



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 1:1-18

"The Silence Broken"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Christmas is not a day in which we remember and think and meditate upon the material but upon the spiritual facts of life, and particularly upon the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who to us represents the truly spiritual and the truly significant things of our human existence. We are greatly pleased to have so many of you who are visitors here visiting your families, and we hope that our time together has been of profit to you. I look around and I see some of the college students who are here on their vacation time having just finished a semester, and you can tell by looking in their faces the increase in intelligence [laughter] that manifests itself, the confidence with which they are facing life for they have not received their grades for the last semester yet. [laughter] And we are especially grateful for them.

Some of you perhaps have never attended a meeting such as we have. What we have sought to do in Believers Chapel is to have as close a representation as is possible for us to the meetings that the early church held. And therefore in the meetings men are free to express themselves in the ministry of the word of God and the giving of

thanks in the calling out of hymns for singing, and in other ways in which Christians give testimony and worship together. So far as we can tell the early church even into the centuries that followed for some time on every Lord's day observed the Lord's Supper. So, perhaps, at least you've had some indication of how the early church conducted its meetings.

Now when the apostle was in Troas Luke tells us in the 7th verse of that 20th chapter of the Book of Acts, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." [Laughter] I want you to rest assured that I am not going to follow the apostolic example and preach until midnight. I once jokingly said to a person that I thought that perhaps I would do that, and that person very quickly said, "You are not Paul." [Laughter] But at any rate, don't worry I'm not going to do that. What I would like to do is to read a passage from the word of God and make a few comments on the key parts of this passage and speak on the subject, "The Silence Broken."

John chapter 1 verse 1 through verse 18 is the Scripture passage. I'll read through it and then I will make a few comments upon it. It's one of the great passages of the word of God, without question, it's the prologue to, what is for many, their favorite gospel, the Gospel of John. The apostle writes,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light

of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

It's one of the reasons, incidental reasons, that we feel confident John the Apostle wrote this because saying, "Whose name was John," since he was such a well known figure of the early church, it's obvious that he would not have written it this way were he not the apostle, calling John the Baptist simply John.

"The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee and praise Thee for the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the way in which through the pages of holy Scripture, the prophets, the Psalmist, and others set the stage for his coming by giving the preparatory words concerning the Messiah. And we thank Thee for the development of that word and for the way in which through the Law of Moses Thou didst seek to prepare the hearts of men for the reception of someone who would save them from their sins. We thank Thee Lord for the provision that Thou hast made for the infinite majesty of the planning of our triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Father who initiated the plan, the Son who executed it, and the Spirit who administers it in our day bringing men to the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal. Surely, Lord, as we reflect upon these great facts, we cannot help but as the Psalmist expressed the majesty of our great God. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth.

We give Thee thanks for the other blessings of life that are ours through the Holy Spirit today, as he guides and directs the children of God, fashioning them ultimately to be like him who gave himself for them. We thank Thee Lord for the privilege of approaching Thee through our representative the Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest.

And Father, we pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ. Especially at this time of the year, may our thoughts reflect the great truths of holy Scripture. Deliver us from the things that would lead us to the things of the world, and may our appreciation for divine truth and the divine purpose grow as the days go by.

We pray for our country. We ask Thy blessing upon the President, upon others in our government, the state and local governments as well.

And Father, we pray for Believers Chapel and its ministries. We pray that by Thy grace Thy blessing may be upon the radio ministry, the tape ministry, upon other forms of outreach, upon the staff here, upon our elders and deacons and the members and the friends and the visitors who are here with us today. We pray Thy blessing upon them.

And Lord, a special prayer we offer on behalf of those who have requested that we pray for them, those who are sick and who have other difficulties. Give healing Lord, as it pleases Thee. Glorify Thy name in their lives and in ours as well.

Be with us now through this service. May the Lord Jesus Christ be exalted in it. We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] "The Silence Broken." Job has expressed something of the longing for the human heart of the knowledge of God when he wrote, "Oh that I knew where I might find him that I might come even to his throne." John the Apostle recounting the words and works of the Lord Jesus Christ makes the stupendous claim that the knowledge of Jesus Christ is the knowledge of God. Our Lord, of course, made that same comment in John chapter 8 and verse 19 and then again in John chapter 14 verse 9, he makes it very plain that when one sees him, one sees the Father.

William Canon, a bishop in the Methodist church, in our day, at least my day, once wrote, "Jesus of Nazareth is all we know of God and yet all we need to knowledge." Well perhaps that's not fully correct, that is there is more to the knowledge of God than is represented by that statement. But nevertheless it's not far wrong. "Jesus of Nazareth is all we know of God and yet all we need to know."

One of the interesting things about Christianity however is that even though the Lord Jesus said, "To see and know me is to know the Father," that there is no indication there was ever a desire to raise up a Jesus cult in Christianity. Our Lord and the apostles sought to bring us to the worship of the Father. The Lord Jesus himself says that "Worship is worship of the Father." He may make it plain that that worship is ultimately through him but he wanted to bring men to the knowledge and worship of the Father, as the mediatorial Son that's to be expected. He was carrying out his mission of trying to bring men to the knowledge of the Lord God and to the worship of the Father.

The Apostle Paul follows along in Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 18 in a passage that probably many of you are acquainted with. He said, "For through him," that is, through the Lord Jesus Christ, "We both Jews and Gentiles have access by one Spirit unto the Father." So the aim of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ was to bring men to the knowledge of the Father. We do not have in Christianity an independent cult of Jesus. We have the revelation of the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ and the worship of God in the ministry of the triune God, the Father who sent the Son, the Spirit who empowered the Son for his mediatorial ministry, and the Son who carried it out in his death upon the cross at Calvary.

The Jewish people with whom the Lord Jesus had contact ask him a question. They said, "Where is Thy Father?" the Lord Jesus often speaking about him. In John chapter 8 and verse 19, "Where is Thy Father?" Produce him. Let's have some tangible evidence of what you're talking about. But to ask the question, "Where is Thy Father?" is to disclose an incapacity to receive the answer. The light is shining fully upon them in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and to say, "Where is Thy Father?" with the light

shining upon them in their presence is to confess unwittingly and unknowingly that they cannot see the light in their present state.

Well the apostle in the beginning of this great Gospel of John speaks about the word of God. Of course, our Lord Jesus is in mind. In the first 5 verses, he speaks of the word in eternity and among men. No book ever opened more magnificently than the Gospel of John. If you think of the other synoptic gospels, for example, Mark begins his gospel at the river Jordan, Matthew and Luke begin their gospel, both of them at Bethlehem, but John begins his gospel in eternity. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

We don't have time to deal in detail with these great statements which clause by clause would demand the best that any expositor or exegete could give them, but I simply point out that when John says, "In the beginning was the word," he's saying in his own way that the word of God is eternal. "In the beginning was the word." And when we think of the word of God with the Father in heaven, we are thinking about the eternal sanctuary of the living God. When Arius, the well known heretic said, "There was a time when the word was not," John's words were used among others in the early church to refute the heresy. "In the beginning was the word." The Son is the eternal Son of God.

Now secondly he says, "The word was with God." That is, the word possessed a community of interest, enjoyed a community of interest with the Father. He was in company with the Father. "The word was with God." And the kind of language that the apostle uses suggests he was, he is, he ever will be with the Father, or in company with the God who is the Father in this context.

And finally he says, "And the word was God." The deeds and the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are the deeds and words of God. And let me say to you this that if that is not true then the things that are said in the Gospel of John would be regarded as blaspheme. The deeds and the words of Jesus of Nazareth are the deeds and words of God. And if that is not true, we have blaspheme in this particular work.

John goes on to talk about the work of the word in verses 3 and 4. We won't talk about that. He says, "All things were made by him," so he is the one through whom the creation came into existence. "Without him was not any thing made that was made." And further he states in the 4th verse, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." So he is the one who performs the work of creation. He's the one who performs the work of revelation. In fact, this gospel could be called simply, "The Revelation of the Father through Jesus Christ the Son." His life was the light of men. Now men, of course, did not respond. Some did, as we shall see, but nevertheless the light shown

And finally he states in the 5th verse, "And the light shineth in darkness." The darkness is humanity into which the second person of the trinity came. "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness was unable to overpower it." In other words, the light is ultimately that which overcomes the darkness. He calls himself the light of the world in the 8th chapter. And the light ultimately is victorious in the ministry of revelation.

In the next section, verses 6 through 18, John describes the word in history and particularly among the Jews. He states,

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. John came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all men through him might believe. (He's careful to point out) He's not the light, (Jesus is the light, but) he was a witness of that light. (For the Lord) was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, (John says) and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."

What a picture that gives us of the blindness and darkness of this world of which you and I are a part. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Among his own people, the Lord Jesus was not received. However there were some, a minority. "As many as received him, (John says) to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The mission of the Lord Jesus Christ was a mission in which the majority turned away from him and did not respond, but nevertheless it was not a failure. And there were those who came to believe in his name born of God. John simply says human volition is not the source of the birth.

Ambrose Bierce, the American satirist, once said that every time a woman has twins you have absolute proof that there is no free will. So, here when he says that men were born, some were born of God, not of blood, not of the will of man, not of the will of flesh, he is telling us that salvation is a sovereign activity of the Lord God by which men come to know him.

And finally in the last section in 14th through verse 18, the apostle expounds the word in history and among believers. You'll notice as we read through this that the

prologue turns personal now, the third person being supplanted in part by the first person. We read in verse 14, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." This is what we celebrate especially at Christmas time. We celebrate the word becoming flesh. The word of whom John has said in verse 1, "Was with God," "Was in the beginning," and "Was God." And so this word, he states, "Became flesh." Dorothy Sayers once said, "If this is dull that is the incarnation, then what in heaven's name can be called exciting?" "The word became flesh," took to himself human nature, is the sense of it.

Now when we read this, we're not talking about transubstantiation, that is when the second person took to himself--incidentally I'm not using that in the sense of the term that it has in connection with discussions of the Lord's Supper--when we read, "The word became flesh," we do not mean that he was no longer the word, that he was no longer the second person of the trinity. We mean simply that he took to himself, assumed, another nature. Not only does he have a divine nature, he has a human nature. So he is not speaking about anything that might be called transubstantiation.

He's not even suggesting by any means that there is any alternation in the trinity, that is the trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, still after the incarnation, is the trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But he is saying this, that there has been a modification in the form in which the trinity exists. That is, we have the Father, and we have the Spirit, and we have the Son, but now the Son is a God-man, the God-man, the God who possesses a human nature as well as a divine nature. And one of the most magnificent and most wonderful things that could possibly happen in the history of humanity, creation and humanity is that our Lord's assumption of a human nature is not

for a time. It is for eternity. The Lord Jesus Christ taking to himself human nature, wedding himself to human nature, for time and for eternity, always the God-man, always the lamb, always the one who in his human nature and moved by the divine personality carried out the saving work, the work of the atonement on Calvary's cross. "Great is the mystery of godliness," the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and it is surely true. So we have then a God-man.

What an amazing thing that is. Nothing could be more significant. A man can have two forms of consciousness, yet with only one self-consciousness; we can feel cold with our bodies while at the same time we may pray to God with our mind. These two forms of conscience experience are diverse and distinct. We do not pray with our bodies, nor do we feel cold with our minds, but this doubleness and distinctness in the consciousness does not destroy the unity of our self-consciousness. So, Jesus Christ is a God-man kind of person.

As we say in theological class room, he is a theanthropic person, a God-man. And he was constituted and is constituted I should say of a divine nature and a human nature. The divine nature has its form of experience like mind in an ordinary person and the human nature has its form of experience like body in a common man. The experience of the divine nature is as diverse from those of the human nature as those experiences of the mind are from those of the human body. Yet there is just one subject ego of both of these experiences. When Christ is conscious of weariness and thirst by the well with the woman of Samaria he was at the same time the eternal and only begotten Son of God. Listen to his words, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. I that speak unto Thee am the Messiah."

Now the first mention consciousness of fatigue and thirst came through the human nature in his person, but the other consciousness, the consciousness of the omnipotence and supremacy of the divine nature comes from that divine nature. And if he had not had a human nature he could not have felt thirst. And if he had not had the divine nature he could not make that great statement about his Messiahship and also the fact that he was able to give water that would constitute the kind of water with which a person would never have thirst. Because he had both natures, he could have both of these experiences. That's essentially what Christianity has set forth. "The word has become flesh." No wonder Ms. Sayers said what she said. There is nothing really more exciting than that great fact in human history.

I wish that we could talk further about that and talk about the fact that we must never divide the person, and we must never confound the natures. There is one person. There are two natures in the person of our Lord. As we sing, "Veiled in flesh the God-head see, hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with men to appear, Jesus our Emmanuel here." Last Sunday I said one of the reasons I like Christmas time is because so often we dispense the singing of the shallow kinds of hymns that have come to characterize Christianity. And now we sing some of those Christian carols. And isn't it striking how strongly theological they are, how much good doctrine is in them? You look at it in that light and I think you'll appreciate the singing of the Christian hymns too.

Now, having confirmed this in verses 15 through 17 when coming to the 18th verse the apostle states, "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." He's talked about the fullness of grace in the preceding verses, but now he will talk about the truth. Here's

the answer to Job's great cry with which we began, "Oh that I knew where I might find him that I might come even to his seat." This is where we find him through the revelation that is given by the Lord Jesus Christ. Man cannot, but the Son of God can interpret the Father. You can be sure of this that no human being can possibly understand God apart from divine illumination. It is impossible. And therefore the Lord Jesus Christ has come and has given us the revelation of the Father. He states, "No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him."

Now I don't care whether we translate this "The only begotten Son," or "The only begotten God," there are important manuscripts that read that way, "The only begotten God." It doesn't make a bit of difference doctrinally. When we read, "The only begotten Son," this is a reference to the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore he says, "Who is in the bosom of the Father," and he says, "Is in the bosom." That is, he was, he is, and he always will be so far as the divine personality, the existence in the relationship between the persons is a relationship of eternal relationship. "Who is in the bosom of the Father," and how could we express it more intimately than to say, as John says, "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father," just as this gospel writer John likes to talk about the disciple who was in the bosom of Jesus and was lying in Jesus' bosom to suggest the marvelous experience of a relationship with him in the most intimate way. The Son of God is eternally, "In the bosom of the Father." When he speaks about the Father you can be sure that what he says may be relied upon.

What in effect has happened is that the true mystagog, that is the mystery cults talked about a mystagog who would enable individuals to understand their cult. And all

that they portrayed on their stages. The true mystagog of the heaven itself is the Lord Jesus Christ and he has come and he has laid open for men to see and know the breast of God. That's precisely what we have in the Gospel of John and in the other revelation of the New Testament that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. He has come. He has laid open the breast of God in this gospel, and he has pictured God in heaven as a Father. How marvelous it is to know in all of the experiences of life that we have a Father in heaven.

You think about the way in which our Lord revealed the Father. Think of the way in which Jesus Christ presented God. He presented God as a God on whose face there is a tear. He set forth God as a God who welcomed little children. He set forth God as a God who standing by the grave of Lazarus gives forth something that could be called a cry of pain at the effects of sin. He is a God who as he looks out upon the multitudes is moved with compassion. This, my Christian friend, and my non Christian friend, this is Jesus Christ's picture of God, a God with the tears running down his face, a God with children sitting upon his lap, a God with the cry of pain over the effects of sin, the darkness and the blindness and the rebellion that exists in those who are ultimately creatures of God and the stirrings of pity that come as he had compassion on the multitudes.

Well let me say this, the silence has been broken. Ignatius, the most famous of the early church men in the beginning of the 2nd century, he wrote letters to churches on his way to his martyrdom. We have his letters. There are about seven of them, and they are very interesting to read. They're not really great letters, letting us know at the beginning that the early church was not nearly so advanced in the understanding of theological things as we might have expected them to be. But nevertheless they're

most interesting and reflect the work of God in that 2nd century. In the Epistle to the Magnesians, in chapter 8 and verse 2, Ignatius speaks of Christ as the word of God. He says, "Jesus Christ who is the word of God which came forth out of silence." This idea originated out of Judaism, being linked with Genesis chapter 1 and verse 3. The rabbis ask the question, "What was there before God spoke and said, 'Let there be light.?' " And their answer was, "God's silence."

So the silence of God became a token of the inexpressible majesty of God and in the Hellenistic world, silence was a symbol of the highest deity. We even have a prayer to silence. In the Midrash Liturgy of the 4th century, the prayer is this; someone is advised to put his finger on his mouth and to ask silence for help by praying. We don't recommend this in Believers Chapel, but nevertheless this is the way they are to pray, "Silence! Silence! Silence! Symbol of the eternal immortal god! Take me under Thy wings, Silence."

One of the finest of the New Testament scholars of contemporary times has said with reference to this that this is a very moving prayer. God is silence. He's utterly removed and does not speak. He is a hidden God. To this inscrutable silence man can only lift up his hands and cry, "Take me under Thy wings, silence." But we have the inestimable privilege of saying, "God is not silent." God has spoken. He has spoken in the Lord Jesus Christ. "No man has seen God at any time," that's true, but the only begotten Son has come and he has fully revealed the Father. He's no longer silent. He has spoken out of his silence and he has come with words of inexpressible mercy and truth.

Did you notice when John moves from the more impersonal things to the personal things in that last section beginning at verse 14 that he moves from the third

person to the first person, but he moves also from the statement of things that are to the way in which we should respond to them? He states, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory." John's talking about appropriation. "We beheld," that's a word of contemplation, a word often used with a sense of contemplation and enjoyment and admiration. We beheld his glory. So I say to you on this great day, Christmas day, a day in which we reflect upon the most significant fact of all of human history, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." We have testimonies to that. We have men who lived and saw him, handled the word of life.

Do you know that he belongs to you? Have you truly beheld him with the eye of faith? And have you before him, bowed before him, acknowledging him as the great mediator between God and men through whom eternal life may be ours, not by his incarnation, but as we have been told by the atoning work on Calvary's cross. Incarnation, one step along the way to the atoning work and ultimately his resurrection and his work that he is doing now, praying at the right hand of the Father, securing for his people all of the blessings for which he has died on Calvary's cross.

Our invitation to you on this day is make this the greatest day of your life by turning to him and in your heart receiving him as your own personal savior, acknowledging him as the revelation of the Father just the word from God that you need. May God help you to do this. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee, and we praise Thee for the word of God and for the blessings of life through the Lord Jesus Christ. How wonderful it is, on this day,

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to remember him, reflect upon what he has done and what he lives to finish today, as
he prays for his own at the right hand of the Father. May, Lord, this be...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]