



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Lessons from the Life of David

2 Samuel 14:1 – 3:3

TRANSCRIPT

“Joab, the Woman of Tekoa, and Means for Restoring the Banished”

This morning we are turning to 2 Samuel chapter 14 and our topic is, as mentioned in our bulletin, “Joab, the Woman of Tekoa, and Means for Restoring the Banished.” I usually call Ms. Ray and I apologize to her and say, “Emily, do you mind if I have a little bit longer title than usual?” (Laughter) And she will usually say, “No, not at all.” But she does have to have another line. She said, “As a matter of fact Howard Prier gave one that was a good bit longer than yours while you were gone the other day.” I don’t know what it was, but she said that. (More laughter) And then when I think of John Owen and others who wrote in the seventeenth century, sometimes their titles are about this long. And that’s single spaced too, so I don’t guess “Joab, the Woman of Tekoa and Means for Restoring the Banished” would be too long. They would just call that a “notice” I guess. But we’re going to read the entire chapter and begin with verse 1. The last chapter has ended with, “And King David longed to go to Absalom. For he had been comforted concerning Amnon, because he was dead.”

“So Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king’s heart was concerned about Absalom.”

That’s a very interesting little phrase. I wish it were possible to talk for a little bit more in detail about it. But there are different ways of rendering that first verse. For example, in New American Standard Bible has that, “The King’s heart was inclined toward Absalom.” The New International Version has, “longed for Absalom.” The Revised Standard Version has, “went out to Absalom.” And then the New Revised Standard Version has, “The King’s mind was on Absalom.” Not a whole lot of agreement. As you can see, the Authorized Version has, simply, “was toward Absalom.” The reason for it is the little preposition, the Hebrew preposition, *el*, can be rendered in different ways and, as a matter of fact, is almost more often rendered, “against.” And so I have a feeling that that probably is the force here that “the king’s heart was averse to Absalom.” But there’s enough of a doubt about it that we will go ahead and leave it as it is. Verse 2.

“And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman, and said to her, “Please pretend to be a mourner, and put on mourning apparel; do not anoint yourself with oil, but act like a woman who has been mourning a long time for the dead. Go to the king and speak to him in this manner.” So Joab put the words in her mouth. And when the woman of Tekoa spoke to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and prostrated herself, and said, “Help, O king!” Then the king said to her, “What troubles you?” And she answered, “Indeed I am a widow, my husband is dead. Now your maidservant had two sons; and the two fought with each other in the field, and there was no one to part them, but the one struck the other and killed him. And now the whole family has risen up against your maidservant, and they said, ‘Deliver him who struck his brother, that we may execute him for the life of his brother whom he killed; and we will destroy the heir also.’ So they would extinguish my ember that is left.’ (What a marvelous little expression that is. Her son that is left, the only one, is like a little spark that’s just about to go out.) She says, ‘And leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the

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earth.’ Then the king said to the woman, ‘Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you.’ And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, ‘My lord, O king, let the iniquity be on me and on my father’s house, and the king and his throne be guiltless.’ (That is, of course, if you let my son go free, I’ll take the blame and you will not have any of the blame for that decision.) So the king said, ‘Whoever says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall not touch you anymore.’ Then she said, ‘Please let the king remember the Lord, your God, and do not permit the avenger of blood to destroy anymore, lest they destroy my son.’ And he said, ‘As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground.’ Therefore, the woman said, ‘Please, let your maidservant speak another word to my lord the king.’ And he said, ‘Say on.’”

Now, this is so startling it reminds one of Nathan’s word to David when David expressed a desire that the individual who had done the wrong should be punished. And Nathan, remember chapter 12, said, “You are the man.” Well, that is precisely what she does. So the woman said, Verse 13.

“Why then have you schemed such a thing against the people of God? For the king speaks this thing as one who is guilty in that the king does not bring his banished one home again: For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him. Now, therefore, I have come to speak of this thing to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. And your maidservant said, ‘I will now speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his maidservant. For the king will hear and deliver his maidservant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the inheritance of God.’ (To destroy from the inheritance of God is to destroy them from membership in the children of Israel, who are God’s inheritance.) Your maidservant said,

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‘The word of my lord the king will now be comforting: For as the angel of God, so is my lord the king in discerning good and evil and may the Lord, your God, be with you.’

(Now, David is not totally dumb. And so we read.) Then the king answered and said to the woman, ‘Please do not hide from me anything that I ask you.’ And the woman said, ‘Please, let my lord the king speak.’ So the king said, ‘Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?’ And the woman answered and said, ‘As you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has spoken. (In other words, ‘you have hit the nail on the head.’ It was Joab.) For your servant Joab commanded me, and he put all these words in the mouth of your maidservant. To bring about this change of affairs your servant Joab has done this thing, but my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of the angel of God, to know everything that is in the earth.’ (“In the land.” Well, that is almost an attribution to him of omniscience, but she’s anxious to please the king on account of the decision that Joab would like to hear.) And the king said to Joab, (Who, evidently, was standing just in the background.) ‘All right, all right, I have granted this thing. Go, therefore, bring back the young man Absalom.’ Then Joab fell to the ground on his face and bowed himself, and thanked the king. And Joab said, ‘Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord, O king, in that the king has fulfilled the request of his servant.’ So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. (You remember, he was staying with his grandparents there, in Geshur.) And the king said, ‘Let him return to his own house, but do not let him see my face.’ (That was a mistake.) So Absalom returned to his own house, but did not see the king’s face.

Now in all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he cut the hair of his head; at the end of every year he cut it because it was heavy on him. When he cut it, he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels according to the king’s standard. (We do not know the king’s standard and

speculation has ranged all the way from five and a half or six pounds to two and a half pounds. I might say something about that later on.) To Absalom were born three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a woman of beautiful appearance. And Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, but did not see the king's face. Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but he would not come to him. And when he sent again the second time, he would not come. So he said to his servants, 'See, Joab's field is near mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire.' And Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab arose and came to Absalom's house, and said to him, 'Why have your servants set my field on fire?' And Absalom answered Joab, 'Look, I sent to you, saying, 'Come here, so that I may send you to the king, to say, 'Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still. Now, therefore, let me see the king's face, but if there is iniquity in me, let him execute me.' So Joab went to the king and told him. And when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king. Then the king kissed Absalom. (In complete restoration, of course, as you can obviously see.)

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for the privilege of reading the word of God and we give Thee thanks for the ministry of it to us, as the Holy Spirit has wielded it in our lives. We thank Thee for the way in which Thou hast enlightened us concerning the truths of Scripture and brought us to the knowledge of him who to know is life eternal, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the Gospel, and for the privilege of proclaiming it and, Lord, we pray Thy blessing upon it, as it is preached already this day and then in the remainder of the hours of this day. Wherever that word

goes forth, attend it with the blessing of the Holy Spirit that the whole Church may be brought together to meet our Lord, when he comes again.

We thank Thee for our country. We pray Thy blessing upon it and upon our President and others associated with him in government, and in all of the government of our land, our state government and our city government. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon those who are ministers of God for our benefit.

We pray for this church and ask Thy blessing upon its leadership and upon its members and upon the friends and visitors who are here with us today. O God, open the minds and hearts of all of us to be responsive to Thy word, that we may grow in the knowledge of him, who to truly know is to possess the assurance of eternal life.

And now, Lord, we pray Thy blessing upon our entire family, and we include those who have requested that we pray for them, who are pressed by different trials and needs. We commit them to Thee. We pray that Thy hand may be upon them for physical good and for spiritual blessing. For those who have especially requested that we pray for them, Lord, let us not be unfaithful in remembering them. We remember them and we pray for them and we ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon them and give them, if it pleases Thee, answers that will be pleasing to them and to Thee.

Bless our meeting as we sing. May we sing from the heart heartily, in thanksgiving to our Lord, and may the ministry of the word be edifying.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Absalom's banishment by David has raised the question of succession to his throne. And Joab, David's strong man, obviously, considers the presence of Joab in Jerusalem as a critical necessity. Joab is one of the interesting characters of the word of God. He was the son of David's sister and, thus, David's nephew. He was a man of outstanding ability. Had it not been for David, Joab, undoubtedly it seems, would have

climbed up into the throne of Israel, itself. As it was, he stood in the steps of the throne and faced the king all of his days.

If you were to sum up Joab's life, you might say that he was guilty of an over vaulting ambition. In the light of these chapters as they unfold, it seems clear that he was, as someone has put it, “King in all but the crown.” And, in fact, even more. And as long as his weaker uncle, for David had become weak because of his sin, as long as he wore the crown, “Joab's heart,” as also this individual says, “raged like hell.”

The end of Jonathan and the end of Joab may be contrasted. Jonathan gave over to David all that he possessed, all that he ever expected to possess, and died like a king. Joab envied David and everyone else all that they had and died as an outcast. Pride, jealousy, arrogance; all of the common sins of important men seem to have characterized him. Such is, as David says, “The son of Zeruiah.” And, as David said, long before this, “they are too hard for him.”

Dean Stanley has written about Joab and he has described him as, “The Marlboro of the Empire of Israel.” Some of you, if not all of you, may remember that the Duke of Marlboro, the First Duke of Marlboro, actually, an ancestor of Winston Churchill, for his name was John Churchill Marlboro, was an English general and statesman and many feel was the greatest military commander that England ever had. A great strategist, a shrewd diplomat; he's been criticized as possessed of an inordinate love of wealth and power and for unstable political loyalties. And in many ways, Joab must have been like this great man.

The real problem that faces the King and Joab is simply this, who is to succeed to the throne? Now, this is very important in a kingdom. If you go back in your study of the history of England, you'll remember that when King Henry the VIII, was nearing or at least when people were thinking about his demise, the individual who was slated to be the successor to him was just a young boy, relatively speaking. And it has been said that

he could have obtained anything in the land if he wished it because he was so important for the kingdom.

Well, things were very, very important in Israel at this time and the question is simply this, Joab wants Absalom back in Jerusalem so that he may succeed in the throne of his father David. But the question, as I say is, will David concur in this? Is there any weakening in his attitude? And Joab is not sure. We do read in verse 39 of the preceding chapter that King David longed to go to Absalom. But then we read in chapter 14 in verse 1, that “the king’s heart was averse to Absalom.” And so the question is a question that is very existential for Joab. Can we arrange in such a way that Absalom will succeed him? And so he devised a plan in order to change the mind of King David. And the plan is so much like that which happened when Nathan came and gave his parable to David that you cannot help but feel that he reflected upon how Nathan had come, had told the little parable, given us in chapter 12, and how Nathan had finally said, “You’re the man” and David had repented. And so he devises this program, this strategy. He seeks out a woman who is noted as being a wise woman, an *‘ishshab chakama*, a person very much like Jonadab -- in our last study we saw of him as a wise man. He was a wise but crafty man. This woman is simply said to be a wise woman. She must have been known for being a rather wise woman and one able to carry out this subterfuge. So he seeks her out and he puts this little story in her mouth in order to cause David to change his mind.

Now, what she says is not altogether logical but, at least, it works. And the leading features of it are simply this, she comes in to David’s presence, Joab has brought here there, in effect. And she begins to tell her story. She begins with something that’s bound to soften the heart of David, would soften the heart of any man, “I am a widow, my husband is dead.” Now, mind you if she was not a widow, so far as we know, and her husband was not dead. But, this is the way Joab has her acting out her little charade.

Now, your maidservant had two sons and the two fought and one killed the other, so she says. She says in the seventh verse, “Now, the whole family has risen up against

your maidservant,” the whole clan family because murder has been committed and they want judgment. And they have said, “Deliver him that struck his brother that we may execute him, for the life of his brother whom he killed; and we will destroy the heir also.” And you can just imagine as David listens to it, it has flitted through his mind the story of Absalom slaying Amnon just previously. So she says, in the end of verse 7, “They will extinguish my ember that is left.” That little spark, the only thing she has left is the son, and leave to my husband, her husband is dead, but his name is important in Israel, as you know, “And leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the earth.” Then the king said to her as many politicians will say, “You go to your house and I’ll give orders concerning you.” But that doesn’t satisfy her. So the woman of Tekoa said to the king, “My lord, O king,” if you’re worried about if you’re going to have any judgment on you for what has taken place, “your iniquity be on me and on my father’s house, and the king and his throne be guiltless.” So the king said, “Whoever says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall not touch you anymore.”

Now, it’s obvious at that point, she has largely gained what she’s driving at, but David doesn’t know it quite yet. Then she said, “Please let the king remember the Lord, your God, and do not permit the avenger of blood to destroy anymore, lest they destroy my son.” She’s asking for a little more and now she gets it. And he said, “As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground.” Therefore, the woman said, “Please, let your maidservant speak another word to my lord, the king.” And he said, “Say on.” And listen to what she does. She’s an entirely different woman now. So she says, “Why then have you schemed such a thing against the people of God?” It’s just as if Nathan has said, “You’re the man.” That’s what she’s done. “You’re the man.” “Why have you schemed such a thing?” This reference to Absalom, “Against the people of God?” Against Israel? “For the king speaks this thing as one who is guilty, in that the king does not bring his banished one home again.”

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Well, you can see what she has done. She has managed to put herself in the role of Israel. She's the people of God in her story. The son that is left is Absalom. And David now is in the place of the clan family that would like to judge the other son. It's very clever. You can see why Joab was an important man, in spite of many things about him that are very displeasing.

So she has a few other things to say. She says in the 14th verse, “For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life, but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him.” There's a lot of wisdom in that. She says, first of all, we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground. Death is the common lot of all of us; every one in this audience, from the children to the gray heads and to the bald heads, death is the common lot of all of us. It is unavoidable and irreversible. It's a law of nature as a result of sin in the Garden of Eden and, unless our Lord comes before we die physically, every one in this room will, ultimately, die and a funeral service or a memorial service will be in your honor. It's a stern and terrible law. By one man, sin entered into the world and death by sin, so death passed upon all men for all sinned in Adam.

It's appointed unto men once to die and, after this, the judgment. We die under the guilt of Adam's sin and we prove that we deserve that by the fact that we've followed in Adam's sin of rebellion against the Lord God.

Now, she goes on to add, however, “Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him.” God's penal judgments will be carried out. But God's disciplinary dealings are far from irreversible. And she refers to such things when she says, “He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him.”

Now, what she really wants to say is God acts in mercy. And, again, David's thoughts must have gone back to chapter 13 because when Nathan has said, “You are the

man,” and goes on to say, “In the name of the Lord God, I appointed you king over Israel, I delivered you from the hand of Saul, I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have even given you more. Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord?” And when Nathan finishes, with that extra word from the Lord in condemnation, we read, “So David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin.’” So in the matter of discipline there is reversibility, so to speak and, in David’s case, he enjoyed that, that God forgave him his sin.

Now, David is no dummy. And so David, as he has heard this, and now, as he’s heard this woman shock him by in effect saying, you are the one that I’ve been talking about all along. You’re like my clan family. You want to slay the one that is left. And he’s mine, and I represent Israel, in her little story, and you have put yourself in such a place by banishing Absalom that you would like to take the place of the clan members and judge Absalom. You can see these things going through David’s mind as he’s reflected on the parallels. And, finally, we read, the king answered and said to the woman, “Don’t hide anything from me that I’m going to ask you.” And she said, “Let my lord speak.” “Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?” He recognized that Joab is really the one who stands behind this, and it’s he who specifically wants Absalom back. The hand of the loyal pragmatist, Joab, is seen in this charade, to deliver David from an impasse because Absalom is his son and he is banished from the kingdom.

Well, the rest of the chapter is subsidiary to that, as you can see. What happens is that David does forgive Absalom, but it is limited forgiveness. Joab’s plan succeeds. He comes back to Jerusalem but the forgiveness is half-hearted and it’s unwise and it leads to resentment and it leads to hostile rebellion and it fails to treat Absalom as a man. In fact, you can sense the fact that the relationship between Absalom and the king is not satisfactory by the way in which David refers to him in the 21st verse. “And the king said

to Joab, ‘All right, I have granted this thing. Go therefore, and bring back the youth Absalom.’” That little term, *na’ar*, which means “youth” is a term that should not have been applied to Absalom. He was a man, a grown man. But you can see that David still thinks of him and refers to him as if he’s a youth. It’s so difficult for us to realize when our children reach their maturity and to treat them as such. So that’s just one of the many signs of the fact that David does not really understand things as he should. He doesn’t treat him as a man. He’s too lenient, with reference to Absalom, because of the fact that he’s his son.

Now, it’s interesting to see the physical attractiveness Absalom, because this will be important later on, when Absalom rebels against David on the throne. We read, “Now in all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he cut the hair of his head, at the end of every year he cut it because it was heavy on him, when he cut it, he weighed the hair of head at two hundred shekels according to the king’s standard.”

This reads like 1991 doesn’t it? [Laughter] Five and a half pounds of hair; well, that might seem strange. Two and a half? Does that seem strange? Well, I don’t know. I look around and I see, last night I happened to see the end of the news on Channel 8, and suddenly it was Saturday night at the Apollo and for a few moments I looked at that. I was tempted to say Martha loves that program, but she doesn’t. [Laughter] I’m not going to try to get a laugh, but I did notice the singer. I looked at it long enough to see the singer and he had hair and curls, greasy curls, incidentally, that went all the way down to about here. I really would have loved to have cut his hair off and weigh it. [More laughter] And I’ve often wanted to weigh Jimmy Johnson’s hair with all of that spray that he’s got on his and wonder if he let it grown, how much it would weigh after one year. Someone has said there are three ways in which a man can wear his hair, parted, un-parted, and departed. [Laughter] Well, the last is not true of Absalom.

There was a small boy who went and got up in the barber’s chair for the first time. The barber said, “Well, how would you like me to cut this?” And he said, “Well, cut it just like my daddy’s with a hole on top.” [Laughter]

Absalom must have had a magnificent head of hair and, evidently, then they were just entranced with a head of hair as we are now. That’s why people like mine so much.

Well, the remainder of the chapter describes the imperfect reconciliation. Appearances are deceptive. Absalom is beautiful, handsome, has this magnificent head of hair, there isn’t a person in the land that is more handsome than he. But, nevertheless, the same spirit that dominated him when we murdered Amnon still dominates him. He seeks to get an audience with David, twice. And so when he fails to get the audience with David, what does he do? He burns Joab’s barley field. So the spirit of rebellion, the arrogant spirit of rebellion still dwells within Absalom, and it will lead to serious difficulties later on.

We don’t have much time, but I wanted to turn attention to this statement in verse 14, “For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him.” I would suggest to you that this statement, which Joab evidently put into her mouth, is a flash of illumination that brings a glimpse to Bible students of the great redemptive principles of the word of God.

We sometimes think that the children of Israel in the Old Testament did not understand spiritual things very well, at all. I would like to suggest that I don’t really think that is true. Now, we have some magnificent outstanding men. We have David, whose psalms are magnificent for their unfolding of the messianic work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We have the Prophet Isaiah, whose prophecies are remarkable and whose chapter 52, verse 13 through chapter 53, verse 12, is perhaps the high-water mark of messianic understanding, a remarkable picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. And our contemporary biblical scholars cannot keep our Lord Jesus out of those verses. And I’d

like to think that those individuals who had plenty of time to sit out on the hills of Judea and of the land with their sheep, for they were a shepherd nation, they had plenty of time to reflect on the revelation that they had, at that particular time.

My impression of them from studying the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament is that they understood a whole lot more than we in the 20th Century are inclined to give them credit for. In fact, the writers of the New Testament display a remarkable understanding of the things of the Old Testament, which often puzzle the finest of interpreters until they've devoted a considerable amount of time to them, and then they come to see things that they never dreamed were really there before. So I like to think that when this statement is given us in chapter 14 in verse 14, that we are justified in think of the New Testament plan of redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ. And in the few moments that remain I'd like to develop this just a little bit.

There is obviously a parallel here, set forth by Joab, with David on the one hand and Absalom in exile, on the other, banished and the parallel is obvious. For David stands as the type of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and we stand as examples of those banished because our sin has caused us to be banished from the favor of God. As a matter of fact, the Prophet Isaiah is one who says to Israel, “Your sins have separated you from the Lord God.” And your sins, my Christian friend and my non-Christian friend and in my case as well, our sins have separated us from the Lord God, naturally. That's the way we are born. We are born in separation from the Lord God. We are born under divine condemnation. We are born and we are dying from the moment that we are born.

In fact, the Apostle describes us more than once as those who are “perishing” not shall perish, but are perishing on the way to destruction. Mr. Spurgeon calls this, “The great and universal outlawry, which encompasses all of us, as a condemned people before the Lord God.” But we know his great purpose. His purpose is to gather his people to himself. That's what Peter writes and writes about it so beautifully, often misunderstood but, nevertheless, it's true. In 2 Peter chapter 3 in verse 9, he says, “The

Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any,” that is, any of us, the context makes plain these are beloved individuals in verse 8, “Not willing that any (of us) should perish but that all (of us) should come to repentance.” That’s what God is doing in the present day. He’s gathering his elect people and he will not rest until he has gathered every one of his elect people into the family of God. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

I know you are sitting and saying, “Am I, perhaps, a member of the family of God?” I don’t know. I may have some fairly good feeling with regard to some of you. Some of you, I feel certain. And if you’re not a member of the family then I’m not. But, in the ultimate, only God knows his elect. But you can settle the question right now. If you are troubled by that, my advice to you is to turn to Christ, receive the benefits of his saving work, as the Scriptures have set forth. God is faithful to his word. Believe in our Lord Jesus Christ; give yourself to him. And then, if you want to, study the intricacies of the doctrine of election afterwards. But, come to Christ, trust him. And the fact that you do come really settles the question, doesn’t it? You were one of his. He’s not willing that any of us should perish but that all of us should come to repentance.

Now, the means he devises by which we come to him include the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, for we must come justly. And in this, the parallel with the situation with Absalom and David falls down. Our Lord seeks us, he seeks to save us. The incarnation is the first step. Our Lord’s death is the fundamental work of the Lord God by which we are saved. In Galatians chapter 3 in verse 13, the Apostle writes words that are very significant. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs upon a tree.’” He has died for sinners as the sin substitute. The Apostle says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

His resurrection details the pleasure that the Father has in the work that He accomplished on the cross at Calvary. That, of course, is not sufficient for our salvation. In other words, you may hear the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ but the fact that Christ has come and died for his people is not a saving fact for you until a further gift of God makes that possible. And that is the gift of God the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who, as you hear the word of God, touches your heart, turns your heart to the Lord Jesus, moves upon your heart, makes your naturally unwilling heart willing so that in grace you turn to the Lord and receive the free gift of eternal life. So the means to make us willing is the result of our Lord's saving work on Calvary's cross as well. It's one of the benefits of it.

Mr. Spurgeon has some interesting little illustrations in one of his messages that I'd like to repeat. I think I've got time to do that. But they illustrate the ways in which God works, the means that he has devised and the path along which he reaches his determined things. He has an interesting story about a man by the name of Thorpe, a noted preacher of the gospel, Mr. Spurgeon says. “He was before his conversion a member of an infidel club. In those days,” he says, “Infidelity was more coarse than now, and the skeptical society took the name of the Hellfire Club.” Reminds you of the worship of Satan in our day. “Well, they had some amusements that they entertained themselves with when they came together and one of them was to imitate religious services. And then, also, to imitate popular ministers who were gospel preachers. And young Mr. Thorpe decided that he wanted to entertain the crowd in the Hellfire Club, and so, Mr. Whitefield was preaching at the time and he thought nothing could be better than to attend Mr. Whitefield's services so that he could more effectively represent a gospel minister. And he listened to Mr. Whitefield and he listened to him very well. He heard him so carefully that he caught his tones and his manner and something of his doctrines as well.” Mr. Whitefield was remarkable for his ability to express truth. In fact, I

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remember someone saying that he loved to hear Mr. Whitefield just pronounce the word Mesopotamia. (Laughter) That was enough to be blessed, for him.

And, anyway, this man heard Mr. Whitefield, and then when the time came for the club to meet, he was going to give his caricature of the great preacher. “And he opened his Bible and he took as a text, but he just was looking at the text and he looked for one that would be one that he could take and start from. And his Bible happened to open at “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” “And so, as he spoke upon that text, he was carried beyond himself,” Mr. Spurgeon says, “and lost all thought of mockery and spoke as one in earnest as was the means of his own conversion.” (Laughter) “And he was want to say in after years, ‘If ever I was helped of God to preach, it was that very day when I began in sport but ended in earnest,’ carried by the force of the truth beyond his own intention, like one who would sport in a river and is swept away by its current.”

Mr. Spurgeon also tells the story of Mr. Tennant. I think this is probably Gilbert Tennant. He doesn't give his first name. But he said, “An individual, who was a skeptic, went to hear Mr. Tennant and he with great care listened to him as he preached. And Mr. Tennant had studied his message very well because he knew this eminent skeptic would be there. And so he started out to preach the sermon, he wanted to have a sound argument that would win his hearer, but in his intense earnestness, he became too absorbed to follow out the chain of his reasoning, his speech faulted, and though generally, a man remarkable for eloquence, he came to a standstill and had to conclude the service abruptly.” And the one gleam of truth that, or rather, let me go back a moment. “He concluded the service and it was very painful.” But this was the means of conversion of the skeptic. And, afterwards, the skeptic was asked how it was that the sermon was the means of his conversion. And he said, “Well,” he said, “there is evidently such a thing as the help of the Holy Spirit because I heard Mr. Tennant on a number of occasions, and it was obvious that he preached with great power. But this time he had no power at all. And it convinced me that there was such a thing as the power of the

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Holy Spirit in preaching. And, as a result of it, he was converted on that occasion.” And Mr. Spurgeon said, “Oh blessed blundering, blessed faltering, blessed breaking down, if it is part of God’s means by which his banished may be brought back.”

And he tells one final story that I thought was also very interesting. He tells of a Christian minister who one day was sent to visit a dying man. And when he reached the bedside, he was gratified to hear the dying man say, “Sir, I thought I should like to speak with you before I went to heaven. I thank God I have good hope through grace, for I rest on Christ Jesus and wish to tell you that you were the means of my conversion.” “How so,” said the minister? “Did you attend the ministry? I don’t remember you ever being in our services?” And he said, “No, I was a hearer elsewhere. One night I met you on the streets of this city, and I asked you the way to a certain place and if I was on the right way. And you told me at the time, that I was not going to the place, you were actually going away from it. And you set me straight. But then as we left, you said, ‘I hope you are equally earnest in finding the right way to heaven.’ And he said, that awakened me, and as a result, it was you who pointed me on the way to heaven.”

Well, there’s one final. Mr. Guthrie who lost his way one night on the moor, his companions that he had intended to meet, he was unable to meet them. He missed them. And when at last he found them, he explained to them that it’d been a marvelous little piece of providence that he’d missed them. Because, he said, “I wandered across the moor, looking for the way, ‘til I came to a little cottage in which was a sick and dying woman. The priest was just administering to her extreme unction and when he went out, I went in. She was troubled in mind. I told her the gospel. She believed in the Lord Jesus. I found her in a state of nature. I preached the gospel to her until I saw her in a state of grace. And when I came away, I left her in a state of glory.” He went back and told his friends that it was the providence of God that caused him to lose his way on the moor and as a result, God worked the salvation of a soul.

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So I look at this text and read, “He devises means so that his banished ones are not expelled from him.” The fundamental means is the work of the Lord Jesus on Calvary’s cross, and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring home the truth to those who do not know our Lord. But then there are many other ways by which God works. He devises means for the restoration of his banished. And also for those who are out of fellowship with him, as David said, “He restoreth my soul.”

I wish it were possible for me to talk about the fact that what happens in chapter 14, here, is not altogether in accordance with the word of God because the questions of repentance, the questions of justice are not settled. But, no doubt, it’s true that when we read, “He devises means so that his banished ones are not expelled from him,” there is the element in truth in it that we are justified in saying it parallels the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. And what Christ has done is that by which we actually enter into a just relationship with the Lord. The other night, at the Lord’s Supper, I stood up in the meeting and made reference to a little thing that I have in my Greek New Testament. I don’t have it with me now. But Lucy is hugging Snoopy and she says, “A hug is better than all the theology in the world.” Nothing could be worse than that! A hug may be wonderful and I hope you enjoy many hugs from your loved ones but a hug is absolutely worthless so far as heaven is concerned. Heaven is entered through a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sinners such as you and I are. Come to him. Believe in him. Trust in him. Don’t leave this auditorium without having settled the question of your faith in him who died for sinners, in his atoning substitutionary sacrifice.

Let’s stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the word of God. We are grateful for the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are grateful, Lord, that Thou hast devised

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means, just means, by which the banished and we refer to ourselves because of our sins, are not expelled from Thee. We thank Thee for the hope that we have. We thank Thee for the fact that Thou hast not rested until we have been brought into family of God. We thank Thee, Lord, and we praise Thy name. And we ask if there should be some in this audience who have not yet believed in Christ, oh, give them no rest nor peace, Lord, until they rest in Christ.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.