



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 22:25 – 28:22

“Great Lion of God – Paul in the Midst of the Religious in Jerusalem” TRANSCRIPT

[AUDIO BEGINS] to 23 and verse 22. Our thoughts would no doubt sooner or later lay some stress upon the truth of Romans 8:28 because what we do see in the life of the Apostle Paul in the midst of a great deal of difficulty and trial, we see this divine continuing providence that guarded and guided all of his steps.

There is a marvelous text over in the 37th Psalm that I would like to read. The Psalmist writes, “The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The LORD shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming.” I like that because it lays great stress upon the fact that in the final analysis there is a different destination for the righteous and for the unrighteous. And the Lord God who cares for all of our steps knows exactly what is going to happen when the day of judgment comes. And so consequently, all of the little machinations and rebellions and refusals to submit to the word of God ultimately will be settled at the time in the future when the Lord reveals the secret things of the human heart.

I think that as I think about these last chapters of the Book of Acts in the light of what Luke is trying to do and Paul of course is the chief of the heroes of this part of Acts, is that Luke is anxious to show that Jerusalem is on trial. One notices that the church has faded from view in Acts chapter 21. In fact, Acts chapter 21, verse 18 is the last reference

to the church as a body. The term is not used there, but nevertheless the body seems to be implied. And from that time on through the Book of Acts there are individual believers here and there that are referred to, but the church is passed out of the place of emphasis. And so the historian Luke who is writing this appears to me to be going out of his way to show that Jerusalem, the city of religion, the city of the genuine religion in the past, is on trial. And furthermore, will fall short. And it won't be long before the testimony to Jesus Christ will move its headquarters from Jerusalem to Antioch, never to return again until perhaps in the immediate future to the city of Jerusalem. So Luke is seeking to show us that Jerusalem, on trial, fails.

Now, of course, this has some tremendous implications because Jehovah belongs to Israel, the Lord God. The Messiah, Paul will write to the Romans, was their Messiah. The promises of God in the Old Testament were the promises that he made to Abraham and to his seed. So the promises of God were theirs. In fact, the word of God is theirs.

Now it is true that probably Luke was a gentile. And so we're not suggesting that every book of the Bible was written by a Jew. But the vast majority of the books of the Bible were written by Jews. And even those who were not Jews, such as Luke who wrote Luke-Acts, about a third of the New Testament, Luke, in what he writes about the truth of God, lays great stress upon the fact that it is to Israel that the promises have been made. So it's a momentous thing that Luke is recording. He is letting us know that the home and heart of the divine revelation, the city of Jerusalem, is falling short.

There are so many applications that it would be proper at this point to just use that as a springboard and go into the history of the Christian church and show how often this pattern has been seen in the history of the Christian church. Great promises, great blessings, great movements of the Holy Spirit of God in the blessing of people, initial remarkable response, a lot of zeal and interest and a lot of thrilling responsiveness to the word of God, a great deal of true spiritual joy, a deep desire on the part of many to get the word out to those who have not and then got blessing and the church and the

testimonies growing. And then finally as the word continues to be preached because of the nature of the human heart there is a cooling off process. We lose our first love, even the church. In Ephesus for example, lost its first love in about forty years from the time the apostle was used to bring them to the knowledge of Christ. And that is what goes on in the propagation of the gospel. It's a tremendous revelation of the nature of man. To me that is the thing that shines out more than anything else, the nature of the human heart is rebellious toward God. And oh how believers should, as Barnabas taught the Christians in Antioch, “Cleave unto the Lord with a conviction that through many tribulations they would enter into the kingdom of God.” One can look at Paul's experiences as just an illustration of it.

Now Paul is going to make his defense before the council in Jerusalem. And his defense that he makes in these several chapters revolves around three points. First of all, he says, “In blood, I am like you. In training, I am like you. In zeal, I was what you are. I persecuted the doctrine that I now hold.” Notice chapter 22 in verse 2 and following.

“(And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.”

So he points out that he's no different from them in background. But then in order to explain what has happened because after all one must have an explanation for the fact that Paul stands now as an adherent of the despised sect of the Nazarenes. There

must be some reason for this. And so Paul, in the next few verses, beginning at the 6th verse of chapter 22 and going through the 16th verse explains what it is that has moved him away from being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, embracing the law and all of the things that those men who are listening to him embrace to a follower of Jesus Christ. And he says, “It is because I was met by the Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus road.” That is the only thing that can explain this tremendous transformation that has taken place.

Now those of you that are students of Paul’s letters will know that this is the point he makes in Galatians chapter 1. He says, “I have a revelation from God. I did, as far as my progress in Judaism was concerned, I advanced in it more than any of my contemporaries. But something happened to me. And that is the only thing that can explain my present position. It was a revelation from God. That is responsible for my change. Nothing else can explain it.”

Now if it were true that the apostle went off to the library in Alexandria to study for ten years and came back thinking that, “Well, maybe Judaism was not what it claimed to be,” that might be something with which we would have to engage ourselves. But you can see this was immediate. This was a journey to Damascus. And suddenly the one who was persecuting them is within a relatively short time, two or three days, is now preaching the faith that he once wasted, as he said. So there isn’t anything that can really explain the transformation of the Apostle Paul, but the fact that he had a divine revelation. That’s why he speaks about this so often. Luke not only gives us three accounts of his conversion in the Book of Acts, but Paul constantly refers to it. For example, in Philippians, he said he was apprehended by the Lord. He was snatched by him and brought down. It’s a verb that sportswriters would use when football season comes along because it’s a verb that means to take or seize. And it’s katalambano. And kata is a preposition that has fundamentally the sense of down. So it’s to seize and grasp and bring down. Something I hope a lot of cowboys do this whole fall. But that’s the figure.

He was apprehended by the Lord. He was tackled and brought down when he was trying to make a touchdown against the early Christians.

Now that’s not precisely set out in the New Testament. You understand, football is not found there. But the idea is certainly there.

Now the third thing that the apostle says in his defense, we looked at it last week, is that he was sent unwillingly to the Gentiles. And remember along about verse 19 and 20 the apostle says, “And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.” So here he is. He’s one hundred percent, in fact, the leader of the Jews who are persecuting Christianity. And then we read, “He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.” In other words, “It wasn’t my idea. I never would have gone to the Gentiles.” In Galatians he calls them “sinners of the Gentiles.” In other words, the term gentile is equivalent to sinner because the Gentiles didn’t observe the law. So they were sinners. So the apostle’s defense is then, “I was one of you. You cannot explain what has happened to me by natural means. Only the divine revelation, the encounter with Jesus Christ adequately explains it. And furthermore, I was not willingly sent to the Gentiles. That wasn’t my idea at all. It was the idea of the Lord himself.”

Well, as we said last week when the work Gentiles came and the gospel was to go to them, well the listeners reached the end of their patience. And so we read in verse 22, “And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.” In other words, let’s murder him. His life should be snuffed out.

Now in the remainder of chapter 22 there is a little incident in which it becomes obvious that the Apostle Paul was protected by his Roman citizenship. Let’s just read after

verse 23 and following. “And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air.”

Now mind you these are the religious people of the day. These are not your ordinary rabble. These are the priests and the Sadducees and Pharisees, the scribes, the students of the Bible. And if you don't think that students of the Bible who are on the wrong track can be as malicious as these men, you have not had much acquaintance with preachers and teachers and professors and leaders in denominational headquarters. And furthermore, lest you think therefore it doesn't take place in independent churches let me remind you that they are just like the others. Just like them. So this is very revealing, very revealing. Every Christian ought to have their perception of spiritual things sharpened by reading something like this.

“And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. (He thought, of course, that somebody's hiding something that he doesn't know about). And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by (Isn't it interesting, the centurions who were Romans in every place in the New Testament in which a centurion is mentioned he is looked at as a very noble kind of character. I can remember when I was studying Latin reading about centurions. And I read about some centurions that weren't so noble. But nevertheless, all in the Bible who appear appear in a very good light. It's almost as if God is saying this is what civil authority should be. It should be sure to give itself to the maintenance of law and order. But anyway), as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, or a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, you better look out, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. And the chief captain came, and said

unto him, Tell me, are you a Roman? And he said, Yes. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. (In other words, I paid for my citizenship which was a legal way to do. Just like today if you go to Switzerland many of the cantons, if you want to live in Switzerland they might ask you to divvy up anywhere from ten thousand to seventy-five or a hundred thousand dollars just to begin the process of becoming a citizen. And then after ten years in some of the cantons you can become a citizen, having paid all of that money. So they like their citizenship over there. And I once had the thought of transferring my citizenship there until I found out what it cost. And then I said I really love the United States of America. [Laughter] So anyway, he said that), he had bought his. And Paul said, But I was free born. (In other words, his father was a Roman citizen as well). Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. (He had already broken the law). On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.”

Now Paul is going to appear before the council. And it certainly is revealing too. Now mind you the apostle is not going to get any fair hearing if you look at the history of the council. This incidently, this council in Jerusalem is composed of individuals, no doubt many of them who were on the council that passed on the Lord Jesus Christ. They were on the council that passed on Stephen. And they are going to be the ones now who are going to pass on the Apostle Paul. And I can imagine him looking out and, no doubt, there have been some changes in the council, but some of those men were still there. And as he looked out he said, “You know, I don’t think I’m going to stand too much of a chance before this group of people unless the Lord intervenes directly because these are

the people that put to death the Lord Jesus Christ and they've stoned Stephen. And I have a hunch that they might like to do the same thing to me.”

Now this was a very important point and time in the history of the nation and the history of the council because Israel's final and supreme hour appears to have come.

Now in one sense that came at the cross because when they said, “We have no king but Caesar,” and aligned themselves with the Romans they gave up their claim, though they would never have done it except to get rid of someone they didn't like, they gave up their claim to be the divinely chosen nation. They gave up their claim to have the truth of God and the messianic promises. But they were so anxious, so angry at Jesus Christ that they said, “We have no king, but Caesar.” And what I think is so interesting about it too is that when they denied him they had to deny themselves in order to deny him. And what they feared most of all was to lose their standing among the Romans. And the very maneuver that they schemed and mentioned and sought to follow through is the thing that ultimately caused their downfall.

One studies the history of Jerusalem and learns that that is exactly what caused their difficulty. Well, at any rate, Jerusalem is to have another chance. And her important hour has come again. And what will they do? And the apostle now is going to address them. And we read in verse 1, and Paul earnestly beholding the council said,

“Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. (He's not saying, of course, that he was a sinless man. He's simply saying he sought to keep the law). And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. (Now that would give him a little idea about the justice that he was going to get at this hearing). And then said Paul unto him, “God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?”

Notice that clause, “God shall smite thee.” In other words, the apostle’s decision while he may have made it in a slightly different sense is the thing that ultimately was carried out. He spoke as a prophet here. God did smite him. Ananias’ history, this incidentally is not the Ananias who was the high priest, or at least the father of high priest, father-in-law, when Caiaphais was high priest, but a later Ananias who lived in the forties. But at any rate, the apostle said, “God shall smite thee, thou whited wall,” because he was breaking the law in what he was doing.

Now that’s an interesting expression, “whited wall,” isn’t it? Do you know what that means? You probably do, maybe even better than I. But it was the custom then and it’s the custom now for a wall that was tottering. And you didn’t want to really go to the trouble of really fixing it, so you would whitewash it and make it look like it was a nice wall. You know like a person is going to sell a house. He knows that the foundation’s bad, that there are cracks throughout the place. And he hopes, of course, that people come and won’t see them. But he paints his house. And you know what else he does? He goes out and cuts his grass, maybe the first time in six or eight months that he has, cuts down the weeds, cleans it up and so on. But it’s the same old house. It just has a new kind of exterior to it. And so the apostle by this figure refers to a wall that was just about to topple. There’s some right out here in Dallas, right down near here. If you just drive down Hillcrest and look over to the right about six or eight blocks down, you’ll see a wall that’s leaning about like that. I’ve been telling Martha as we pass by, “I wonder when that thing is going to fall.” But they haven’t whitewashed it yet, so maybe it’s stronger than I think. But the apostle calls them a hypocrite. That’s just his way of saying, “You are a hypocrite.”

Now Ananias, I said, ultimately is destroyed. Ananias’ history may be detailed in this way. Ananias was a notorious character. He was notorious as a glutton. He was a thief. He was a rapacious robber. And furthermore he was a quisling in the service of Rome. So all of the time that he was serving as a high priest, he was actually standing for

Rome. So those of us who lived through World War II know what the word quisling means. He was a traitor. That comes out later on and ultimately he met his death at the hands of an assassin in 66 AD. Paul's answer is stronger than “God shall smite thee, thou whited wall” because he said, “For sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?” He's referring to simple teaching in the Old Testament that said that one was not to revile the ruler of the people or to revile the chief ruler of the people. And then also one should not smite another one without charge. That is, without proper charges made. Both of these things will appear here. So Paul announces God's decision in the case of Ananias in a prophetic kind of utterance. Whether he knew that at the time or not, I don't know. But we know that “Pride goeth before destruction, and (I wrote this in small print. You understand it's real small, but), and a haughty spirit before a fall.” It looked like humanity and I knew that was wrong. [Laughter] So Ananias is an illustration of that. And then when, “They stand by and say, Revilest thou God's priest?” Of course, that was something that he was not to do from the passage in Exodus. And so Paul says, “I knew not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.”

Now that's an interesting statement. And a great deal of discussion has taken place over it in the commentaries on the Book of the Acts and in the lives of the Apostle Paul. Was he really making an apology? If he was really making an apology saying, “I made a mistake. I didn't really know that he was the high priest.” Then we'd have to assume that his eyesight was worse than mine. That is, that he didn't even recognize the person who was standing so close to him to smite him as being the high priest. That's possible because we do know that there is a great deal of discussion over Paul's “thorn in the flesh” and many feel it was some eye trouble, some form of eye trouble. And that's a possible interpretation. On the other hand, he may have spoken it ironically. He may have said, “I didn't know that he was the high priest.” In other words, “I didn't realize a person who could do something like that could actually serve as high priest.” And then

there are others, and I tend to follow the others liking these tougher interpretations naturally, I tend to think it was a charge.

And I think that what he was really saying was, “I didn’t know that such a person as this could be a high priest.” And he is to be condemned for what has taken place because “Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.” Or rather, previously, he was “smitten contrary to the law.” In other words, “You should not do anything with reference to me until you have brought me before authorities and judge my case.” In other words, he’s thinking about Deuteronomy chapter 25, verse 1 and 2 which says that “No one is to charge any Israelite except in the presence of witnesses.” So I rather think the apostle was speaking very strongly and saying, “To think, this is the kind of person who is a high priest. He breaks the law by not carrying out the things that he should carry out in the judging of a man.”

Now when Paul perceived and Paul was – Paul was an extremely intelligent and quick individual. This little altercation which began things probably gave him time to give judgment with regard to the crowd and size them up. And so he looked around and he saw some of his old Sadducee friends there and he saw some of his old Pharisee friends over here. And he saw a lot of the scribes. They were generally speaking Pharisees, but they could be Sadducees. But most of the scribes were Pharisees. So he looked out there and he knew he was in deep water. And one of the nicest things that he could do since he wanted if he possibly could to get out of this in a legal way, he just said, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee.” Well, that immediately divided the audience because they were Sadducees and Pharisees. But further, he goes on to speak of one of the choice doctrines of the Pharisees, which the Sadducees hated. Notice, he says, “I am the son of a Pharisee: and of the hope and resurrection from the dead I am called in question.”

Now let me stop for just a moment and remind you. The Pharisees believed in the minutiae of the oral law. The Sadducees were the politicians. They were what we would call secular theologians. They were like many of our liberal theologians today who are

largely interested in politics, or at least denominational affairs. They did not believe in the resurrection. The Pharisees believed in the minutiae of the oral law; the Sadducees only accepted the written law.

Now the Pharisees had built up a lot of interpretation of the written law. And they believed the law and the tradition. The Pharisees, thinking they could support their position better, were actually saying to them, “No, we don’t accept your tradition. We just take the Bible, the Old Testament.” Well, they only said that because it was helpful to them in their position. They are not fundamentalists who say, “We believe in the Bible.” No, they have a different interpretation of it entirely. The Pharisees believed in fate and predestination. And you notice the way in which they believed in predestination. They had the extreme view of predestination that one finds in Mohammadeanism, for example, today. And, on the other hand, the Sadducees believed in free will. The Pharisees believed in angels and spirits. The Sadducees did not. In other words, the Pharisees believed there was such a thing as the intrusion of the supernatural into the affairs of life. And above all, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead. And the Sadducees did not. So he says,

“I’m a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: and of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees’ part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man.”

Now that’s extremely interesting. Incidentally, I don’t think that this was simply a clever ruse on the part of the Apostle Paul. What he is doing is he is saying to them, “Let’s take the issue out of the realm of the little ceremonies whether I observe certain

features of the Mosaic Law, let's take it to the real issue, the hope of the resurrection of the dead. And that's why, ultimately, he did it. It wasn't simply to escape with his skin. He would ultimately come to ask the question, “Was Jesus the risen Messiah?” And this would be along the way to it to confess the fact of the resurrection.

Now the Pharisees say, “We find no evil in this man.” Here is a man that is so sound in the central truth of theology that he couldn't be as bad at heart as people say that he is. He is kind of the way they are saying because they're able to win the argument with the Sadducees. And at this point, they're willing to let Paul go if it could be established that the belief in the resurrection is a genuine belief.

So this reminds me of a statement made back in Luke chapter 20 and verse 30. And I'd like you to turn over there because the experiences of Paul are so similar to the experiences of our Lord that it's really remarkable. Luke chapter 20 and verse 39, “Then certain of the scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said.” Remember the question was the resurrection. They came to him on the day of questions and said, “If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. There were therefore seven brethren (remember): and the first took a wife, and she died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. (And so on down to the seventh). And lastly the woman died, (we read in verse 32. Therefore, they put him to the test with this conundrum). In the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife. Now the Lord Jesus said, You've got an entirely wrong idea about life in heaven. The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they that shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham,

and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto him.”

Now notice how the Pharisees answer. “Then certain of the scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said.”

Now you would think that their only motive in saying that was just simply to acknowledge he is scriptural on this point. But there's more lying back of it. You see that's the point at issue between them and the Sadducees. And in a moment he will deal, of course, with all of the other ancillary questions. But that reminds me, here in Acts chapter 23, it reminds me of that experience of our Lord when people confess the scriptural nature of a certain point in order to support their position. Not because it's fundamentally the word of God. But it supports our position. Sort of like if you want to argue with a Calvinist or an Armenian, and if there's some argument that might support your view you would say, “Yes, that's a good argument,” when it may be a fallacious argument. But nevertheless it supports your position. And so you're willing to let it stand. That's a form of dishonesty, really. So here they are dishonest. They don't really like the law. But at this point they want to establish a doctrine. So they say, “We find no evil in this man.” And so Luke continues,

“And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him.”

The worst fears that the apostle might have had seem to be coming to pass. When he wrote the Epistle to the Romans before this he had said, “Pray for me when I get to Jerusalem that I might be delivered from the evil doers there.” And here as he thinks

about his prayers he would say, “Well, perhaps the Lord is not going to answer affirmatively that petition that I prayed a number of times as I was making the collection for the saints.” And so the Lord stands by him there in the midst of his fears of what was coming to pass. He’s been insulted. He is frustrated. He is abandoned by the church. You don’t read anything here about “Let’s have a prayer meeting for the Apostle Paul. So far as we know he’s standing on his own before the council.” No one comes to help him out. But fortunately in situations like this we do have someone to whom we can go. In fact, the writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews puts it this way in the 4th chapter and the 14th verse of his epistle. And this is something to remember when we come into difficult times and there’s nobody around to lean on the writer of the epistle says,

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

So evidently the apostle was there. And during the night the Lord stood by him. I like that statement, “The Lord stood by him.” And he said to him, “Be of good cheer, Paul.”

Now that’s a difficult thing to follow through on, isn’t it? “Remember Jewry is under me. And also remember that Jerusalem and Rome are under me too. There are no unfinished lives for the faithful saints.” Let us remember that. There are no unfinished lives. All of the lives of the saints accomplished the purpose of the Lord God that he had in them in saving us and sanctifying us and sustaining us. His purposes are accomplished. So the Lord stood by him. That’s tremendous. Wesley said, “I’m immortal

until my work is done.” That is true. One has said, “The God of eternity is the God of the hour.” And so the Lord, who is the eternal Lord, stood by him.

I wish I had time to talk about Jacob, but we’ve had a lot of talk about that over the past three or four years. And it’s not necessary. Just think of Jacob’s experiences and how he finally came to the place in the midst of his trials and said, “All these things are against me.” And the very time when he said, “All these things are against me,” was the time when everything was working for his good. Joseph, the son he lost, he thought was gone and dead; he is the prime minister in Egypt. Simeon, whose hell down there is in the hands of the second most important man in the land of Egypt. And the hand that was reaching for Benjamin, who was remember Joseph’s blood brother, the last connection that Jacob had with Rachel, his beloved Rachel, well the hand that was reaching out for Benjamin is the hand of his blood brother, who, when they finally come will weep like a baby on the shoulders of the brothers who condemned him to imprisonment and they thought death. So and that’s the very time Jacob is saying, “All these things are against me.” There’s never anything against the saints, ultimately. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” That’s a text that has great doctrinal significance. But it has great practical significant too. And let us remember in the experiences of life we can count upon him.

Now further he says, “The Lord stood by him, and he spoke, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem.” He would be giving a similar kind of testimony in Rome.

Now I think that that further confirms the fact that Paul was right in going to Jerusalem because God approved of his testimony. He said, “Just as you have testified of me here in Jerusalem, so you shall testify of me in Rome.” So this is an approval of the fact that Paul said, “God shall smite thee, thou whited wall.” It’s an approval of his saying in the midst of this crowd, “I’m a Pharisee bringing consternation and dissension in the midst of the crowd.” And third, he says, “So must thou bear witness also at Rome.” In

other words, “Paul, you have further work to do for me. So don’t worry about what they’re going to do here.”

The Christian is to live in the witness of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We know the greatness of his love. We know the cleansing power of his blood. We also know the stirring at impulse of the life of God in us, the life of Christ in us. And we are to be witnesses in the midst of our society. There’s really hardly any joy like that of the witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, to think that I have been used by God in marvelous grace to give testimony.

Now I’m going to tell something on Merrill. He may not like this. But we were eating just before this meeting and he’s here. He and Roberta have just been in North Carolina, close to God’s country, but nevertheless not quite. And they were in Monroe, North Carolina not too far from, I guess, Rock Hill and the beloved country. And they were there for a wedding of a member of their family. And Merrill was not performing the wedding, but as most of you know he is a former Methodist minister and was actually an assistant at the Lovers Lane Methodist Church for some years here in the city of Dallas. Something happened to him, but this will transpire in the conversation. So they were being married in the First Presbyterian Church because, as I understand it, the Methodist church was having some repairs. So the Methodist minister who was relatively new in the community at Monroe was performing the ceremony. And so someone, I think the brother-in-law of Merrill said to the Methodist minister, not realizing what he was saying, “Merrill here is a former Methodist minister too.” And so the Methodist minister said to him, “Oh, you were. Well, are you one now?” He said, “No, I’m not one now.” “Well, what happened?” He said, “Well, I got saved.” [Laughter] And Roberta said she began to feel a little tension there. [Laughter] And so Merrill just goes on and gives his testimony.

Now that is good witnessing, tremendous. I am so proud of you Merrill because I know what it costs to give a testimony like that in the midst of your family and friends. And in a sense it was a condemnation of things. And as I understand it, I need to get this

straight, but I think Roberta said this. That in the course of the conversation Merrill just said, “The church was just drifting away from the gospel.” And the young man, or the relatively young man, said, “But there are winds of change in our denomination.” And Merrill said, “Yes, you’re going farther away from the truth.” [Laughter] So, there is a tremendous value in being bold and Christian witnessing. And who knows, but God may have planted just a little seed in the life of that individual. And maybe five or ten years from now, maybe a few months from now, of course, he may realize that there is something different from the New Testament in the particular group. But at any rate, Paul is told as the Lord stands by, “Be of good cheer, as thou hast testified here, you shall testify in Rome. You must bear witness of him there.”

Now then the final part of the chapter and our time is about up. In the final part of the chapter we read of a Jewish plot against the apostle’s life. And I’m going to read through it. Since our time is up we don’t have time to deal with it in detail. And I don’t think it needs dealing with in detail. Just simply to say this, that there were people in Paul’s day like the PLO, like the Armenians who are extremely violent towards the Turks. And furthermore, there was the Jewish Defense League in those days just as there is today. Human nature is really the same. Listen.

“And when it was day (this is verse 12), certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. (It’s too bad these fellows died of starvation later on. But it’s not recorded in Scripture, of course. I can imagine them doing that). And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. (You know you cannot do anything when the Lord stands behind one of his servants. You can use all of the instrumentality of human warfare, but it will not succeed). Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him

down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, if every he become near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's sister's son (Isn't that interesting, Paul's sister's son? Paul had a little nephew. It's just a little boy, happened to be standing in the right place, these accidents of divine providence. The little boy happened to be standing nearby), Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain (Mind you this young fellow. How old he was, I'm not sure, but relatively young. Here he gets to appear before the chief captain), and he said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto him, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately (I would imagine that by taking him by the hand that would indicate he was just a little lad), and said, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from Thee. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter after this manner.”

We'll save that for the next time. Well, I'll begin by saying that what we have here is a beautiful illustration of diving providence. And one can see it here. For unbelievers,

everything that happens to unbelievers is within the providence of God too. Jerusalem is weighed in the balances and found wanting. The theocracy which had denied the Lord Jesus Christ and in denying him had denied themselves. And now in this, one of the last opportunities is denying the teaching the apostle preaches. Soon 70 AD will come and the theocracy will perish with the Romans. There is no hope for any man who rejects the love of Jesus Christ. And then, of course, for believers there is the providential presence of the overruling Lord. What G. Campbell Morgan used to call the “supernaturalism of the natural.” That little boy in the right place at the right time because God had put him there.

You know there is a story. I think I’ve told it on the theology tapes I’m sure in connection with the doctrine of providence. But I remember this very well. It happened in Dallas Seminary Chapel many years ago. In fact, it was in 1950. So that’s thirty-three years ago. There was a man by the name of Tom Olsen who used to write tracts. He was a business man for some time and then a well known preacher and an excellent preacher and noted particularly for the vast amounts of Scripture that he had memorized. And he gave his message with a lot of authority too. He was the imposing figure, a tall, strong looking man. And he spoke in chapel at the seminary one day. And I’ve forgotten the general thrust of his message. I remember it was a lot of Scripture. But I remember one story that he told. He wondered, he said, what would ever happen to him if he would be held up by a robber or a thief. And finally he said he was held up by four men. He said one held a pistol against his heart, another shined a flashlight into his face, another searched his pockets and a fourth stood guard. He said the man who was searching his pockets came across a little book and said, “What’s this?” And Mr. Olsen said, “It’s the Bible.” And he said the man dropped the Bible and all four of them ran. [Laughter] And...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]

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