, was a young man, of appearing in Bible

conferences with him and being on the same platform. And I always looked forward to hearing Dr. McClain who was a much more experienced man and a much more knowledgeable man. He was the professor of systematic theology of Grace Seminary in Winona Lake, a school that I am on the faculty of as visiting lecturer now. And He was the founder of that school. I remember one of the messages that he gave in which he spoke of a friend of his who had his doctorate in education and he was a very fine Christian man. And one day he came to Dr. McClain and he said to him, “When our little girl came into our home Dr. McClain we promised the Lord that we would bring her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And we’ve taught her the gospels, and we’ve taught her Christianity and she’s responded remarkably to them. We’ve taught her everything that we could possibly teach a child.” But he said “a strange thing has happened, she now wants only to pray to Jesus. And we’re having difficulty explaining to her that she ought to pray to the Father in the name of the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.” Dr. McClain said, “I replied to him, first of all, you ought to leave her alone because she already knows more than most professors of systematic theology.” And the knowledgeable professor of education said, “But Dr. McClain, what about the doctrine of the Trinity?” And Dr McClain said, “I replied to him, anyone who acknowledges the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and prays to the Lord Jesus will have no difficulty ultimately with the Trinity.”

And of course that is true because that was one of the key points in the explication of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the deity of Christ means that there are two persons within the Trinity. And the doctrine of course of the deity of the Holy Spirit means that there are three persons who may be called God and yet at the same time there is one God, Christian doctrine of the Trinity, one God who subsists in three persons. The Lord Jesus is the true and final Theophany. No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father; he has let him forth into full revelation. So Philip, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”

Let me summarize, we are going to the Father’s house by way of the Son who is in union with the Father. Now if this is true, then all other ways are wrong ways. When a man leaves the rest of the crowd and goes out and gets on the airplane of good works, he’s got on the wrong plane. “For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.” If a man leaves the gate and goes out and gets on the airplane of the way of reformation, he’s gotten on the wrong plane, he’s going to the wrong place. It’s like a person who goes down to one of our department stores here in Dallas and goes up to the credit department. He’s very much burdened by the fact that he’s over used his credit card and so he talks to the credit manager and he says, “Look, I’ve determined that I have a difficult time handling credit, I’ve run up quite a bill, and I want you to know, from now on I’m paying cash. I’m not signing the credit cards any more, and therefore I hope you will forgive the past. From now on I’m paying cash.” Well the credit manager would say, “Well of course I’m very happy you’re going to pay cash from now on, but what about that which is passed?”

There is a text in the Bible incidentally that says, “God requireth that which is passed.” For even if it were possible for you to reform, God holds you responsible for the past. And we all have offended, and therefore we are all guilty. The way of church membership, the way of self righteousness, all of these things can not get us to Heaven. God’s way is through the Lord Jesus Christ. So often we reverse the Pharisee and the Publican parable. The Pharisee, remember, said with regard to the publican who was just beating on his breast saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Oh the Pharisee said, “Oh, I’m so delighted that I’m not like that publican, I pay tithes of all I possess, I pray, I do this and I do that. But that poor publican there, he’s a lost man.” We’re not like the publican anymore you know. The protestant, the modern day protestant is different. He doesn’t pray, “O God, I thank thee that I’m not like the publican.” But he prays, “Lord I thank Thee that I’m not like this Pharisee.” So his pride is not pride because of righteousness, but rather pride because of his lack of pride. That’s characteristic of us.

If you're here in this audience, and you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, let me remind you finally of what the word of God says, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Come to the Father through the Son.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent words of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the ministry of the Holy Spirit who has brought us to the knowledge of the Son of God, out of our sin and out of our wickedness and guilt and condemnation, O Father, Thou hast been so good to us. And if there are those who are listening ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]