



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 24:32–36; Luke 21:29–33; Mark 13:32

Gospel of Matthew

“Jesus’ Knowledge of His Second Coming”

TRANSCRIPT

Our Scripture reading is a very short passage, and so I’m going to take the liberty of reading not only the passage in Matthew but the parallel in the Gospel of Luke. But let’s turn first to Matthew chapter 24, and will you listen as I read verses 32 through 36. Remember, we are in the context of the Olivet Discourse. The Lord has just set forth many of the conditions that shall prevail just before the Second Advent, and then he has described the Second Advent, and then turns to a more applicational side of the ministry, introducing it with an illustration concerning a fig tree.

“Now learn a parable of the fig tree. (I think probably that word parable could be better rendered simply, “illustration” or perhaps, “analogy”—now learn an analogy of the fig tree.) When its branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”

Will you notice, particularly, the little word, only, because we will have something to say about that later on?

Now, let’s turn over to the Lukan passage in Luke chapter 21, and we begin reading at verse 29 Luke chapter 21 and verse 29:

“And he spoke to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, (now notice, carefully the next words, “and all the trees”) behold the fig tree and all the trees, when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now near at hand. So also ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is near at hand. (Notice especially, the kingdom of God, instead of “it,” as Matthew has it. Verse 32): Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.”

Now I’m not going to ask you to turn to Mark chapter 13. I want to read one verse from Mark chapter 13. It is verse 32, and it is also parallel to Matthew chapter 24 verse 36. Mark chapter 13 verse 32, and we read,

“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels who are in heaven neither the Son but the Father.”

Now notice the expression “neither the Son” in the Markan passage. Now when you turn back to the Matthean passage, in chapter 24 and verse 36, you notice in the Authorized Version that the expression, “neither the Son is not found.” It says, But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no

not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. If you have an edited Greek text you will find that in the Bible Society’s edition of that text there is the expression, “neither the Son” in Matthew, too.

Now the thought is there, regardless, it happens to be a textual problem of some significance. It’s possible that a scribe, for example added the phrase in Matthew because he knew of the passage in Mark, and there are other reasons that might account for this problem, but if you’ll look at the little word, only, at the end of verse 36, you’ll recognize that the thought is in Matthew—regardless of whether the expression, neither the Son, is there or not—“but of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven but my Father only.” Well if the Father only knows it, then of course the Son doesn’t know it. So the thought is there, and the question is this: how may we reconcile the omniscience of the second person of the Trinity with the ignorance of Jesus? That’s the question we’ll take up among some others in our message in just a moment.

The subject for this morning in the continued exposition of the Gospel of Matthew—if the Lord does not come we shall finish it [laughter] is “Jesus’ Knowledge of his Second Coming.” Steven Travis has written a very interesting little book on the Second Coming of Christ. In it he tells the story of a minister who was visiting a man who was very ill, and as he was at the foot of the stairs getting ready to go up to the bedside of the person who was ill, the wife of the sick man whispered apprehensively to him and said, “Say something hopeful to him won’t you? Not about heaven and all that.”

And it called to mind a story, a true story, of a conversation that a friend of mine had with the builder of the first house that we ever owned in Dallas, Texas. He had built also a house for a friend of ours, and she was a very fine Christian woman, a member of the First Baptist Church of this city and still is. In the course of the building of the house for her she engaged him in conversation about spiritual things, as we all had. We lived almost next door to each other. And in the course of the conversation she asked him, he had mentioned something about his minister of whom he was very proud and with whom he was rather close, she said, “Well does he every say anything to you about how one gets to heaven? About the forgiveness of sins through the

redemption that Jesus Christ accomplished? And he said, “Oh no, he’s a good guy. [Laughter] He only tells us things about how we can live while we’re here right now.”

Well now I think most of us can identify with the ridiculous request of the woman, because it’s so characteristic of the spiritual blindness of men. Just think of it. Heaven is not hopeful. Say something hopeful to him; not about heaven and all that. Could anything be more hopeful for a believer than the doctrine of heaven? And let me assure you in the trials and stresses of life, it is the doctrine of heaven and teachings just such as that in the Word of God that strengthen you.

I can remember a few months back, just about six months back, when my wife was extremely ill and suffering considerably. But one night, I went in the bedroom and I asked her what she was doing—she obviously was awake—and I said what have you been thinking about and she said, “Well, I’ve been just thinking about the members of my family that I’m going to see in heaven shortly.” And she said there are—I’ve forgotten the number—there are seventeen of them that I’ve been thinking about, and then she started naming ones that I knew. The doctrine of heaven is one of the greatest comforts of life, the doctrine that when we leave this life a believer in Jesus Christ we go immediately into the presence of the Lord Jesus.

But what about an unbeliever? It’s not a very comforting doctrine for the unbeliever, and that’s why he doesn’t like to think about it, because it calls to mind the thought of hell, which is the natural opposite of heaven, and it reminds him of the sentiments expressed in statements such as the statement of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who said, “It’s appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment.” And so the promise of a blissful eternity serves to remind the believer of the glories of the presence of the Lord, but for the unbeliever it reminds him of the somber thought of an everlasting separation from God and of men under judgment. So it’s not surprising, then, that the same words call up differing responses on the part of people.

The Olivet Discourse often provokes the same two responses. To the unbeliever the words of our Lord contain enough warning of dread judgment to terrify the proudest of men. There is thought of earthquakes, pestilences, wars, mixed with threats of great tribulation and reminders of

the judgment of Noah’s flood, and all of this reaches a mighty climax in the cosmic agitation in which the sun is darkened, the moon turns to blood, and shall not give its light, the stars fall from heaven—the very powers of the heavens are shaken. So it’s no wonder that the unbeliever dreads this most glorious of this divine visitations the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus.

On the other hand, since the believer knows that the Lord Jesus is not like the third assistant guesser at the Weather Bureau who tells us that there is a forty percent chance of this or that happening, but rather prophesies that which is sure to come to pass, these words of our Lord are most comforting. Promises of persecution are tempered with assurances of preservation, the preservation of the elect; and by the hope of the ultimate solution of earth’s problems in the magnificent Second Advent of the Lord Jesus in power and great glory and the gathering of the elect to him.

Incidentally, did you notice how the Lord Jesus keeps mentioning the doctrine of election throughout this sermon on the of the Olivet Discourse? I know that there are people who say that Dr. Johnson is always mentioning the doctrine of election, but I call to your mind the Lord Jesus is the one who over and over again in this sermon has made reference to the elect, and when I say this, I do not say that we talk about the doctrine of the election in the spirit of that stanza: “We are the chosen few; all others will be damned. There is no room in heaven for you; we can’t have heaven crammed.” [Laughter] We don’t talk about election in the spirit of that we talk about it in the sense of the emphasis that the Lord Jesus puts upon it.

The Olivet Discourse to this point has contained an outline of the events of the seventieth week of Israel, and from this point on, after he has discussed the Second Advent, the thoughts of our Lord tend more toward the how of the events, and the why we should live in a certain way in the light of them. So the moral side of the truth begins to come to the foreground from this point on.

But before the Lord turns specifically to the kind of life that one should live, he gives a simple illustration of a fig tree and all the trees. Alfred Plummer, who has one of the better commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew, has entitled the section “The Lesson of the Fig Tree; the

Certainty of the Event and the Uncertainty of the Time.” His illustration is given us in verse 32.

“Now learn an illustration or an analogy of the fig tree when its branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that the summer is near.”

Now I’m myself convinced that the Lord Jesus was able to give this ministry that he gave because he was not only the Son of God, but he was a person on the human level who was the greatest student of the Word of God that there has ever been among men. Now you can see this evidenced in the fact that this Olivet Discourse rests so fully upon and totally, almost, upon the teaching of the Old Testament. Its phrases are taken from the Old Testament, its clauses are frequently from the Old Testament, even whole sentences are taken from the Old Testament, and yet he never says “it stands written.” You can just go back and take a look at those phrases and clauses, and they are clauses and phrases drawn from the Scriptures that he knew so well. For example, when he describes the cosmic agitation, as I mentioned last time, he leans heavily upon such passages as Isaiah chapter 34 and verse 4 in which the same types of disturbances are predicted in the heavens.

Now the interesting thing about that Isaiah 34 verse 4 passage is that in the remainder of the verse not used in the description of the Second Advent, there is something that our Lord seems to pick up upon here. That text reads in Isaiah 34:4, “And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together like a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth from off the vine, and like a falling fig from the fig tree.” So even the very text from which he described the events that are going to happen at his Second Advent contains a reference to a fig tree.

Now using that as his illustration he gives us an analogy which is designed to teach us a certain spiritual truth. The fig tree of course is something that we must consider for a moment. There are students of the Gospel of Matthew who say that the fig tree is not illustrative of the nation Israel. And then there are some who say the fig tree is illustrative of Israel. Because I went over a little bit at the 8:30 service, I’m going to skip turning up some of these passages, but I suggest that you take a look at the passage in Hosea chapter 9 verse 10 when you have a chance, and Joel chapter 1 verse 6 through 7. I think you will [see] that that there is some justification for thinking that the fig tree is a

figure of the nation Israel in certain contexts of the Old Testament, and therefore we should consider that as a possibility, here.

But in the light of the Lukan parallel in which the Lord Jesus said, now learn a parable of the fig tree and all the trees, I gather that in this point he is not using the term, fig tree, as illustrative of Israel. There are those who have thought that it was a figure of the nation Israel, and what they have made of it is simply this, that when we look down through the centuries and we see the nation Israel beginning to move back toward the land of Palestine, that is the budding of the fig tree, and since that is the budding of the fig tree, then we can know that the events described in the preceding chapter are soon to come to pass.

I wish it were possible for us to say that with definiteness, because if Jews going back to Israel is the budding of the fig tree, then we have already seen the budding of the fig tree. That would be definitely evident because there are almost three million Jews back in the land of Israel, and that would, if it were the meaning of the text, would suggest to us that we are very close to the beginning of the events described in the Olivet Discourse. But of course what we want to see in the Word of God must be distinguished from what we do see in the Word of God, and the fact that Luke says that he’s not talking simply about the fig tree, but about all the trees, it seems to me, makes that a questionable interpretation and that we rather are simply to think that our Lord is just using an illustration from ordinary tree culture or horticulture to get over a particular spiritual truth. What he is simply saying is that when you see the leaves on trees, then you know that summer is at hand, and we even in the Western world would know precisely what that means.

Now it is striking that in the case of the fig tree, the fruit appears before the leaves. I know that, because as I’ve said before, I have a fig tree in my own backyard, and the figs, remarkably, appear before the leaves. That is strange. But we know generally, that when in Dallas, Texas, for example, when in February, the trees begin to bud out in—about two months before they should, incidentally; but that’s the way they do here—we know that summer, which is April May June July August September October and part of November [laughter] in Dallas, summer is near at hand.

Now when we see the leaves come out then we simply know that summer is at hand, and therefore the meaning of this text is essentially this, that when we see these events described in verse 4 through verse 28, false messiahs, persecutions, wars, pestilences, the abomination of desolation set up in the temple, worldwide disturbances, then we know that the Second Advent is near at hand. That seems to be the force of the illustration, but let’s look at the interpretation beginning in verse 33.

Now when you are reading the Gospels particularly, you will notice that very frequently the Lord Jesus will give a parable or tell a story and then say something like, “likewise also.” Well here we read, “So likewise ye.” That lets us know that we are entering into the interpretation of the illustration that has been given, and the illustration is designed to stress the proximity of the event of the Second Advent. “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”

Well now in order to understand fully, we must ask ourselves several questions. What does our Lord mean when he says, when you see all these things? Well that’s not hard. The simple explanation derived from the immediately preceding context is all these things refers to the events described in the preceding discourse. That is, events that have to do with that seventieth week of Israel, including the setting up of the abomination of desolation in the temple, the Great Tribulation period, these are the all these things. When you see these things, then, he says, you know that it is near, even at the doors.

Well what does the “it” refer to? Now Matthew has the word, it; Luke has the term the kingdom of God is near. Unfortunately in Greek, there is an ambiguity here. Incidentally, there are people who think if I could just learn the Greek language, then I would be able to interpret the Bible without any problems at all. Ah, one of the sad things you learn when you learn Greek is that there are ambiguities in Greek also, just as there are ambiguities in English. And as a matter of fact, most of us who have ever studied Greek have learned that that there are problems the Greek text raises

that you never see in the English text at all. So if you have the idea that by studying Greek all of your interpretive problems shall be resolved well you shall be greatly disappointed.

It so happens that right here we have an ambiguity because it is possible to take that verse 33 in this sense, “Verily I say unto you, or so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that *he* is near even at the doors. And as a matter of fact, you could even translate it, know that *she* is near, even at the doors. But we reject that feminine interpretation because it does not agree with the context at all, and we still have two genders, however, which might be subject to that verb. It might be *it* is near or *he* is near. Well what do we do then?

Well Luke helps us a little bit when he says, *the kingdom of God* is near, and so we might tend to think, well, he is saying know that it is near, the kingdom of God is near, that is the messianic rule which shall begin when the Lord returns to the earth. That’s possible.

On the other hand the expression “know that it is near, even at the doors” well you don’t think of a kingdom or an it as being at a door and entering a door. You think of people of being before a door and entering a door. So the expression even at the doors suits the masculine subject much better.

And then in addition, since we have not had any description of the kingdom coming in the preceding text, immediately preceding text, specifically, but rather of a person coming and also, since immediately afterwards, we read about the Second Coming again, we conclude then, that verse 33 really means something like this, So likewise ye when ye shall see all of these things described in verses 4 through 28, all of these events know that He is near, even at the doors. So to sum up what our Lord has then said in verse 33, is that when you see those events described in the preceding context begin to unfold, his coming is near at hand.

Well now, he goes on to speak about the certainty, and you always need to have a new word: celerity—the certainly and the celerity of the event. Verse 34 reads, “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” This verse has been the subject of a great deal of discussion, and it’s the basis of the opinion of many modern commentators that the Lord

Jesus was a man, just as we are men. And the proof that he was just a man, and a man who could be in error, why this is the evidence.

He said, many hundreds of years ago this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled, but that generation did pass away and all these things have not been fulfilled. So Jesus was mistaken. And it is the opinion of many modern commentators that this is a text which shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Lord Jesus could be in error. Now what then, shall we say to the Christian claim down through the centuries that the Lord Jesus is inerrant in his utterances, that he never did make an error in the things that he that he said?

Well we must ask ourselves, is there another way to interpret these words, this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled? Some have suggested “that all these things” is not a reference to those things that surround the Second Advent but really the things that came into being when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. It was then that the kingdom of God came and the influence our Lord Jesus going out from Jerusalem over the whole of the world since the Day of Pentecost is evidence of the arrival of the kingdom of God. And so therefore that generation did not pass away until the kingdom of God had come.

But unfortunately that’s not the interpretation of the kingdom of God that Matthew, in his preceding remarks, supports, because he thinks of the kingdom of God as the reign and rule of our Lord upon the earth. So that interpretation, while it preserves the inerrancy of the Lord Jesus, is probably not genuine or not preferable.

Some have taken the expression to refer to the Jewish race, and they read it this way, Verily I say unto you this generation *or this nation* shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled, *or this race* shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled. In other words the Jewish people shall be here upon the earth until the time of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. Now fundamental to this view is the claim that the expression “this generation” refers to the Jews as a nation. That is, that it should be rendered “this nation.”

Now if you have a Scofield Reference Bible, you’ll notice on the bottom of the page that the editors took this interpretation of the passage, but unfortunately it overlooks the meaning of the term generation in the Gospel of Matthew. It occurs about ten times and never in the Gospel of Matthew, in any of its other occurrences, does it mean nation or race. It always means generation. I just challenge you, in order to see the evidence for that, to get a concordance and look up the word, generation. Or if you have a Greek concordance, look the word *genea* up; you’ll find it means generation, a people living in a certain period of time. It does not refer to a race. It does not refer to a nation.

Now I do grant that there are texts in Scripture, in the Old Testament particularly, that tell us that the Jewish nation shall be on the earth until the program of God is fulfilled. And I do appreciate the sentiment of people who like to stress the fact that God does have a purpose for the nation Israel. I must confess I find it very difficult to confront what seems to be an obvious fact that there are evangelical Christians who would be very happy for the Jews to vanish from the face of the earth. I do not understand how it is possible for a person who has been born again and who possesses a new nature to have that attitude toward the Jewish people.

Now I know that you are liable to say, but they are so unpleasant. But have you ever been around Gentiles? They are so unpleasant. We even have expressions like, we which we as Gentiles have managed to concoct. He “jewed” him out of this. One of our speakers this last week made reference to that. We never say he “Gentiled” him out of it, [laughter] but you could say it just as well. So I’m not denying the fact that God has given promises to the Jew. They shall have those promises, and they shall be among the earth until those promises are fulfilled. The nation abides under disciplinary judgment today, and God has sent them to the four corners of the earth.

Cannon Howett, who was an Anglican minister of the 19th century, in the light of this, took it as one of his personal interests to check into the presence of Jews over the four corners of the earth. And as missionaries came back from wide away places, he would ask them questions about the presence of the Jews there. When a man came from Alaska once, he said. “Are there any Jews

there?” And the man said, why yes the Jews are there. Long time ago. He asked Dan Crawford, who came from Central Africa, “Are there Jews out there?” He said, yes there are Jews out there. And over the four corners of the earth, he said, he asked people were there Jews there, and he never found a single place at where there were not some Jews.

Incidentally, if you want to destroy the Jews it is very easy to do that. There is text in Scripture that will tell you how you can arrange to have that done. In fact, God speaks the text. He says, “Thus sayeth the Lord who giveth the sun for a light by day and the ordinances of the moon and the stars for light by night, who divideth the sea when its waves roar, the Lord of Hosts is his name; If those ordinances of the sun the moon the stars shall depart from before me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me forever. Thus sayeth the Lord, if heaven above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, sayeth the Lord. So it’s a rather simple matter if you’d like to get rid of the Jews. All you’d have to do is to blot out the sun, darken the moon get rid of the stars.

Now if you find that a little above your human intelligence and power and your Gentile strength, then the second alternative: if you can measure heaven above or the foundations of the earth below, if you can do that, then he will he will cast off the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the Lord.

Now you can see then that God says that they are going to be upon the earth until the promises that he has made to them shall be fulfilled. It’s very striking that today the Jewish people are experiencing a great moving of the Holy Spirit in their midst. There are Jews for Jesus, who are witnessing to Jews, and wars are starting over it.

The Jews like to point to the fact that the Gentiles, down through the centuries have persecuted them in the name of Christ. They don’t understand the difference between an evangelical Christian who is a true believer, and one who is not a believer. They don’t understand that difference,

because they are not believers, and it is true in the name of Christianity they have been persecuted down through the years.

But is also true that today in the movement of the Spirit of God, among the Jewish people, particularly the young Jews, the rabbis are very much disturbed. One of the rabbis in Los Angeles said not long ago that it is literally a war and the Jews who are turning to Jesus Christ are experiencing persecution from the Jewish religious leaders. So you see, human nature is alike. Whether Jewish or Gentile, we all abide under sin and naturally not a one of us, Jew or Gentile loves the truth of God. The Holy Spirit must work.

Well, coming back to our text, this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled, what is meant? Well the term, generation means generation. We will leave it at that. But it [is] possible, of course, that our Lord Jesus is speaking representatively. That is, that when he addresses them and says, this generation shall not pass, he may be speaking about the generation of Jews that are upon the earth when these things begin to come to pass. And it is my own feeling that that is probably what he is speaking about. He is saying in effect that this generation, I say to you, this generation, that is the generation that is upon the earth when these great climactic events begin to come to pass, that generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled. In other words, once the program of the last days begins, it will have a sudden and swift consummation.

Now someone says, oh, but what about the words, you? Was he not speaking just to them before him? Well I don't have time to look at a number of passages there are about four in the Olivet Discourse itself, in which our Lord Jesus uses the term, you, but obviously looks on beyond the individuals to whom he is speaking to those who stand before him in the same relationship.

For example, in the 9th verse he said, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for my namesake. Now the disciples that were before him were never hated by all the nations. He is addressing them representatively, as representative of those who shall be on the earth when these things come to pass. Much more could be said about it, but I think that's what our Lord means.

Now then, what about the truth of this? Is he thirty percent right, forty percent right, eighty percent right? Is he, after all, one of the third guessers at the Weather Bureau, or does he do the things that he says have truth behind them? Well, in verse 34 we read, “Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away.” In other words, I want to give you a guarantee that this shall come to pass, just as I have spoken it, and the proof of it is that my words shall not pass away. My words have more enduring power than the heavens and the earth themselves.

Now this is a magnificent testimony. Suppose I were to stand up to you this morning and say to you, now heaven and earth may pass away, but the words of S. Lewis Johnson shall not pass away! Well you would die laughing, if I said it sincerely, or else you would say, he’s gone around the bend [laughter] or has a loose shingle on his roof, or something like that. Don’t you see that when our Lord made a statement like this he was making the most outlandish statement that a man could possibly make, if he were only a man. The very fact that he makes a statement like this, heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away, is evidence of the fact that he was making the claim of deity.

I don’t remember who was the well-known expositor who said this, whether it was Alexander McLaren or Charles Haddon Spurgeon or someone else, but I remember reading when I was studying in Britain about twenty years ago of an instance that happened in the ministry of a British preacher. He was trying to stress the fact that the Word of God is not like any other word, and when he entered the pulpit that morning he brought a stack of books with him. I don’t remember the titles of the books, but they were all classics. I’ll just make up some names.

He stood in the pulpit and then at the proper time in the ministry, he reached over and uh picked up one of these volumes and said, “This is Plato’s *Apologia*, in which he so beautifully defends Socrates and speaks of his death,” and with that he dropped it on the side of the pulpit and said, “It’s the word of a man. It shall pass away.” He picked up another volume he said this is Aristotle’s

Organon, in which he gives six theses on human logic, one of the great classics of literature. He dropped it on the side of the pulpit and said, it shall pass away.

He picked up Augustine’s *Confessions*. He said, “This is a most remarkable book; no other book had ever been written like Augustine’s *Confessions* when he wrote it. He addressed God in one long prayer of over three hundred pages and told out the spiritual experience that he had as a man before he knew God through Christ and after. It’s one of the classics of devotional literature.” He dropped it on the side of the pulpit and said, “It shall pass away.”

He then picked up Athanasius’ *De Incarnatione* and said, “Here is the work of a man that we shall remember for a long, long time. As a matter of fact, if Athanasius had not spoken as he had against Arias, we would not have any Christianity as we know it today, for it would have all moved over into the eclectic type of religion that is manifest over the face of the earth. But Athanasius stood for the truth, and *De Incarnatione* holds within the ideas that saved Christianity at a point in its history.” He said it shall pass away.

He picked up one of Shakespeare’s works and said, “Here is the master of English literature, but his work shall pass away.” And then—you know, in the old days, we used to have pulpits with great big pulpit Bibles. I can still remember in the Presbyterian Church watching the minister he came into the pulpit with a little Bible of his own, and he put the little Bible on top of the big Bible, but when the time came to read the Scripture, he put the little Bible aside and opened up the big pages of the big Bible and found the passage and read the Scripture reading, then he preached from the little Bible.

Well, the minister at this point, having said that the words of the great classics written by men shall pass away, reached under and took the great big old pulpit Bible, and held it up like this, and he said to the audience, stressing the fact that the Word of God shall endure he said, “This is the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever and ever.” That’s true. This is the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever, and the Lord Jesus said, heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away.

But there needs to be a little qualification concerning the time of the advent, and so he says, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven nor the Son, but my Father only.” How can we reconcile the omniscience of the second person of the Trinity, whose words shall never pass away, with the ignorance of Jesus?

Now incidentally, this is a remarkable testimony to the sincerity of the gospel writers. They didn’t have to write this, you know. They could have passed it by. They could just have said to themselves, now no one will understand this; we won’t put this in our Gospel. It is a testimony to the integrity of the authors of Holy Scripture that they put the things in the Gospel records that they understood, the things that they did not understand, and even those things that others might misunderstand and might use in their attacks upon Christianity. The truthfulness of the Gospel records is evidenced in this. But what does it mean? Seems to raise serious questions concerning the deity of Christ.

How can the Lord Jesus be ignorant of anything? Well, it’s helpful to remember that the Christian doctrine of the Son of God is that he is the divine Son who possesses two natures: one human one divine. There are certain things that pertain to his human nature that don’t pertain to his divine nature. For example, he sat by the side of a well and was thirsty. He also was hungry, because he had a human body. There are certain things that he did not know in advance. He waited to find the will of God, just as you and I find the will of God.

He never made a mistake. He never made a sentence that he withdrew. He never said, wait a minute, I’d like to rephrase that. Calvin did. Calvin said, now wait a minute I want to withdraw that; I want to say something else. And every other human speaker has done it, but our Lord Jesus never did. You see when we speak about our Lord Jesus being ignorant, it’s the ignorance of self-limitation, not the ignorance of error. This is something he did not know. It’s not something that he knew wrong; it’s something he did not know. And as a human being in his human nature, there were things that he did not know.

Now if you’ll look at this text very carefully, you’ll see that even the phraseology of it lets you know that he’s not saying he’s just man. Look at it carefully. Incidentally, when you study the Bible you have to study it. It’s not like *Gone with the Wind*. It’s not like some modern novel. It’s different. Look, “But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*.” Man. Now wait. No, not the angels. We have man here, angels here; you can see the order developing. No man, nor the angels, here, nor the Son; why he already has told us the Son is not like a man, he’s not here, and he’s not with the angels, but he’s above both, because he is moving toward the Father. So he says, knoweth no man, not even the angels, not even the Son, but the Father only.

If I had a diagram I’d like to just draw some arrows up, put men on the bottom, an arrow to angels, an arrow to Son, and then I’d like to draw one out horizontal to the Father, because you see the same person who said, of the day and hour knoweth no one, nor the angels, nor the Son, but the Father, said at the conclusion of this Gospel—the same person the Lord Jesus—when you go out, baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. You see it’s almost as if he were trying to answer the question, is the Son on a lower level than the Father? No. When you baptize, baptize into one name, singular, of the three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So this is a text that has to do with the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well I said in the introduction that men like to hear something hopeful, and we pointed out that some words are hopeful to believers and dreadful to unbelievers. Such are the words of our Lord in the Olivet Discourse. There are many substitutes for hope that men seek to conjure up. Despair. There is no plan of God. Suave optimism. Someone said not long ago, a hundred years from now, everybody will have three houses, two cars and possibly a submarine. [Laughter] Escapism. Everybody’s running off to their own guru. Self-indulgence. I’m reading a very pitiful volume on Montgomery Clift. It’s a most amazing volume put out by, it’s one of the selections of the book of the Month Club, and I don’t think there has ever been a more pitiful character than that man who was so popular at one time among the people of the United States, but a man characterized by total self-indulgence.

We rush off to astrology. You never read in astrology that you ought to take up your cross. It’s always good. Or we flee to some kind of national utopia like Mussolini and Hitler and others propagated, or the radical idealism of the youth. For the unbeliever, they are words of dire peril, because if he remains in his present state all is lost. From this there is no escape, no not even in pessimistic agnosticism or any of the other things by which we seek to escape the plain teaching of the Word of God.

The Lord Jesus said, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him.” May God speak to our hearts and may he, through the words of our Lord Jesus, impress upon us our sinfulness, our guilt our condemnation, and our need of a redemption that covers our sin.

If you are here this morning and you have never believed in Christ, we invite you to put your trust in Him whom we can rely upon who promises eternal life, and who gives eternal life, who promises, concerning the future that he will care for us and who will care for us, who meets all of his obligations just as he has spoken them in the Word. May the Lord work in your heart. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, one God who subsists in three persons, be in, abide with all who know him in sincerity. O Father, if there should be some here who have not yet come to him who is the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God, give no rest nor peace until they rest in Christ.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.