



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Lessons from the Life of David

2 Samuel 20:1 – 26

“The Seething General and the Sensible Mayor”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We’re turning for our Scripture reading to 2 Samuel chapter 20. We’re coming near the end of our studies on themes from the Life of David, and this chapter is one of the last that we will deal with in our series.

David, remember, has passed the Jordan River on his way back to resume his rule over Israel. There has been disagreement, just as he has passed through the Jordan, between the men of Israel and the men of Judah; each, evidently, wishing to have some preeminence with the king, the men of Israel saying that, “We have ten shares in the king and you do not have but one or two,” at most. The place of Benjamin is a little in question at the point. But Judah pointing out that David is a close relative of theirs and, further, they have not received anything from the king. He’s not given them any gift. And the chapter ended, the preceding chapter, with the words “Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.”

Incidentally, the men of Israel also appealed to the fact that they were the first to wish David to come back and resume his rule over Israel, so things are in a difficult condition. And chapter 20 begins with verse 1.

“And there happened to be there a rebel, whose name was Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite. And he blew a trumpet, and said, ‘We have no share in David, nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!’ So every man of Israel deserted David and followed Sheba, the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah, from the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, remained loyal to their king. Now David came to his house at Jerusalem and the king took the ten women, his concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in seclusion and supported them, but he did not go in to them. So they were shut up to the day of their death, living in widowhood. And the king said to Amasa, ‘Assemble the men of Judah for me within three days, and be present here yourself.’ So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah. But he delayed longer than the set time which David had appointed him. And David said to Abishai, ‘Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom. Take your lord’s servants and pursue him, lest he find for himself fortified cities, and escape us.’ So Joab’s men with the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all the mighty men, went out after him. And they went out of Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon. [And, incidentally, Gibeon was a place located six or seven miles northeast of Jerusalem.] Amasa came before them. Now Joab was dressed in battle armor, on it was a belt with a sword fastened in its sheath at his hips; and as he was going forward, it fell out. Then Joab said to Amasa, ‘Are you in health, my brother?’ And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him, but Amasa did not notice the sword that was in Joab’s hand and he struck him with it in the stomach and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not strike him again. Thus he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri. Meanwhile one of Joab’s men stood near Amasa, and said, ‘Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David, follow Joab!’”

Now, that’s an interesting verse because it suggests that there still was division and dissension among them. And it may also have accounted for the delay in Amasa following David’s order to him which was stated in verse 4.

“But Amasa wallowed in his blood in the middle of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he moved Amasa from the highway to the field and threw a garment over him, when he saw that everyone who came upon him halted. When he was removed from the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. And he went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel and Beth Maachah and all the Berites. So they were gathered together and also went after Sheba. Then they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth Maachah.

You’ll notice, they are two different names for this little town and the reason for that is that in the original text there is some variation. And if I can just sum it all up, the text, the Hebrew text of the books of Samuel still is a little bit corrupt in places. And when I say “corrupt” I mean there is question about exactly the way in which the text should be read at those points. That accounts, perhaps, for the different readings.

“And they cast up a siege mound against the city, and it stood by the rampart. And all the people who were with Joab battered the wall to throw it down. Then a wise woman cried out from the city, ‘Hear, hear! Please say to Joab, ‘Come nearby, that I may speak with you.’ When he had come near to her, the woman said, ‘Are you Joab?’ He answered, ‘I am.’ Then she said to him, ‘Hear the words of your maidservant.’ And he answered, ‘I am listening.’ So she spoke, saying, ‘They used to talk in former times, saying, ‘They shall surely seek guidance at Abel,’ and so they would end disputes.”

And, evidently, she refers to the fact that this was a place that was noted for having wise people there and when disputes arose, people would go to Abel and they would let the people hear the grounds of the disputes. And often, they would accept the conclusions of other people. There’s also a possibility that there was an oracle of kinds there earlier. At any rate, Abel Maachah had the reputation of being a place where wise people dwelt, sort of like Dallas. [Laughter]

“I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel.”

Now, I must make one other comment here. “Mother” does not mean that she was claiming to be a mother. Mother is a reference to the city. So what she in effect is saying is, “You seek to destroy a city and a mother city, at that, in Israel, a kind of metropolis of the north, an important place.

“‘Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the Lord.’ Joab answered and said, ‘Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city.’ So the woman said to Joab, ‘Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall.’”

Now, those were vigorous days. [Laughter] And women were more powerful, perhaps.

“Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba, the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent. So Joab returned to the king at

Jerusalem. [The last words are a record, simply a record of the condition of the government of David. And we read them.] And Joab was over all the army of Israel; Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; Adoram was in charge of revenue; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; Sheva was scribe; Zadok and Abiathar were the priests; and Ira the Jairite was a chief minister under David.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his inspired word and let's bow for a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the ministry of the word of God to us; we thank Thee for the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the confidence we have that they express the mind of our great triune God in heaven. And, therefore, we know that in having the word of God, we have that which points us to the will of God and to the glorious future that Thou hast devised in Thy wisdom that we should, ultimately, experience.

We thank Thee for the grand purpose reflected in the plans and purposes set forth in the word of God. And how marvelous it is to know that the foundation of the completion of all of the acts and facts of this grand purpose is settled by virtue of the shedding of the precious blood of the Redeemer, the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who acting as our representative has borne our judgment and now sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven to make sure that all that for which he has died shall, ultimately, become his. How marvelous is this great plan of God!

We pray for the whole church today. We ask Thy blessing upon the ministry of the word of God in it, wherever the Lord Jesus is lifted up. We pray for this local assembly and ask Thy blessing upon it and upon its leadership, upon the members and friends and the visitors who are here with us today. We pray for those who have requested our prayers and ask that we pray for them. Lord, Thou knowest their needs

and their petitions and we ask that if it should please Thee, Thou wilt answer them favorably, in accordance with Thy perfect will.

And Father, we ask Thy blessing upon our country today. Give wisdom and guidance to our leaders. May, by Thy grace, we be enabled to continue in the blessing of God and in the proclamation of the word of God. We commit our meeting to Thee and as we sing, as we listen to the word of God, may our thoughts be drawn to the worship and praise of Him who is the center of the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray In His Name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is “The Seething General” a reference to Joab, of course, and “the Sensible Mayor.” I don’t really know that the “wise woman” was the mayor of Abel Maachah, but the fact that she had such influence in the city may, at least, be comparable to it. And then, I confess that the thought occurred to my mind that when I read the past week, I believe, of how many Texas cities have had in recent days, female mayors. Dallas, Houston, I believe Austin, El Paso, San Antonio, Fort Worth, and someone mentioned some other one this morning to me afterwards, but I have forgotten the one to whom they referred. So that’s the reason the subject is “The Seething General and the Sensible Mayor.” And so I have appointed her mayor, the wise woman, of the city of Abel Maachah.

There is a latent tendency in human nature restlessness under authority. May we avoid it, both individually and as a church. Sheba’s revolt against David is really an anticipation of the revolt that will mean the division of the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, not long after these events. As you know, when Solomon died and Jeroboam and Rehoboam came to the throne, it was Jeroboam who revolted. And even the words that were stated were very similar to the words of Sheba. For we read in 1 Kings chapter 12, verse 16, “Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying, ‘What share have we in David? We have no

inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!” So what we are seeing here is really an anticipation of the revolt that will take place when Rehoboam and Jeroboam separated and the northern kingdom separated from the southern kingdom.

The zeal of crowds in a bad cause is more often do to the influence of clever and restless leaders than to profound conviction and intelligent views of the people themselves. Politically this is so. One only has to look at human history to recognize that many of the rebellions that have taken place have been rebellions, not because the mass of people had deep convictions, but that they had clever leaders who were restless to assume authority for themselves. My thoughts go back to men of my generation such as Hitler and Mussolini and then, recently, Saddam Hussein. But you can multiply them down through the years; it’s often true.

Spiritually the same thing is true. We’ve had men like Arius, who in his departure from the word of God gathered a great number of the people of the church to him. Pelagius, a man who was noted for his nice, easy disposition and life, but whose doctrine of the grace of God was faulty. And Augustine had to stand up to Pelagianism and even semi-Pelagianism and win a most significant battle for the grace of God in the Christian church.

And, in our day, if you will just think of those who have assumed leadership within the Christian church in various ways and the Christian professing church; there are many people who are very clever and who are like the restless leaders in other spheres and gain authority, often, not because the individuals hold their views deeply, but because they are swayed by the individuals.

One other thing that stands out, obviously, in this section is the influence of women in promoting the church’s purity and peace and that surely is worthy of consideration by all of us. Think of the Gospel of Luke, sometimes called The Gospel of Women. And Mary, the mother of our Lord, and the magnificent illustration of godliness

and piety reflected in Mary’s life and the knowledge that she possessed of scriptural things. Or think of the woman that was a sinner and the expression of devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, which has inspired anyone who has read the Gospel of Luke. Or think of the women who supported our Lord and financially helped him in order that he might carry on his ministry, being tools and agents in the hand of the Father in heaven and enabling him to carry on the ministry that he did carry on; or Mary and Martha, some of the ones who stand out, or the women who after our Lord’s crucifixion ministered to him in his burial; or those who ministered after our Lord’s resurrection. Of course, not all women fall into the category. There was Euodia and Syntyche in Phillipi, and they caused the church difficulty there. But, surely, the wise women of Abel Maachah stand out in Scripture as a woman of significant and important influence in the things that concern Scripture. Women are often underestimated, yet, subtly persuasive, as those of us who have loved ones, know.

Well, when we turn to the chapter, I want to deal with it rather lightly and center at the conclusion on something I’ve been underlining on recent days. The revolt under Sheba is described in verses 1 and 2 and as I mentioned, it was caused because of the difficulties between Judah, the kingdom in the south, and the tribes in the north, and exacerbated, no doubt, by the fierce words of the men of Judah. The last sentence of chapter 19 makes the point, “Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.” And those words led to evil results.

When I read something like that, I think of those many texts in the Proverbs, which make the point so beautifully that we need to be careful of the way we use our tongue. A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger. In verse 18 of chapter 15, “A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.”

In chapter 25 in verse 15, to make the point in addition, “By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone.” That’s nice isn’t it? “A gentle tongue breaks a bone.” So if you want to break the bone of the one with whom you are



talking, use a gentle tongue; and it's so important particularly in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Well, the narrator says, “There happened to be there a rebel,” a man of Belial-iysh, a man Belial, a man of Belial. This means something like a rebel, a man of a demon and so Sheba is marked out at the beginning as a man of Belial and he blew a trumpet and called the tribes of the north to rebel against David. “We have no share in David, nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!”

The crowd, as is so often the case, obeys the dictates of one man's inconsistent contemptuous words. This is the man who, obviously, having a leading part in matters had just said above, “We have ten shares in the king,” and, therefore, we have more right to the king than you in the south do. But now he says, “We have no share in David.” Isn't that interesting? They've just said, “We have ten shares in David,” and now he says, “We have no share in David.” And, furthermore, notice how he refers to David. Now, David is the God-appointed, through the prophet Samuel, king of Israel. And what does he call him? Not King David? The son of Jesse. So contemptuously he refers to the king as the son of Jesse, ignoring the fact that he's God's appointed king, and God's appointment has not be cancelled. He's still God's appointed king.

Now, I cannot help but see in this an illustration of the rejection of our Lord's claims as “God's anointed.” There's always in human society some restless, unscrupulous spirit ready to take advantage of differing sentiments and from them to form them into expressions of positive opinion and antagonistic action. In the church and in the body politic, always something like that. And this was an open repudiation of the right of David to exercise kingly authority over the people. But, it's not simply a rejection of David's authority; it's a rejection of God's authority, and that's what we need to keep in mind. It's a rejection of God's authority because it is God who has appointed David and anointed him as the king of Israel. And in it what a beautiful illustration there is of the

ways in which men rebel against the Lord God and, specifically, against Jesus Christ. Let me just try to point them out in a few moments.

Man’s revolt against Christ consists, essentially, of a rejection of the divine claim. Just as Sheba was rejecting the divine claim of David to the kingship, so when men reject the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and call him the Nazarene or call him the “carpenter’s son,” and that’s all, they are really rejecting the beloved and authoritative Son of the Lord God in Heaven, anointed of God at his baptism to be a prince and a savior. The spirit of revolt manifested in Sheba is the same kind of spirit of revolt except magnified against the divine will and the purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ and is the same spirit that manifests itself against every form of modern infidelity whether it is scientific or whether it is simply pure agnosticism or atheism. All is, ultimately, a rejection of divine authority.

A rejection of Jesus Christ’s divine claim proceeds from unbelief in God’s self-revelation of man. Therefore, we have often said that the nature, the precise nature of sin is unbelief and that is what we find here. It is not selfishness. Selfishness is the product of unbelief as well. But the nature of sin is unbelief. And in the case of Sheba, it was unbelief in the divine anointing of David, evidently, a rejection of it. It is as if he regarded Samuel’s anointing of David as king as a fiction and, consequently, he rebels.

Another thing that we can point out to make it clearer, revolt against the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ is sustained by various pleas, as it was in the case of Sheba and David. Men are influenced in action by superficial pleas. For example, in David’s case it might well have been, well, David has made many mistakes. David has been guilty of adultery. David has been guilty of neglecting the affairs of the kingdom and so on. Many different reasons might well have been given for abandoning David’s kingship. But, nevertheless, God had anointed him king and had not canceled that anointing. An ingenious mind, bent on resisting the Lord Jesus Christ, will never lack plausible reasons for rejecting the authority of the Triune God. He can say, “Look at the Christian Church,

can the Christian Church be the product of the will of God with all of the flaws and faults and sins that exist in the Christian church?” And various other types of things can be brought forward as plausible reasons for abandoning the truth of the word of God.

The revolt against Jesus Christ is a course of conduct devoid of positive regulative principles. Let me make the point, because I think it's so important. If divine authority is ignored then what principle is there to determine the destiny of the people of God? If we abandon divine authority, what are we left to? We are left to the conflicting whims and passions of men who contend for supremacy and the grand purpose devised in the mind of God, in eternity past, is no longer significant and important for men. Please remember that. That if you abandon the word of God and you abandon the plans of the eternal Triune God set forth in Scripture, you have nothing of divine authority any longer.

Now, if you like to live that way, then you can live in the uncertainty and weakness of such a view. But those of us who know from the study of the Scriptures and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to our hearts that the Bible is the word of God, do not want to live like that. Individual life, the life of the Church, the life of the people of God would be like a ship, which has no pilot. So that is precisely in smaller form the problem in David's day. If we abandon the anointed king under whom shall we serve?

Now, Sheba wanted to be the individual, but there is no divine authority for that. Now, the campaign that follows is an interesting campaign, of course; interesting because of some of the things that happened. And, incidentally, it suggests to us that David's failures are illustrations or let me put it this way, David's failures are his sins that are finding him out because he's having great difficulty.

Well, he's back in Jerusalem now. He, wisely, cuts himself free of the concubines. He's evidently learned that much, at least. And then he asks Amasa to assemble the men of Judah because he's going to go after Sheba, the son of Bichri. But we read in the 5<sup>th</sup> verse, “So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah. But he delayed longer than the set time.”

This past week I was reading in one of our national newspapers about the procrastinator’s club, a very interesting club. It was born a number of years ago; the president of the club is an individual who has had his clock set at ten thirty for the past two years and it hasn’t changed. He says, “He puts off shoveling his snow until it has melted.” [Laughter] And, furthermore, he says, “He rakes his leaves in the Spring, for the simple reason that if I wait long enough, sometimes they’ll blow on the neighbor’s lawns.” He says, “His wife says he was fifteen minutes late to his own wedding.” He is the founder and president of “The Procrastinator’s Club of America.” Actually, he’s only the acting president, the nominating committee still hasn’t come up with a list of nominees, so we are told. [More laughter]

He’s, incidentally, a former World War II pilot. But he claims that his group has half a million members although only nine thousand have actually gotten around to joining. [More laughter.] This is the group that protested the War of 1812 at the height of Vietnam and not too long ago they tried to put out the Chicago fire. [More laughter.] What interested me was the fact that they finally decided that something should be done about the cracked Liberty Bell, and so they wrote to the White Chapel Foundry in England for a refund, saying, “We got a lemon.” And the British take to that kind of humor very well, you know, and so they said, “They would be happy to offer a refund if they return the bell in its original packaging.” [More laughter.]

Well, I don’t know about Amasa, whether he was one of the original perspective members of the procrastinator’s club, but we do read in verse 5 that he delayed longer than the set time. Perhaps the reason that he delayed is suggested by verse 11, and that is that he was not really whole-heartedly behind David and delayed for that reason. The 11<sup>th</sup> verse seems to me to, perhaps, support that.

But, at any rate, he finally joins the men and Joab is there. And Joab, now, is guilty again of another murder when Amasa approached him and, remember, they are relatives. And he approached him and approaching him as if he was to give him a

friendly greeting, kiss, on his cheek, Joab plunges the sword into his stomach and that's all that's necessary. He is a very, very skilled murderer. This is the third of Joab's murders that we know about in Scripture and, as a matter of fact, he was also implicated in the murder of Uriah. So here is an individual who is a very, very strong person. This is, perhaps, the most malicious of Joab's murders because the only reason is apparently jealousy that Amasa, Amasa had been given the generalship of all of the armies. But one can see here the hardening of the deceitfulness of sin once it begins to take root in the human heart. And, since we probably won't deal with this later on or, perhaps we will, I'm not sure yet, we do know that Joab, himself, will, ultimately, be put to death near this very same spot.

Joab is a most interesting individual. And as I was reading again in a national newspaper this week, there was a cartoon that reminded me of Joab. A man is sitting behind his desk in his office and his secretary is standing by his desk with a piece of paper in her hand. And he says, “Maybe the meek will inherit the earth, but they'll need tough guys like me for executors.” Well, Joab was that kind of individual and not a person to be praised in any way. What Joab illustrates is so true of human nature. That is, you have an individual of great abilities, no doubt remarkable abilities, one can only follow his career and realize he was a remarkable man in many ways. But he was an individual who had, also, a very, very determined will. But on top of that he also had unholy passions and was moved by those unholy passions which moved his will and caused him to do the evil things that he did.

Someone has said, “One of the most formidable illustrations in Scripture of unsanctified power.” To have a strong will is fine, but it must also be moved by the passions that originate in obedience to the will of God. And in Joab's case that was not true. The fire that moved him was the fire that comes from below and not from above.

Someone also said with reference to him, “A being who becomes a Miltonic Satan might be a real Archangel. It's the spirit that makes the one or the other.” And, I think,

of the apostle speaking of the false apostles speaking in his day, who are ministers of righteousness but, fundamentally, are evil men seeking to overthrow the authority of the Lord God in the churches.

The last part of the chapter deals with the wise woman and the heritage of the Lord. The little town of Abel Beth Maachah means “the meadow of the house of oppression.” It was located in the extreme north, above the Sea of Galilee, beyond that, to Lake Huleh or Huleh. And there it sat as an important city in the earlier days of the kingdom.

And so when Joab and his men come looking for Sheba, who has escaped into the city, they, first of all, begin to cast up a siege mound against the city. And those inside the city realized what was going to happen because it was customary in those days, if someone like that was in the city, for them to attack the city, put it under siege. And then, ultimately, to destroy the city and destroy every thing in the city; and so the wise woman realizes that this is not simply a matter of just an attack. But this is something that’s going to mean the destruction of the whole of the city.

And so like the woman of Tekoa, in chapter 14, this woman is a mistress in the art of persuasion and realizing the danger of the city she calls out, “Hear, hear! Please say to Joab, ‘Come nearby that I may speak with you.’” And Joab comes near. She asks him if he is Joab. He identifies himself. And then she speaks. And she says, “You know, Joab, they used to speak in former times and so they would end disputes. Well, “I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel.” And, “You seek to destroy this mother city of Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the Lord?”

So you can see that her argument is based, ultimately, upon what God has determined is His country, His people, His place. And Joab is moved by that. He says, “It’s not true that I have come to swallow up or destroy the city. There’s a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba by name, he has come and if you will just deliver him to us, that’s all that I want, and we’ll leave the city.’ And so, she said to Joab, ‘Watch, his head

will be thrown to you over the wall.’ Interesting women in those days. ‘His head will be thrown to you over the wall.’”

I read something in the paper this week, also, you can see I’ve been spending a lot of time reading the newspaper, a long article about, and the question was, “Are women more ethical?” And I read through the article and, essentially, the article said that perhaps women are more ethical than men. And maybe that’s why we elect all our women mayors, I don’t know.

But here is a woman who is a remarkable woman and a very, very wise one. I also read recently a book in which the author made a little trip around the British Isles, I think mainly around England and Scotland, and he followed the line of the British Isles. I think he did take in Wales and then Scotland. And he wrote his book and it was called, “The Kingdom by the Sea.” It was a little trip that he took on his own and the way in which he did it. And he came to a place called St. Keyne in England, and there is a well there. And the well is very famous. And it is said that the virtue of the water is very significant and, especially, that when a husband and wife are married, the first to come and drink of the water, they get the mastery over the other if they drink the water first. And then Robert Southey, who was a well-known British poet, a friend of Coleridge, wrote a little ballad about this and this is his line that he wrote. He said, he’s telling the story about a man and a wife who were married, and they were contending for the mastery of life. And in the words of the husband, he says, “I hastened as soon as the wedding was done and left my wife in the porch, but in faith she had been wiser than me, for she took a bottle to church!” [Laughter] Wise women. Young people, pay attention. If you ever go near St. Keyne, be sure and drink from it before your wife does.

Well, the woman gains the victory and Joab leaves, and the head of Sheba is thrown over the wall and the problem is resolved. Incidentally, one could talk for a long time about the application that that has to strife within the Christian church because one of the reasons for strife in the Christian church is that so often we are not willing to sit

down and discuss the matters over which we have differences of opinion. And even when we may not gain the way, we usually gain a friend. The true condition of the professed servants of Jesus Christ should be a measure of unity. The breaking out of religious strife is productive of serious mischief; threatens the church in the world with great calamities.

The inheritance of the Lord, as she says, “is laid waste.” “A boar out of the wood doth waste it,” so we read in Psalms. And the cause of religious strife often lies in mutual misunderstanding and neglect of fundamental obligations that we have to each other.

Someone has said, “It’s the duty of persons of reputed wisdom to bring all their influence to bear on the promotion of peace and harmony. A serious injury is inflicted on the church in seasons of trial and conflict when men of character and repute keep in the background and leave the conduct of affairs to inferior minds.” It does take a great deal of grace to be a thorough going Christian. But thorough going Christianity involves just such meetings of minds as comes from earnest discussion in the light of the word of God.

Well, let me close by making a few comments. And I want to say something that I’ve been ringing the changes on recently, and I’ll try not to do it any more. But it’s so important, it seems to me.

The social and psychological aftermath of sexual sins and their divine judgment has great implications for state and church leaders. We’ve said last week that sinful liaisons have repercussions. This narrative, incidentally, in which David’s sin is so predominant and then we see in the flow of David’s life afterwards, a flow downward this is designed to be teaching. This is a didactic narrative from the Old Testament. It’s doctrinal, fundamentally; it’s telling us something about a way of life. And if we miss that we’ve missed a great deal of the account. In fact, the big idea of the section underlines the revolt against God’s word, morally and doctrinally. That’s the fundamental thing.

David is God’s anointed king. He’s not simply son of Jesse. And to react against David is to react against God, ultimately. To not follow the teaching of the divine word



concerning the Lord Jesus Christ is not simply the matter of disagreeing with the Christian church. It's a matter of disagreeing with God. So Christians believe. We are firmly convinced that we have in Holy Scripture the inspired word of God. And if you want to talk about why and wherefore the church, Christian church, holds that view, then the Christian church should honestly sit down and discuss the matter. But you must understand that the Christian church stands on the authority of the Lord God as expressed in his word. And so, consequently, to revolt against Jesus Christ is for believing men a revolt, ultimately, against the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I've made reference recently to the Presbyterian Church of America and the special committee on human sexuality that was appointed by the general assembly to bring back a report. They brought back a report of five or six hundred pages on human sexuality entitled “Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice.” And in the course of this report, it's very plain that the men have suggested such things as monogamous marriage is not the only way in which marriage should take place. That it's perfectly legitimate in justice love for people of the same sex to be married or to be faithfully united to one another. There is also a support for homosexuality as being a legitimate way of life and, furthermore, for the ordination of homosexuals as well; the same kind of thing over and over again, in this lengthy report. All of which has offended a great number of Christians within that denomination as well as Christians of all denominations, for that matter.

Now, I'd like to suggest, just very briefly, that for three reasons this report, which incidentally reflects the leadership, unfortunately, of that denomination, and will give us some idea of the spiritual condition of individuals within our Christian profession and their views concerning the word of God. This particular report, in three ways, to my opinion, is utterly false: First of all, historically and second if I may use a philosophical term, epistemologically, which has to do with knowledge and how we know, and finally, biblically. I suggest, first of all, that we should be suspicious of anything like this for the

simple reason that the Christian church has existed for nineteen hundred plus years and this is a radical departure from the historic church doctrine on sexual ethics. Whenever you have a departure from historic Christian doctrine, one should be suspicious. The Holy Spirit has been teaching for nineteen hundred plus years, given by the Lord Jesus for the specific task of teaching the church, so He said. And down through the years the church has, as a body, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, and others have affirmed the sexual ethics that are set forth in the word of God. But now, today, we are told that that is not only inadequate, but wrong.

Now, we should be suspicious if only on those grounds, historically, it is in effect a rebellion against God and his word. It's a rebellion against the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit; as if he has been teaching us falsehood down through the years, epistemologically. What this is saying, essentially, is the way things are, for that's the ground of this report, we do live this way now. We have to adjust to the way things are in our society. The way things are demands that we modify our views of what should be. In other words, what we are determines what we should be. Sin is defined according to the changing morals of society. That is specifically set forth in that report.

Now, Christianity and specifically reformed Christianity and Believers Chapel stands in that tradition, that is, we stand for the things that characterize the sovereign grace of the Lord God and, specifically, things that have to do with the word of God concerning Christ and concerning the doctrines of the sovereign grace of God. The Christian church and particularly of the reformed side of things, has affirmed “*sola scriptura*.”

Now, you know, that means “by Scripture alone.” In other words, the Scripture is the standard of faith and practice. Whatever we believe, we should be able to support from the word of God or reasonable and legitimate inference from the word of God. But here, this report says “the way things are” demands that we should modify our views of what should be. But we affirm, *sola scriptura*, by Scripture alone.

Karl Barth once said, and he did say some very good things, he once said that individuals of the present day often talk about God, but what they are really talking about is they are talking about man in a loud voice. And he said, “We should not talk about God by talking about man in a loud voice.” But that is precisely what is taking place in this document.

And then, biblically, “The Bible is not the solution,” they have said, “but it is part of the problem.” Its treatment of sin, of sexuality is wrong. And, really, heterosexuality, which we have thought is the legitimate form of sexuality set forth in the word of God, is really today, in their opinion, the means of oppression.

So I suggest to you that historically, epistemologically, and biblically that report reflective of so many denominations today within our Christian profession is fatally flawed. And in it we have individuals talking about what should be by merely talking about “what is” in a loud voice.

The consequences of such revolt is the thing I'd like to underline in a few sentences. They are disastrously incalculable. Without divine authority, no convincing principles that determine our destiny could ever grip our minds. We are left to the mercy of the whims and passions of blind and fallible men. The grand purpose of human existence is lost to view. We are doomed to aimless, chaotic groping. We are, as our friend mentioned, aboard a ship with no pilot. The Lord Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my word shall never pass away.”

The Apostle Peter, citing a text from the Book of Isaiah, in the first chapter of his first epistle, makes these comments, 1 Peter chapter 1 in verse 23.

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

The apostles, the prophets, our Lord affirm the eternity of the word of God.

I was in Portland recently, in the house of a friend of mine where I was holding meetings, Dwight Costas. And looking through some of the books he had in his living room, I saw a little book, a little thin book, and it was “A Brief Life of C. I. Scofield,” the one who edited the Bible that many of you have. And, I pulled it down and was just looking through it. And then I started to read it because it was rather short and rather interesting. And it was a book that was issued in connection with one of the issues of the Scofield Bible, published by The Oxford Press in order to go along with the new edition of the Scofield version, many years ago. It had some things in it about his pastorate here in Dallas, The Scofield Memorial Church, and things like that. But it also had some notes taken from his personal Bible, and this was the thing that interested me. And I noticed a little paragraph. And I copied out some of the things. And one of the things I copied out was a little poem. And the little poem was this.

“I paused last eve beside the blacksmith’s door,  
And heard the anvil ring the vespers chime;  
And, looking in, I saw upon the floor,  
Old hammers worn with bearing years of time.  
“How many anvils have you had,” said I,  
“To wear and batter all these hammers so?”  
“Just one,” he answered. Then with twinkling eye,  
“The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.”  
“And so,” I thought, “The Anvil of God’s Word,  
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon,  
But, though the noise of falling blows was heard,  
The anvil is unchanged, the hammers gone.”

And so down through the years, those who've taken up the hammer against the anvil of the word of God. They're gone. The word of God is still here, still believed by Christians, still stands. And as Jesus said, “Heaven and earth may pass away; but my word shall never pass away.” The ultimate revolt of men against the Lord Jesus Christ is a revolt against this word.

If you are here today, and you have never believed in him, we invite you, again, to reflect in the light of the word of God upon your condition. You're a lost sinner. You have offended a Holy God. You stand under divine condemnation. There is no escape except in Christ. But he has offered an atoning sacrifice for sinners. And the salvation that he has won by the blood that he has shed is offered to you and to all.

May God in his grace touch your heart. May you know truly your lost condition. May you flee to Christ and receive as a free gift, for there is no way you can earn it, eternal life. Come to Christ! Trust in Him!

Let's stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the lessons that come from. We thank Thee for such a sovereign. How marvelous to have a sovereign, so filled with loving kindness and mercy for lost sinners, for such we have been. We thank Thee for the comfort and consolation we have that we belong to Him. With all of our failures and frailties, we depend, Lord, upon Him, who loved us and gave himself for us. And, O God, if there are some here who do not know him, may by Thy grace and the ministry of the Spirit at this very moment they turn to him and take him also as their own savior, too.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.