



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 21:1-14

"The Service of God and the Unseen Companion"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Today we are turning to the last of our chapters in the Gospel of John. And we're beginning our reading with chapter 21 and verse [one] and reading through the 14th verse of this last chapter. We have just, as you know, read John's account of how he came to faith in the resurrection. And then he has been describing some of the personal appearances of our Lord after the resurrection. Including also the commission that he has given to the apostles, that as the Father has sent him into the world, even so was he sending them. And he had given them also the assurance of divine power for the carrying out of the commission by saying to them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." "Whosoever sins ye remit, they have been remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they have been retained."

And then Thomas received a special visit from the Lord, and Thomas was encouraged to ascertain truly that our Lord had been raised from the dead in bodily form. And when Thomas confesses, "My Lord and my God," that's really the climax of this gospel, because it's there that the readers of the gospel see an individual who has come to confess that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. And at this point John has just said as if here concluding the gospel, "And many other signs did Jesus truly in the presence of his disciples, which are not in this book. But these are written that

ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."

One might think that that would have been a very good place to conclude the gospel. But then if you'll remember the apostle was a preacher. It's not surprising that he goes on after he was finished. And so we have this 21st chapter. And it's an important chapter. And will you listen now as we read the first fourteen verses of it.

"After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. (It's interesting that John is the first one to realize that it is the Lord, but Peter is the first of all the apostles who goes overboard for Christ. [Laughter] Now, the 8th verse we read.) And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. (A man who thinks of fishermen and reads that text can hardly do it without smiling. Fishermen are all alike; they always know exactly how many fish they have caught. How many fish did you catch

yesterday? Six. I caught three. He caught three. How many fish did you catch last week? Thirty-two. I caught he seventeen, he caught fifteen. You never know a fisherman who doesn't know exactly what he has caught. And here you can see them counting a hundred and fifty and three. This is very true to a fisherman's life it seems me.) Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. (Incidentally, some of the older commentators and some of the newer commentators have made a point that in the 9th verse the Lord Jesus evidently had already prepared a little charcoal fire. And on that fire was a fish. And there was bread nearby. And then he fed them. And while it is true they brought one hundred and fifty-three fishes to land. Still, so far as the account goes, these commentators feel, he fed them with the fish and the bread that he had prepared. Thus many commentators have said what he here is really a miracle within a miracle; the miracle of the one hundred and fifty-three fishes, and then also the miracle of the feeding of the apostles, the seven of them, with that which was on that little charcoal fire. And since in the 9th verse the word is singular, with that one fish. Well we cannot be sure of that, but I thought it's interesting to note that that has been the interpretation of some, that we have a sign within a sign. John concludes by saying): This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead."

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

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we draw great encouragement from the reading of the Scriptures, being reminded again of the sovereign majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the way in which he takes it upon himself to sustain those whom he has brought to faith in him by the mighty power of God. And we thank Thee Lord for the supply of all of our needs, and the assurance that no matter what lies ahead in the future, for the saints of God it is all glorious. And we thank Thee that we may look forward to the more perfect day of the future when we experience

the divine redemption accomplished by the shedding of the precious blood on Calvary's cross. We are grateful Lord, and on this the Lord's day we give Thee thanks.

And Father we thank Thee for the privilege of approaching Thee in prayer and bringing our petitions to Thee. And Thou knowest the petitions, the desires, the aspirations of the hearts of each one present in this auditorium. And O God, we pray for young and for old and for mature believers and for immature believers that the ambitions and desires and holy aspirations may find their culmination in the blessing of our triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We worship Thee Lord. We thank Thee for the promises. We pray that Thou wilt glorify Thy name in the answering of the petitions of all of us.

We thank Thee for this country, for its leadership. We ask Thy blessing upon them. We pray that that will continue to keep the United States as a free land where we are able to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, where we are able to give out the life-giving word. And O God, we pray that the Holy Spirit may continue to work and that many may respond to the freeness of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

We thank Thee for the ministry of this church, and we pray Thy blessing upon it, upon all of the ministries that go forth. We bring them to Thee. We pray that Thy mighty hand of power might be upon them to the blessing of the souls of men. Be with us in this hour. May it be a time of spiritual blessing. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Now we are looking at John chapter 21. And our subject this morning is "The Service of God and the Unseen Companionship." You might think that John's chief purpose is completed with the confession of doubting Thomas, "My Lord and my God." Why any further words? Seven magnificent miracles out of our Lord's ministry, chosen to exalt his saving power and bring men to faith in him as the Son of God and to bring them to life through him. Seven artistic masterpieces; the turning of water into wine, the healing of the nobleman's son, the feeding of the five thousand, the walking upon the water, the healing of the blind man, raising of Lazarus and so

on. Seven magnificent signs. Who wants to add to a Renoir, a Michelangelo, a Degas, a Da Vinci, an Rembrandt, an El Greco, a Rafael? Who would want to add an eight? But John does.

Some have thought that John was just a longwinded preacher. He really was over, but he went on talking. Well, we all have fallen into that. W. E. Hawkins used to tell us that he heard the way to preach to start low, rise higher, strike fire, then retire. [Laughter] But most of us who preach have a hard time retiring. And maybe John just couldn't retire. He had struck fire, but he couldn't finish when he really was finished. I would suggest to you that there is a little bit more to it than that. John really had an important purpose in writing this last sign, it seems to me. What he wanted to do was show in effect the permanent relationship between the risen Lord and the struggling church, which he has created through his sovereign power and grace, and which he has commissioned to be his ministers in this world.

Now, one can, I think, sense that that is John's purpose in giving us that last sign, because there are certain obvious correspondences and contrasts with another event in the ministry of our Lord, which one could not help but remember when he read this account. And you know, of course, it is the account in which our Lord gave the apostles the miraculous draft of fishes described in the 5th chapter of the Book of Luke. Remember in that account Peter and others had been on the seashore while Jesus had been speaking and teaching. And when he finished his teaching he turned to Peter, in whose boat evidently he was, and he said, "Peter launch into the deep for a draft of fishes." And Peter protested, he said, "Lord we have fished all night, and we have caught nothing. Nevertheless at thy word we'll let down the nets for the fishes." And so he let it down and so many fishes fell into his net that actually when they tried to bring the fish in the boat began to sink. And so when Peter realized what was happening, he realized that he was simply not in a boat with Jesus of Nazareth, he was in a boat with the Lord God of Israel. And so he fell down upon his face and he said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Now here we are after the resurrection, unmistakable resemblance. Think of the position that John puts this in his gospel. He has been raised from the dead. He has given them a

commission, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." He has said that they have the power of the Holy Spirit as a temporary enduement to carry out his work. He even uses some of the words in the description of the event that he has referred to in our Lord's ministry as he recorded it. For example, Jesus said, "No man can come to me except the Father which sent me draw him." And he says, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me," speaking of all kinds of men, Jews and Gentiles. And now as Peter and the disciples with him drag the fish to the shore, that same word is used: draw, effectual drawing.

In addition, remember in the account in Luke after the miraculous draft of fishes, Jesus said, "Peter you have been catching fish, but you are going to catch men." And there would have been again an unmistakable comparison of these things. After all, it was the same lake, same boat so far as we know. Same mountains around, the same blue waters of the Sea of Galilee, the same failure the night before, the same miraculous catch of fish. And now the Lord Jesus gives the same kind of command, "Let down your net for a draft of fishes." But there is a difference. In the other Jesus is in the boat with them, now he's on the shore.

And one would think that John as he thinks about the ministry of the Lord Jesus, as he completes his account with the confession of Thomas, thinking now, what is the relationship of our Lord to us and to the church that he has brought into existence now that he has been resurrected. And what more beautiful incident to record than the one in which the same work is going on, the same work of catching men, represented by the figure of catching fish. But now the Lord Jesus, not in the boat with them as he was in the days of his flesh, but on the shore in resurrection glory, in the glory of the resurrection carrying on his work continually even though he personally and physically is no longer here. I can think of him saying, "Ah, I see, that incident has to do with catching men."

And did you notice too that John does not conclude his gospel like Matthew concludes his, with a great commission. These apostles wrote their accounts of the ministry of our Lord, but they wrote them out of their own individual and unique personalities. When Matthew finishes his he adds our Lord's great commission at the conclusion, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing

them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." Well John, he may have said, "I don't want to end my book like Matthew ended his book." He wrote later. And furthermore, his own personality was different. He liked the symbolical and the spiritual. We know that. And so thinking of this incident he said, "This will form my account of the great commission." And so he has our Lord on the seashore observing the activities of the apostles as they are fishing. Fishing for men, he's thinking about, because he moves to the reality that lies above the physical. And also trying to portray our Lord on the shore with the promise upon his lips, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." In other words, this is John's account of the great commission. Well, I know that not everybody will be persuaded of that. Many are, many of the outstanding students of the New Testament have been, many scholars have been. And I'm inclined to think that they are right.

But now, coming to the principled point of the passage, I know that you're probably thinking did not Dr. Packer speak on John 21 when he was here? Why should we have to listen to some words from Dr. Johnson, when Dr. Packer has given us such a magnificent message? A lot of people came to me afterward and said, "Wasn't that a wonderful message?" And some of them were even more unkind than others. They said, "What in the world are you going to do when you come to John chapter 21?" [Laughter] I received some suggestions. One, read the Scripture and just let it go at that. And then someone said, "Why don't you read the Scripture and then play the tape?" [Laughter] And then some, of course, said just skip John 21. Well, I thought I would at least explain by saying I'll give his message, after all he's an Englishman, I'll give it in pure English. [Laughter] But then practically everybody said, "Isn't his English easy to understand?" "He has a keen sense of humor for an Englishman," I was told more than once.

And then I thought, well I've got to speak on the radio. And the radio audience, of course, don't know Dr. Packer as well as we do. And they haven't heard him. And someone said, "Well why not play the tape then?" [Laughter] Well they would want him for the regular speaker then.

[Laughter] And of course we could not have him for a regular speaker. So I guess I'll just have to settle for telling you what he should have told you that morning. [Laughter] Now, it is interesting that two men that come from the same kind of theological background may approach a passage and say some different things about it. I hope we don't contradict each other. I don't think we do.

What our Lord is really trying to show us is that service in dependence upon the risen Christ is always fruitful and will always have his support. And service in independence of the risen Christ is always fruitless. And further, he goes on to say, "When you do my work in my way, I promise I will meet all your needs." So let's with that in mind, just review what is said. It's after the resurrection. It's after the appearance of our Lord. And the apostles are evidently sitting around, perhaps reflecting on the things that have happened, possibly a bit discouraged, we're not sure. But Peter says, "I go a fishing."

Now, it is possible that Peter thought of returning to his old profession. We are not really told one way or another. I don't know that we can make much over that. It's possible but what he says is simply, "I go a fishing." And there were six others who said, "We are going with you Peter." There was Thomas, and there was Nathanael, and there was James and John, and then two unnamed disciples. And so they went out fishing. And we read that as they went out fishing, entered into their ship, that night, now in the original text there is a bit of extra emphasis upon the phrase, "That night." That night they caught nothing, almost as if it was unusual for them to catch nothing. That night they caught nothing, because of course there is a lesson to be learned from this incident. And if they had come back in and someone asked them, "What did you catch?" They would have said, "We caught nothing. It was a water haul," as fishermen like to say.

Well, Jesus had warned about this. He had said back in chapter 15 in verse 4 and verse 5 in his upper room discourse. He had said, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except ye abide in the vine. No more can you except ye abide in me." You cannot bear fruit if you do not abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. For without me, ye can do nothing. Now, it is startling for



Christians to realize that after they come to faith in Jesus Christ they cannot please God of themselves. Do not think for one moment that Jesus Christ saves us and gives us eternal life as a kind of gift which we may receive. And then we have no need further or reliance upon the Lord God. The reason we are given life is in order that we may have a life of communion with the Father. The salvation of our souls is the beginning of spiritual life. God desires not simply that we have the forgiveness of sins, but that we enter into the relationship of communion with him, constant communion with him. True spiritual life is life in communion with God. So all believers in Christ can do nothing apart from the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Even though you may have the forgiveness of sins, even though you may have life you cannot produce fruit apart from momentary reliance upon the work of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, Easter's a wonderful day. It's the day when we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, but the messengers of Easter can do nothing if they do not constantly rely upon the risen Christ. As one Swiss preacher has put it, "These messengers of Easter have to admit that they themselves have nothing, and therefore cannot give him anything. The messengers of Easter are as poor as church mice." We don't have anything to give unless we rely upon him.

Now, they needed to learn, of course, these truths. And they needed to learn that the same Lord who had given them life was the Lord of the ocean as well, and he can supply all of their needs. So the second thing they must learn is that if you depend on the risen Christ, then you can be fruitful. So as the men went out and fished and they caught nothing, and no doubt discouraged, it's early morning, the Lord Jesus stands on the seashore. The disciples may have seen a figure over there, but they didn't recognize that it was the Lord. And soon they heard this voice come out to them, which they didn't recognize, "Children have you any meat?" And you can sense that they were discouraged. That one word they sent back is dripping with discouragement. "No." They don't have any meat.

And so then the voice comes again, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." The right side of the ship, incidentally, the starboard side, was regarded in ancient times, as the

fortunate side. The port side was the other. The starboard side, the fortunate side. William Manson, one of the outstanding New Testament scholars of about a generation ago, professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh has written a book called *The Incarnate Glory*. And in it he has likened the ship to the church of Jesus Christ. He's likened the fishing to apostolic mission of fishing for men. And he said that the right side of the ship represented a change of direction for them. And that was John's way and our Lord's way of reminding them that now that the nation has rejected the message, the message of the gospel will now go out to the Gentiles.

For remember when the Lord Jesus came he came as a minister of the word of God to the Jews. Paul puts it this way; he was a minister of the circumcision to confirm the promises made unto the Fathers. So what our Lord did was to come and to proclaim that the covenants of the Old Testament were fulfilled in his ministry. And they were told not to go to the Gentiles, but to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The covenant promises were to be fulfilled to them, and were fulfilled in the sense that our Lord fulfilled them. And in that little body of believers who formed the very germ and essential part of the church of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul later speaks in Romans chapter 11 of an olive tree, and he speaks about the olive tree having its natural branches cut off, the Jewish nation, and unnatural branches, the Gentiles, being grafted in to partake of the blessings of the covenants of God. And then at the conclusion of his illustration he said if the natural branches are cut off and unnatural branches shall be grafted in, then how much more shall the unnatural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? It is Israel's olive tree. We share as Gentiles in the promises, but it's Israel's olive tree. It is their own olive tree. And so far as Paul is concerned, the same way in which they were in the olive tree at one time, they shall be in the olive tree again in the future.

Now, the casting of the net on the right side is just a suggestion of the fact that the flow of the reception of the gospel is moving from the nation of Israel, only a remnant now in the body of believers, great numbers of the Gentiles coming into the church of Jesus Christ. But our Lord anticipated it in this gospel. He said, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold. Them also I

must bring." Well I say all this because it might be that professor Manson is right. This is really an indication in symbolic form of the change that the message of the apostles and the ministry of the apostles will undergo.

Well they heard the word from the one on the shore, and they cast. And they were not able to draw it for the multitude of the fishes. Ah, you can count on a miraculous haul when you follow the directions of the Lord God. You can be sure that if it is true that without him we can do nothing, with him we can do an awful lot. We shall be fruitful if we abide in him.

Now the disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter, for he recognized first that it must be the Lord Jesus on the shore. He said, "Peter it's the Lord." Isn't it interesting? John understands first, Peter acts first. And Peter stripped to his waist, threw his coat around him, went overboard for Jesus. But it's John who understands first. Now John describes himself, did you notice it? "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter." Ah, love understands. You know that's a truth of our life too. True love is a door to understanding. A man who loves understands. In fact, a man who loves understands the object of his affection far better than anyone else.

Now what is so striking about this is John describes himself as one who is loved by the Lord. In other words, his love produces knowledge, but his knowledge leads to greater love, it's like a spiral. The more one loves, the more he understands, the more he understands, the more he loves so far as our Lord is concerned. That is a spiral that shall never stop. But notice the order, John says "The disciple whom Jesus loved said it's the Lord." In other words, it was the love that the Lord Jesus had shown him, which he had come to know, which leads him to the love of our Lord. Well, let's put it in scriptural language. You are saying no doubt, "Why are you laboring this point, Dr. Johnson? We all know that. Doesn't the Bible say we love him because he first loved us?" Well that's what the Bible says, but that's not what men say. In fact, my friend this morning who attacked this doctrine of sovereign grace believes just the opposite. He believes we love first and God loves us because we loved him. You see, when a person believes that God is a kind of God who looks down through the ages and sees who will believe, and then determines to elect and love them, is the

kind of God whose doctrine is not we love him because he first loved us, but he loves us because we first love him. That's a reversal of the biblical doctrine. That's an absolute reversal of the word of God.

Now John Calvin lived before the days of the Arminian controversy. So he didn't know them as the Arminians. He knows the doctrine as what he calls the Papists doctrine. And he said their doctrine is that he loves us because we first love him. And he attacks it. So I know what he would have thought if he lived just about a hundred years more. I can imagine what he would say about that kind of doctrine and how disheartened he would be to find it in the professing Protestant church, but it's there today. John says "The disciple whom Jesus loved" recognized him. You see my dear friends; we love because he first loved us. Our love is the response of the divine love. It's not the cause of the divine love. It's the response of the sovereign love that has come to us in Jesus Christ. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord."

Now we learn not only that they who love see Christ. But we learn that those love who know that Christ loves them. No wonder the old monastics, when they painted pictures of the apostles, they made John's face almost an exact copy of our Lord's. They were thinking spiritual things. They saw that John was one who knew his love in a special way, and in knowing his love in a special way John was becoming like him. And so they painted his face, practically as a replica of our Lord's. They taught a deep truth by that.

Well, we must hasten on, as Peter dove out into the water and swam toward the shore; the other disciples came in the little boat. They weren't too far from the land, just a few hundred feet. And they came dragging the net with the fishes in it. And as soon as they came to land they saw a fire of coals there and fish laid thereon and Jesus said, "Bring of the fish that you've now caught." And Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes, one hundred and fifty and three. Now, commentators have sought to understand what one hundred fifty and three could possibly mean. I think the most unusual interpretation was given by Augustine. Listen to him, he says, "Ten is the number of the Law. But the Law without grace kills. To the number of the Law

therefore we add seven, the number of the Spirit, in order to obtain the fullness of the divine revelation as a power of life. But, he then adds, the sum of the numbers from one to seventeen inclusive is one hundred and fifty-three (1+2+3 up to 17. If you will add those seventeen numbers together you'll get one hundred and fifty and three.) So that the number 153 signifies all those who are included in the saving operation of divine grace, which makes reconciliation with the Law. Nor is this all. The three is the symbol of the Trinity; and the triple fifty brings out the idea of unity in the Spirit, who is revealed in a sevenfold operation" Would you like to repeat that interpretation for me? Well Augustine did not know the KISS method of biblical interpretation. The KISS method of biblical interpretation is, of course, Keep It Simple Stupid, [Laughter]. He didn't understand that so he had it very, very difficult.

Now the chances are that one hundred and fifty-three to my mind means there were one hundred and fifty three fishes in that net. Any fisherman counts the fish. A miraculous draft like this, count every one of them. They probably counted them a couple of times. And they got one hundred fifty and three. There is one interesting fact. The zoologist, Oppianus Cilix who lived in the time of Marcus Aurelius estimated the total number of species of fish was one hundred fifty-three. Now if that was a familiar number, then possibly it was to be understood as some from every kindred, tribe, and tongue, and nation should come to faith in Christ as the mission went out to the Gentiles. But there is no assurance of that.

Now let's note just before we close the last part here. They sit down around a little charcoal fire and the Lord Jesus feeds them. His servants can count on his supernatural supply. Mr. Mueller, to whom we've made reference a number of times, Mr. Mueller fed those thousands at the Bristol orphanage by simply looking to the Lord God. No prayer letters. No appeals for funds. No public collections. In fact, no knowledge of the situation. He kept that to himself and his closest intimates in the administration of the work. No pledge systems, nothing. But those thousands of orphans were fed, and the result was isn't God great that he supplies the needs of the orphans even though Mr. Mueller doesn't beg anybody. They glorified God by what he had done.

Now we glorify the organization that manages to set up a system by which we can extort from congregations sufficient money to keep the Lord's work going. Merle Weaver is laughing because he knows exactly what we're talking about. He's had a close association with that. Let me tell you a little story. I love this story because it's so beautiful and it touches one of my heroes, George Whitefield. Mr. Whitefield was traveling with a friend of his and they were going for a preaching engagement. And they got on their horses, this was in the 18th century, and they got on their horses in Britain and they left and they were passing through a little village on the way to the place where they were going. And there was a tumbled down house and a woman was standing outside obviously, it seemed to Mr. Whitefield, in deep trouble. And so they stopped their horses. He inquired about her and found out that she didn't have anything. And she didn't have any money. She didn't have any food. He reached in his pocket and took out the only money that he had, which was a five pound note, which was a nice gift in those days. And he gave her the five pound note.

And they got on their horses, and they continued their journey. And Mr. Whitefield's friend turned to him and began to berate him a bit for giving all of his money away. And Mr. Whitefield said, "I consider it a call of the Providence of God. I passed by, she didn't have anything. And I had some means by which I could supply her need. And I felt that was God saying to me, "Give her the money." Well, as they were traveling along they got out on the moor in kind of a lonely place, and all of a sudden behind a tree or something out comes a highwayman and holds them up. And Mr. Whitefield's friend has to give all his money to the highwayman and Mr. Whitefield didn't lose anything. And he began to laugh at his friend and said, "You see, if you'd given your money away you would have been able to get some credit with the Lord in heaven [Laughter] for having given your money. But now you've lost your money and you have nothing."

And he enjoyed himself for a little bit until the highwayman, as he had taken their money, he happened to turn back and look at Mr. Whitefield's coat. And he rather liked that Worcester coat that he had on. And so he said, "I want your coat." So he gave his old ragged coat, and Mr. Whitefield had to hand over his rather nice looking jacket. And the Mr. Whitefield's friend got the

last laugh, so he thought, and had fun at Mr. Whitefield's expense. And well, the highwayman galloped off, and they continued their journey toward the village. And as they drew near the village they happened to hear some sounds behind them. And they looked back and they saw a cloud of dust coming, and they recognized the highwayman. So they sped up a bit and managed to escape into the town. And while he was in the town Mr. Whitefield happened to put his hand in the pocket of that old coat and drew out a hundred pounds, the proceeds of several robberies evidently [Laughter] that the highwayman had managed to carry out that morning. I figured that out one time. That was seven hundred and thirty thousand percent interest on five dollars. That's really the way the Lord supplies.

Well, it's astonishing at times how the Lord supplies the saints with all of their needs. But after all he said to Matthew, "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Well there may be other lessons in this glowingly penetrating incident, but that stands out. We can count on the presence and activity of the risen Christ. He is gone, but we are not forgotten.

John Bailey in one of his books comments upon the fact that the apostles must have been troubled over a question that went something like this. The Lord Jesus has been with us, he has ministered to us, he has cared for us in all of the experiences that we have had. Are we going to be able to carry on when all we have is a memory of what he did when he was here with us. And then of course we who are disciples, we often, we may not recognize this, but we often think are we going to be able to carry on in our Christian life when all that we have is a story that is told secondhand to us? Well, of course our Lord in this upper room discourse and now in this incident is trying to stress the fact that the apostles do not have to live on a memory only. Nor do we have to live on a second story told to us. But by virtue of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the consummation of the union that we have with him, he is with us in an even greater sense than he was with the eleven or twelve when he was here upon the earth.

And when we take up the Lord's work it is not so much that we take up a work and hope that he blesses it. But we share our work with him. Listen, if we were to rely upon ourselves we

would do what these apostles may have done. They may have returned, been intending to return to their secular tasks. But our Lord resumes his work through his saints. We do not inherit work from him to do, we share tasks with him. We work in this age under him, for him, with him, just as the apostles did before, except that we do not have physical, visible presence with us. Every one of us in this auditorium may know what it is to live in the presence of Jesus Christ. All the New Testament unites in this, Jesus Christ is not only someone who lived historically in the past, he is our contemporary.

Listen to John as he describes the letter that Jesus wrote to the church at Ephesus. "These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." The candlesticks are the churches. And Jesus walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. He walks in the midst of Believers Chapel. Listen to the Apostle Paul as he exhorted young Timothy, "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead." And in the original text there's a great deal of stress upon the character in which he is to be remembered. Paul really does not say remember that he was raised from the dead, of course that's true. He said, "Remember him as one raised from the dead." Remember him in his resurrection character. Remember Jesus Christ as raised from the dead.

"Was it empty rhetoric?" One of my old teachers said when David Livingstone said it was not just himself who went tramping through darkest Africa. It was David Livingstone and Jesus Christ. Was it just fever or delirium when Samuel Rutherford wrote to a friend from prison, "Jesus Christ came into my cell last night, and every stone flashed like a ruby." Was it credulity or distortion of fact that made a great scholar of this generation say after visiting a friend in the Christian ministry who had worked himself almost to death in a Midland slum, that in that poor room he encountered Christ? There was his friend lying in that hell, and there was Jesus Christ beside him. These things are fact, he said. "If we have grown into him by a death like his," wrote Paul to the Romans in a passage where his Christ mysticism came to fullest expression, "we shall grow into him by a



resurrection like his." And that's what the apostle meant when he said, "Remember Jesus Christ as raised from the dead."

That is what I think Jesus Christ would have us who are the disciples of our Lord remember. We have a task to perform, but Jesus shares that with us. And we have the glorious privilege of serving in the light and in the presence of the risen Christ who stands on the shore of the heavenly realities. And from the glory of the heavenly shore, ministers to us here through the power of the Holy Spirit. May God help us in Believers Chapel to catch something of the glow of what it is to truly serve Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this magnificent incident. It is such a comfort to us to realize that Thou wilt not leave nor forsake us. Thou hast called us to a great task. As Thou wast sent, so are we sent. O God, help us to fulfill by Thy grace, the task that Thou dost share with us. Glorify the name of the Son of God, enable us to abide in him, and produce fruit. If there are some here, Lord, who have never believed in Christ, who don't belong to the family of God, O give them no rest, nor peace until they recognize their lost condition and flee to the cross for...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**