



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 29

“Formalism, Faithlessness and the Holy One of Israel”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] We pray O God that Thy blessing now may be upon everyone present. May the needs that exist, whether intellectual or spiritual or moral, that they may be met through the word of God.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Now we are turning tonight to Isaiah chapter 29 and our subject is the Book of Woes, the second installment, or formalism, faithlessness and the Holy One of Israel; and I have put the outline for the chapter on the board over here and those of you who are taking notes, you may get it down. In a moment, I think there are two or three things I want to put on the board and so I would suggest that you at least get the first few points of your outline in your notes.

Now I want to begin with a word of introduction as usual. The prophecy in Isaiah chapter 29 is a prophecy that follows the prophecy on chapter 28 by over twenty years. In chapter 28, we probably are to date that prophecy around 725 B.C. but this prophecy is to be dated around 703 B.C. So it is twenty years later and quite a bit has happened in the land of Judah, but there is one thing that is true in the land of Judah, which is also true in the land of Texas in 1969, and that is this that the good news of God is foolishness

to the natural man. Isaiah states in the 9th verse of the 29th chapter “Stay yourselves, and wonder” or as the Hebrew has it stand stupefied and be astonished, and he is describing the response that was given to him as he gave the word of God. So the carnal mind was enmity against God in Isaiah's day as it is in ours.

They that were in the flesh did not please God in the days of Isaiah as they do not please God today. The preaching of the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness in our day and in every day throughout human history. The reason of course is that the mind of man and the heart of man is enmity against God, and consequently when they are told that they must believe in a savior who died for them in order to have acceptance before God, it is a blow at human pride and human self-righteousness, and so the same response that Isaiah received from the preaching of the word is the response that often accompanies it today. And it comes out very clearly in the 29th chapter of the Prophecy of Isaiah.

The world situation in 703 B.C. was something like this. First of all, outside of Judah, the great kingdom with which Israel had to deal was the kingdom of Assyria. Assyria was now ruled by a man whose name was Sennacherib. Sargon had been murdered and Sennacherib had succeeded him, and when Sennacherib succeeded Sargon the empire was in rebellion against him, but he was a man of great dispatch and so first of all, he decided that his greatest need was to subdue the kingdom again to the Assyrian empire, and so he went right at the two problems that faced him which were Babylon, his vassal state, and he laid siege to Babylon. That siege took him several years but nevertheless, he went right after Babylon and then his rival Egypt and he made preparations for ultimately attacking Egypt.

Within Judah, some changes had occurred since the previous prophecy, for now Hezekiah was in complete control. He had succeeded Ahaz and Hezekiah is one of the greatest of the kings of Judah. In fact, according to the Bible itself, he was the greatest king of Judah. No king before or after measured up to King Hezekiah. I have often

wondered about that statement that is made concerning Hezekiah because I never would have thought that. I would have thought perhaps that David would have been regarded as the greatest king that Israel ever had or Solomon, but Hezekiah is called the greatest. We read “He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.” That is Second Kings chapter 18 and verse 5.

Now Uzziah was greater than Hezekiah as a conqueror, Solomon was greater than Hezekiah in wisdom, David was greater in genius, and in the length, breadth, depth and height of his human nature someone has said, but none trusted in the Lord God and followed Him as faithfully as did Hezekiah. David had his great sin, but while Hezekiah faded in the latter days of his reign and while he stumbled a little bit during it, his heart was right toward God. He was a great king and he repays careful study. Hezekiah was influenced by an Egyptizing party. Now I am not sure that word is in the dictionary, but it is now because I have coined it. Egyptizing-- that is, if I can pronounce it, I know how to spell it, but to pronounce it is something else. At any rate, he had an Egypt party in Judah and he had to deal with them.

They were anxious of course because Assyria was the king and the kingdom that was from the north and threatening them. They were anxious of course to make some alliances with Egypt to the south, and so they put a great deal of pressure upon King Hezekiah to make an alliance with Egypt and at one point in his reign, Hezekiah was leaning that way but due to the preaching of the Prophet Isaiah, finally he defied Assyria and one of the greatest victories that Israel ever won or Judah ever won was won through the faithfulness of this King Hezekiah. Isaiah hurled his prophecies into the faithless politics of his day and the resultant false ease that the people were enjoying and had unusual success, but at the same time the great majority of the people did not respond to the message of the prophet.

Now we are looking at the section of Isaiah, which is called the Book of Woes, and the reason it is called the Book of Woes is because it is a series of prophecies in which woe is pronounced against various individuals or against various countries. We saw for example the last time in chapter 28 that that woe had to do with the fall not only of Samaria but also of Judah. Now in chapter 29, we are going to look at a prophecy that begins “woe to Ariel, to Ariel” which is a reference to the city of Jerusalem, but in this Book of Woes, Isaiah is trying to get over a spiritual truth which is very valid for us today in the twentieth century, and it is this that trust in the arm of human strength is bound to fail. Whenever Judah trusted in horses and chariots, they failed. It would seem of course that we would learn this lesson, but it's very difficult to learn.

There are lots of people who will sense that Jesus Christ is their Savior and they will put their trust in him and they will become Christians. They have acknowledged their allegiance to the Lord Jesus who loved them and gave himself for them, but then having trusted themselves for time and eternity to him -- which is a tremendous thing in the daily experiences of life -- instead of leaning upon him for the little things, they lean upon the arm of human strength. They trust in horses and chariots, as Isaiah puts it.

Now I am not going to talk about the United States because it's not a Christian land and you know what I mean when I say that. The great majority of people in the United States do not profess to be Evangelical Christians. They do not profess to be Christians. This is not a Christian country. You should not expect the United States to lean upon the true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, but what you do see in the United States is in thorough harmony with this because we are leaning upon our armaments, upon our wisdom, upon our foreign policy, upon the cleverness of our C.I.A. and so on.

Now when we haven't got a God to lean on, that's the next best thing, and I am not suggesting we do away with the C.I.A. or with our Army or Navy. I am all for making them as strong as possible. If we are not going to trust in the Lord as a nation, we better have lots of gunpowder. But it would be even better if we were a nation of believers in

the Lord Jesus and we could lean upon him for then we could rest in whatever came to us. Well you see Israel or Judah that kingdom is different from our kingdom. That is, a kingdom which outwardly at least made a profession of being a theocracy. We are not. Therefore the principles that are set forth here do not really parallel the United States, its history and its experience, but there are many lessons that are similar, and the lessons that Israel as a kingdom or Judah as a kingdom was called upon to practice are lessons that we, the theocratic people, who are believers in Jesus Christ in the true church, we are called upon to practice these principles today in our daily living.

Well now let's look first of all at the first four verses where we have the solemn admonition of the Prophet Isaiah against Ariel. Now the first thing I think that would strike us as we begin the 29th chapter is that this is a strange way to begin a prophecy. “Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! Add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices.” And I am inclined to agree with some commentators who say that it seems as if we are tuning in into the midst of one of Isaiah’s sermons. It's just as if you spent an extra five minutes over there in the parlor and you came out here and I had already begun and you have entered into the midst of the message rather than hearing it all.

Or it's as Sunday morning, you’ve missed the way and you have arrived ten minutes late and the preacher has already begun to preach. Well that wouldn't happen in many churches of course. You have arrived 45 minutes late and he has just finished his introduction in most churches. And so you have come right into the midst of it and it seems as if here we are introduced to the prophet's preaching in the temple right in the midst of it. He will in a moment speak about their sacrifices. He will say in verse 13 “Wherefore the Lord said, For as much as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me.” And he is talking of course about the way they come forward to offer the sacrifices.

So here we are tossed right into the midst of the temple area and Isaiah is proclaiming one of his messages, and you can be sure that there are some people, a small

little group sitting around the prophet, drinking in every word that he is having to say, but others are sitting off, scoffing and laughing and utterly insensible spiritually to the things that he is saying. And Isaiah said alright, add year to year, keep on, it's not going to be long before judgment is coming. Go on about your sacrificing, keep it all up but God's judgment is sure to come.

Now that statement “add year to year” in the Hebrew text suggests that he is allowing them just a little over a year for their present activity and we know of course that Sennacherib's invasion came in 701 B.C. So the prophecy is probably written around 703 and there is not much time left for Ariel. Now Ariel is a term for the city of Jerusalem. *Ariel* means in Hebrew either “the hearth of God” or “the fire of God,” and the heart of God is probably the correct meaning. I shouldn't have said fire of God. It's the hearth of God or the lion of God for Ari in Hebrew means a lion, and so it is either hearth of God or lion of God, but probably hearth of God is the reference.

Now the reason Jerusalem is called the hearth of God is because it was in Jerusalem that the brazen altar lay. It was in the temple area and it was there that the animals were scarified and they were placed upon the brazen altar where the animals were burned. And so this, the place of worship was the hearth of God, and Jerusalem is given its name by reason of the fact that it was there that the worship of God took place. True worship existed in Jerusalem. That was the place where the sacrifices were to be brought, but since it is also the hearth of God and fire is there, it can also signify judgment, and so that term I think is chosen for that reason, Ariel or Arial, the city where David dwelt and so Isaiah announces that there is going to be a siege.

He says in verse 3, well let's read verse 2. “Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow.” As Chaney says, “There will be moaning and bemoaning.” “And it shall be unto me as Ariel” as the hearth of God, as a fiery place and “And I will encamp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee.” I think that's one of the most terrible verses in all of Isaiah “I will

encamp against thee” for that I is God and God is announcing through the prophet that He is going to encamp against Jerusalem, and you know it's a terrible thing when God is against us and He was against Judah because of their unbelief. Jerusalem has been besieged often through history. I heard one commentator say once that Jerusalem has been besieged about a hundred and fifty times in its history, and of course it has been under siege in recent years too.

The four great sieges of Jerusalem, however, are the siege by Sennacherib in 701 B.C., the siege by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., then the siege by Vespasian and Titus in 70 A.D. and then the siege of the future described in the 14th chapter of the Book of Zachariah as well as in the Book of Revelation, a siege by the antichrist and his forces. These are the four great sieges of the city of Jerusalem, and the first one is being announced here, the siege by Sennacherib and God is going to encamp against the city. And then we read in verse 4 “And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be like a medium.” I think you have like a familiar spirit, “one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.”

What does he mean by this? Well he means that God is going to bring Jerusalem so low in degradation that the proud city of Jerusalem, the city of God is going to mutter and mumble like the indistinct sounds that a necromancer makes when he utters his false words. In other words, Jerusalem’s speech is going to be like the speech of a medium, like the speech of a fortune teller, like the speech of madam queen who will tell your fortune down on so and so street in the city of Dallas.

You know back in the 8th chapter, will you turn back there for a moment, some of you have forgotten because we had this last fall and others of you weren’t even here, but we read in chapter 8 and verse 19 of the Prophecy of Isaiah “And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto those who are mediums and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? Should they seek on behalf of the living to the

dead?” The wizards that peep and mutter. Have you ever been around fortune tellers? Have you ever been around some necromancers? You will discover they have strange speech and in this day they did, and Isaiah said I am going to bring Jerusalem to such degradation that Jerusalem is going to speak like one that hath a familiar spirit, a tremendously vivid picture of the judgment that God is going to bring to the very doors of the city of Jerusalem.

Back during the war, I had a very interesting experience with Isaiah chapter 29 and verse 4 and I want to tell it to you. During the war, I was on the campus at Southern Methodist University as the leader of the InterVarsity Christian fellowship group on the campus, and for a long time during the war I used to teach the boys over there and some of the girls who were going to college, the word of God. And we had a group that every week would come out and SMU also had a Naval V7 program which was going on the campus, and some of the boys who were training for the Navy would come over to the class, and we had several boys particularly that sat back in the class.

And I was teaching the Epistle to the Romans and they would sit on the back of the group and they kept very quiet. They had their Bibles, they were great big old Bibles and they looked like they had not only their Bibles but they were big enough to carry all of their clothes in them too, they looked like family Bibles you know, and they listened, they didn’t enter into the discussion very much. But finally one night after we had been going for some months, everybody drifted out and the two boys were left who were in the naval program, and we began to talk and I asked them a few things about themselves, and then they said they were Mormons, and I said, well that’s very interesting. I am very glad you have been listening to the messages so far.

And I said, by the way, what do you think about the way to heaven, how do you get to heaven? And they said Oh well you have to do good works in order to get to heaven. So that launched us out into a discussion of some of the things of course that I had been trying to bring out from the Epistle to the Romans that it was not by works.

God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That God justifies the ungodly as Paul says in Romans chapter 4 in verse 5. Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, that God might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. So we got into a pretty heated but friendly discussion.

And finally I was getting nowhere with them and they were not getting anywhere with me. Two very stiff-necked groups of people if you could call me a group, and finally I said well, let's have a word of prayer and they said fine; and so we got down on our knees in one of the rooms over in SMU and I prayed and then I waited. Not a sound. Finally I waited about three minutes. Not a sound. So finally I lifted up my head and I said aren't you going to pray and they said we can't pray with the heathen. I said why didn't you tell me that before we got down on our knees? [Laughter] But you see they were of course -- they didn't know what to do with some fellow like me, and so that launched us out into further discussion. Then I said, now why is it that you can't speak, that you cannot pray with me? Well you are a Gentile and I said, yes, I am a Gentile but I am also a believer in Jesus Christ. So we finally got down to the real thing that was bothering them.

I said, don't you believe the word of God and they said, yes. Well I said look, here is what it says. I said I believed in Jesus Christ and he is my Savior, now have you? They said well now Lewis, we have other books and that's the first time they mentioned it. Then we had been discussing for an hour. They said we have other books. I said oh I knew you had other books all along but you never said anything about them. Are you embarrassed about them? And they said, no, we are not embarrassed about them. And I said well now just tell me why you think those books are inspired.

Well I now discovered why they have those big Bibles, because in the back of their Bibles were all the notes that Mormons are supposed to have so that they can

engage in conversation. Most of them don't know their Bibles very well, and so they began to thumb around in the back for a verse which supported the books of Mormon, and so finally they found a text. One of them finally found it, his name was Nephi. And if you read the books of Mormon, you will notice Nephi is a Mormon name, and so he finally found a text and he said Isaiah chapter 29 and verse 4, that supports the Books of Mormon. “And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground.”

Well now if you know historically Joseph Smith is supposed to have discovered those books in the ground and so this is the justification for the Books of Mormon being divinely inspired. It was prophesied by Isaiah thou shalt speak unto them out of the ground and thy speech shall be low out of the dust. And they rather tried emphatically pointed to this text. He read that part of it. I said let's look at that text. I didn't know what that text said to tell you the honest truth, but I knew it didn't say that. [Laughter] So I opened up the text and I looked at it and I said, it also says and thy voice shall be like one that hath a familiar spirit.

Now I said do you know what a familiar spirit is? These boys said no. I said a familiar spirit in the Bible is a lying spirit. And you know I had to scrape their chins up off of the floor over there. We had an interesting discussion. It went on for three hours. And the last I remember it was about 12 o'clock that night and we were down by the fountain, and one boy who had been very antagonistic was very responsive and the other who had been outwardly responsive had become extremely antagonistic by then, and I will never forget what one of the boys said as he left. He said this has taught me one thing. I have got to learn my Bible.

Now I've tried to contact them, that was as I remember on about a Friday and I tried to contact one of those boys on Tuesday of the next week and the government had sent them out in the meantime. So I don't know where he is. I hope he has found Jesus Christ as his Savior, but every time I notice Isaiah chapter 29 and verse 4, it gives me just

a little bit of comfort to realize that Joseph Smith’s books, speaking out of the ground and out of the dust, are the voice of a familiar spirit, a lying spirit, and they surely are.

Now then roman 2 the sudden exaltation of Ariel. Moreover or nevertheless, Isaiah says “nevertheless the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be like chaff that passeth away: yea, it shall be in an instant suddenly.” Now you will notice that these verses, let me go ahead and finish through verse 8, then we will come back to 4. “Thou shalt be visited by the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her stronghold, and that distress her, shall be like a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite.”

You know it's like when you are dieting and you sit down before the table and there is a great big dish of coffee ice-cream and just as you begin to dig in it, you are awake and the stomach is gnawing with pain because you haven't got it and you cannot eat it you know. That's what he is saying. “So shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion.” In other words, God is going to encamp against the city of Ariel or Jerusalem. There is going to be a great siege of that city, but it is suddenly going to be delivered from the siege. Now what's he talking about? Well now we know that historically, Sennacherib came against the city of Jerusalem with the Assyrian forces and we know that Jerusalem was just about to succumb to the forces of the Assyrian when God gave them a wondrous deliverance.

And I am going to ask you to turn over with me to 2 Kings and let's read of what happened. 2 Kings, and let's read chapter 19 and verse 35. 2 Kings chapter 19 and verse 35. That's in the Old Testament. It's right after 1 Kings. Chapter 19 verse 35 and this is what we read. “And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and

smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand (a hundred and eighty-five thousand): and when they arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.” Suddenly God delivered the city of Jerusalem.

Now it's interesting to read the explanations of the scholars, for the scholars tell us that no doubt this was a bubonic plague and as a result of this plague, one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrians lost their lives. Well now I cannot dispute that. I do not have enough to know whether it was or was not a bubonic plague. It might well have been. It is not above God to use means such as that, but you will notice that in the text of scripture, nothing is said about the plague because you see if the plague was a plague and if that is why the Assyrians lost a hundred and eighty-five thousand men, that plague was brought by God according to holy Scripture. So what we have then is a prophecy of a sudden deliverance which was fulfilled.

But there is one thing that troubles me a little bit. In the 7th verse we read “And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel.” And then we read in verse 8 “So shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion.” And historically it was Assyria that fought against Zion. Why the multitude of all the nations? Well, I think that perhaps what Isaiah means by this is that against the background of the deliverance under Hezekiah from the Assyrian yoke, that Assyrian siege, against that background the language of Isaiah goes on to the fourth and final siege of the city of Jerusalem when as Zachariah says and as the Book of Revelation says all the nations of the earth shall be gathered against the city of Jerusalem and the deliverance shall be just as sudden and just as climactic and just as sensational as it was centuries ago for then it shall come through the second advent of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. So the sudden exaltation of Ariel shall be brought about in the future by the coming of the Lord. In the past, by God’s destruction of the Assyrian host.

Roman 3, the sentence of deep sleep. Let's read verses 9 through 12. “Stay yourselves, and wonder” or as I translated that stands stupefied and be astonished. “Cry

ye out, and cry” now that should really be rendered something like be blinded or blind yourselves and be blind. “They are drunk, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him who is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.”

Now what Isaiah is saying here is that his words that he is bringing to Ariel that God is going to encamp Himself against that city and they are going to be besieged, these words of judgment to come fall upon his hearers as if they were in a daze. It startles and astonishes them so that they go about as ones who are staggering about under the influence of drink. In other words, they are not paying Isaiah any attention whatsoever and the explanation is simple. The Lord hath poured out upon them the spirit of deep sleep. By the way, that’s not the description of the congregation on a Sunday morning, or is it? Nor is it a picture of a man sitting before the boob tube and getting brainwashed. What he is really trying to say is that God has pronounced judicial sentence upon Judah for their unbelief. In other words, this is a very terrible thing. The reason that they stand stupid and astonished at the words of Isaiah are because they have already set themselves against God and as a result of their unbelief, He has had to judicially blind them so that they cannot see.

Did you read this morning’s paper? I read the story of a man in Japan who was brought home drunk by a taxi driver and they found him the next morning outside his front door and they could only guess at what happened from what they saw, but apparently this fellow came home so drunk that he got out of his car, he walked up to the front door, he thought he was in his house, he took off his clothes, folded them and laid them on the snow, took out his false teeth, put them over on the side, and then laid down

on the three feet I think of snow outside his front door and of course, the next morning he was frozen to death. He apparently thought he was in his house and he went through the motions.

Now you know that illustrates the spiritual life of lots of people. They are going around with the same senselessness to spiritual things. They are just as much out of it spiritually as that man was physically. He thought he was in his room, but he wasn’t and so today there are many in our Christian churches who think they are all right because they are in the Christian church but they do not have any concept whatsoever of what it is to be in right relationship to God through Jesus Christ who loved them and gave himself for them. They are utterly blind and insensible to spiritual things. They go through the motions, they come in at 11 o’clock on Sunday morning, they sit in the pew, they take the hymn book in their hand, some of them sing the hymns, not too many but some sing the hymns, they listen as the preacher reads the Bible, they put money in the collection plate as it is passed, and they go out with a good feeling saying I am alright, but they are just as much out of it as that poor man who lay down outside of his own house and passed into eternity thinking he was in his bed.

So Isaiah says I have poured out the spirit of a deep sleep upon them and when they take up the prophecies, I think that perhaps he means the words of a book or his own book, when they take up the words of the book, well it's like the words of a book that is sealed. You know when you reject the truth of the word of God, it means that the Bible becomes a closed book. We have heard a lot about the Iron Curtain and the Bamboo Curtain, but there are a lot of people who are living behind the Bible curtain. When they open up the Bible, they do not get anything out of it whatsoever. If they hear the word of God preached, they do not get anything out of it whatsoever because they do not come to it with the attitude of faith. They have never been born again. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” the Apostle Paul states. Until

we have been born again, until we have received new life from God, the Bible is a closed book. It's like the words of a book that is sealed.

The spirit of a deep sleep is upon too many of us in our churches and what we need is revival, but the church today is substituted for the prayer meetings, pep meetings. They have substituted for the preaching of the cross propaganda and the church has become like the church at Sardis. “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” You will notice too that the leaders are involved. “The prophets and your rulers” he says in verse 10 “the seers hath he covered.” And so their eyes are covered. They cannot understand.

You know today when you go into most of our churches throughout the United States and you listen to the preaching of the word, what do you hear? Well honestly, the things that you hear across the United States, it is absolutely pitiful. I go home every now and then to see my family and I go in our family church, and honestly the man who preaches is just the nicest gentleman you will ever meet but as far as preaching the word of God, he just does not know what it is to open up God’s word and expound the scriptures. He does not really know what it is to take the things of Christ and show them unto the people. And they sit there Sunday after Sunday after Sunday utterly starved.

My father expresses that you know our churches they have gotten us to be so nice that we never say anything about the preacher. You know it's very bad taste to say anything about the preacher. And I will tell you one of the most amusing things to me is to watch people who have been trained to never say anything that's not nice about the preacher. Try to see that they are not too happy with what they are hearing, and I watch my family, and they try to tell me without being critical that he is not giving them anything. I say the nicest man, but just not feeding them with a word of God.

And all over the country, politics and poor politics at that, social advice, and poor advice at that, all kinds of good advice, all kinds of politics just everything but the word of God. They hunt through the Scriptures for little portions of a text that might have

some application when it's taken out of its context to some contemporary problem of life, and they call that preaching. It's pitiful. The spirit of a deep sleep has fallen upon the church of Christ in the United States.

Why? What’s the source of it? Well now Roman 4 the source of the deep sleep is described in verses 13 and 14 and listen to it. If you were to take this out of the 7th century before Christ and bring it over into the twentieth century and change a few words, you would have exactly the situation that you have today. We don't offer sacrifices. We just come to church, but listen “Wherefore the Lord said, For as much as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.”

Now if that isn't a perfect description of what we are having today in the United States, it would be hard to find a better one. People who draw near with their mouth and with their lips do honor God, but have removed their heart far from Him, and their fear toward Him is taught by the precept of men, or as Jesus put it by the commandments of men. Instead of going to the word of God which is the authority that we should listen to and before which we should bow, we are given over to hypocrisy and to human doctrine. Hypocrisy because we come in the church. We draw near to God with our lips. We sing these hymns. We put that money in the collection plate. We say we belong to this God who is described for us in the New Testament and set forth for us in the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and we go through all the motions but our hearts are far from God.

Now listen. Don't start applying that to other churches. Those of you in Believers Chapel, let's apply to ourselves. Let's be sure that there is not some of that in us. I am kind of convinced that there is a great deal of that in some of us. I had some notes here that were words spoken by Vance Havner. He said broadly speaking the professing church is divided into three groups. The modernists who have exchanged substance for shadow, preaching a denatured gospel with the supernatural extracted, spraying with the

rose water of the false optimism and ungodly world, vainly calling the righteous to repentance. Then secondly, the denominationalists who too often have forgotten the person in zeal over the program, lost in an ocean of statistics, born in revival fires but now living in smoke. And then the fundamentalists, most of whom are doctrinally sound, but many of whom are so busy castigating the leaven the Sadducees that they themselves are smitten with the leaven of the Pharisees. And he says only revival can meet such a situation as that.

And you know what the Pharisees were, don't you? They were the ones who knew the truth, so they thought, but they drew near with their lips and with their mouths, but their heart was far from God. You know if we could just in the Christian church realize what an offence this is to God and how repulsed He is by it, it would make a tremendous difference in our midst because if we are nothing spiritually, let's let it be nothing. Let's don't put on an act as if we are something which we are not. That is what is repulsive to God. Jesus when he spoke to Laodicea said that they were neither cold nor hot and amazingly he said I wish you were one of the two. I would rather have you cold than lukewarm, but because you are lukewarm, I am going to vomit you. Yes that's the word he used. I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. That is repulsive to God to be lukewarm. Much better to be absolutely cold and know your cold, then you might want to come to the fire, but best still to be warm, hot with love for Jesus Christ.

Well you see why they had difficulty. And then their fear toward me is taught by the precept of man. Do you know what he means by that? He means that instead of relying upon the word of God at first hand or your doctrines, they are relying upon men. Have you ever known people like that? Boy, whatever Dr. Johnson says, I believe. I am flattered. I have two or three people like that. They call me all the time. What does the Bible say on this point, what does the Bible say on that. I always say look at it for yourself, but that doesn't seem to get through. A spirit of a deep sleep has fallen on them. When I make that statement look at it for yourself, no I want to know what you

say on that point. I think that's very bad really. That's very bad teaching for commandments the doctrines of man.

Ol' John Flavel said a long time ago, “He that pins his faith on another man’s sleeve knows not whether he will carry it.” Our faith is in the word. What does the word say? By the way, what does the Bible say about the ministry of the word of God? What does it say about how the ministry should be carried on? What does it say about the elders? What does it say about the deacons? What does it say about the pastor? Does it have anything to say about the pastor as the organizational head of the church, does it? Teaching for commandments the doctrines of man. What about the tithe? What does the Bible have to say about tithe? Have you ever studied that out for yourself? Don't run and ask your pastor. Study it for yourself. What does it say? You might be shocked. You might be shocked.

What about worship? What does the New Testament have to say about worship? Are we right when we call the Sunday morning service the worship service? Is that really scriptural? Is it? Don't rush off and ask somebody. Why not go to the New Testament. Why not read Paul. Their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men. Jesus used that remember that text in Matthew chapter 15, applied it to the Jews. Our traditions have so overlaid the word of God that we don't bother to find out what the word speaks.

I know in evangelical circles, we apply that to everybody else. We apply that to the denominational church as if we were independent. And if we are in the denomination, we apply to the Roman Catholics. But listen it is possible and it is not only possible, it is a fact that traditions grow up in every church; give it a few years. It won't be long before Believers Chapel will have its little set of traditions. I hope I don't live to see that day. We will have them: “this is the way we do it here.” Why do you do it that way? Well it's just the way we do it. Guess it's the right way. We never bother to study the word of God. Maybe we are doing something we shouldn't do.

See, teaching for commandments the doctrines of men. “Their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.” So God is just going to take our wisdom which we don't use properly and make it stupidity, and that's what He did, and Paul used that text too in 1 Corinthians. I don't have time to look at it.

Now Roman 5, I am going to have to hurry here. Just a couple of minutes more. The perversity of faithless politicians, 15 through 16. Now you see the reason that Isaiah has to say a word about the politicians is because there was this Egyptisizing party. Now you see I pronounce Egyptisizing right and couldn't pronounce party. At any rate, it's the party that wants them to make an alliance with Egypt and he says “Woe unto those who seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? And who knoweth us?” They didn't want the people to know you see that they were advising Hezekiah to make an alliance with Egypt because there were lots of common people who believed in trusting in Jehovah and they weren't too happy about this running down to Egypt for help from horses and chariots of Egypt, and so they go around surreptitiously and try to make alliances.

You know in Washington, you have got all of that going. I don't want to make any application there, but you know you can just see what was going on there and everybody is rushing back and forth among the buildings in Washington and all kinds of little bits of information are carried back and forth that have to do with Red China and Russia and Vietnam and all of the other places where we are involved. And so in the ancient days, in the little circumscribed area of Jerusalem, there was the little party rushing back and forth. Let's make an alliance with Egypt, let's lean on the horses and chariots of Egypt, Assyria is going to get us if we don't do it.

And so Isaiah puts his finger on it and says “Woe to those who seek deeply to hide their counsel from the Lord.” Don't you know that this is the no faith policy? Do you think by going around quietly and secretly that you are escaping the notice of God? You may be hiding it from someone else like me but not from God. “Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it.” Why you are just a piece of pottery, you know. That’s all you are. Just a pot. That’s right. That’s what you are too. Just a pot. “For shall the work say of him who made it, He made me not? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, He had no understanding?” In other words by their doctrine, they deny the omniscience of God and they deny the omnipotence of God. It's a sad thing when we try to fool God. That’s what they were trying to do.

Roman 6 the metamorphosis of the Messianic age, 17 through 21. Time’s up. So I will just summarize it in a sentence. In these verses, Isaiah points out that the time is coming when God is going to overthrow this situation and bring in the messianic age, and then the blind shall see and the deaf shall really hear because God will bring that to them through the coming Messiah.

And finally Roman 7 the pinnacle of the divine program, verses 22 through 24. In that day, the people of the God of Jacob shall look out and see the tremendous work that God has done in their midst through the second coming of the Lord Jesus, the deliverance of the people who are trusting in him from the Antichrist’s hosts and the establishment of the kingdom of God upon the earth and they shall sanctify the Lord God of Israel as the true Holy One and they shall worship Him not from the lips or from the mouth but from the heart, the transformation having been produced by faith in the word of God. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] we thank Thee for these wonderful exaltations from Isaiah and we pray that we may go home tonight and renew again our dedication to Thee. O God, deliver us

“Formalism, Faithlessness and the Holy One of Israel” by S. Lewis Johnson
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from the sentence that comes inevitably from unresponsiveness to the word of God, but
make us responsive and give us hearts that are warm toward Thee because of what Thou
has done for us through Jesus Christ. We ask in his name. Amen.