



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 16:16-40

“The Great Question”

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio begins] Well it's a pleasure to be here, and things have changed a bit since I was last preaching here because I looked at the bulletin and it said, “Hymn #35b” [Laughter] and I had trouble finding “#35b.” [Laughter] And then I saw “#18r” and since I had trouble finding “b” I didn't want to go all the way down the alphabet to “r” [Laughter] and so I didn't bother to look at that and I wondered why we went to, someone told me, black book, when the red book also had “All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name” in it. [Laughter] Seems to me a matter of efficiency to use the one hymn book in which it had both hymns, [Laughter] but perhaps there's some ulterior reason that I haven't figured out yet of why this was done. At any rate, I'm glad to be here and I'm glad to have something to talk about like that, [Laughter] big issue. [Laughter]

We're turning to Acts chapter 16 and I'm going to read verse 16 through verse 34 instead of verse 40 just simply for the sake of time and because those latter verses are not really a part of the message that I want to give, so Acts chapter 16, verse 16 through verse 40. And since I'm going to make reference to the first two verses of the Book of Acts, I want to remind you of the fact that Luke began this marvelous history book of early Christianity by saying, “The former treatise I made oh Theophilos, of all that Jesus Christ began, both to do and teach.” So it's evident that he thinks of the Book of Acts as the

continuation of the things that Jesus began to do and teach. And we understand it that way and if we read through the Book of Acts with that in mind, I think the Book of Acts will have a bit more meaning for us, to realize that the things that we see happening in the life of the early church are things that our Lord Jesus is still doing. And of course we can go on beyond Acts chapter 28 to the life that we have become a part of, because we are disciples who are following in the footsteps of the apostles and those that were their companions. And we have seen ourselves the things that our Lord is continuing to do and teach. And you are the product of that, at least most of you as I look out on the audience, that's what you are. You are the product of the things that our Lord is continuing to do and teach.

Now let's begin with verse 16 in the reading of the text. And I'm reading from the New King James Version, so there'll probably be some differences between my text and your text. The author writes,

“Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. (soothsaying) This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.” Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a

charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. (it has been the opinion incidentally, that this probably was the high place in the city and the dungeons were carved out, or dug out, on the side of the hill so that they were completely dark, back, under a mass of land, and that the jailor's house was probably situated right on top of that. That may give us some idea of why these things happened the way they did. And Luke continues) But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. (apparently, it would have been difficult ordinarily for the apostles and those with them to have seen this man, but he must have been situated in such a way as he came to the front of the prison that they were able to see him against the light that was outside and so they saw something like a silhouette of him, and they saw him take out his sword and get ready to kill himself, because he knew it meant his death if those prisoners who were in his hands had escaped) But Paul called with a loud voice, (verse 28) saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (it's interesting that he calls these prisoners, for whom he had little respect when he put them in, “Sirs” now) So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”

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

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the inspired word of God. And we thank Thee for the way in which our Lord has continued down through the years to do the things that he did when he was here with us in the flesh. We thank Thee for the encouragement of the word of God to remind us of the fact that the Lord Jesus does continue to work. We thank Thee Lord for the promises of the word of God, and especially for those that have to do with the gospel of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. We pray that if there are some in this audience who do not have acquaintance with our Lord in a saving way, that this may be the occasion in which they turn to trust in him who loved sinners and gave himself for them. What a marvelous message that we have to proclaim.

And Father we ask that through the Holy Spirit we may be responsive to the truth, all of us, those who have already come to him and those who may not yet have come. May our time together as we sing our praises, as we have read the word of God, and as we consider the things in the word of God, may it be a time of spiritual refreshment for each of us. We pray for the ministry of the word elsewhere, where Christ is preached. Bless, that the whole body of the church may be blessed today.

We pray for our president, who's been in our city. We ask Thy blessing upon him and upon the government, over which he serves at the present time. Give wisdom, and give guidance and direction. And Lord we ask Thy blessing upon the United States of America. We thank Thee that there is a sovereign in heaven who undertakes for us and we are thankful that we are able to entrust ourselves to him. We commit our time to Thee, with remembrance of those who've requested our prayers especially. We pray for them. We ask Thy blessing upon them. Meet the needs that exist, and especially of those who've requested that we pray for them. We remember them. Bless the ministry of this church. May Christ always be honored and glorified in it. We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today, as the bulletin notes, is “The Greatest Question.” I don’t doubt, really, that this is one of the most important questions in life. If it’s the greatest, or if it’s not, it surely is extremely important. What must I do to be saved? With different phraseology it’s the question that has been asked rather often. And was asked often in the apostolic age and down through the centuries. You may remember that the rich young ruler came to the Lord Jesus and asked him, “What great thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” And the lawyer said essentially the same thing when he came to the Lord Jesus, “What great thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” It seems that this was probably the question, at least in essence, that Nicodemus wanted to ask too, because the way that John describes the interview of our Lord with Nicodemus seems to make that quite plain,

“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, this man came to Jesus by night, said unto him, Rabbi we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no man can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. (our Lord, anticipating the question, responds) Most assuredly I say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Seems evident that Nicodemus came with the same kind of question, “What must I do to be saved?” So, it is a scene that is probably reflected often in the lives of many. This one is a little different, because this is in a jail, in a Roman jail. And that’s not the kind of scene in which you and I have asked the question, “What must I do to be saved” but it surely is the kind of question that all of us at one time or another have had to face. In the Book of Acts, when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, he comes to the conclusion, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. And when they heard this they were

cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren what shall we do?”

The answers that our age has given to this question are lessons in irrelevance. If we read the political scene and listen to the questions that they are discussing, they are questions that ultimately are irrelevant for the great issue of life, the relationship of us who are created beings to our eternal Father in heaven. And so consequently, when we talk about violence, when we talk about health care, when we talk about jobs, jobs, jobs, or when we talk about church union for spiritual things, when we talk about all of urban renewal, all of these questions that are on the front pages of our paper, they are ultimately irrelevant with regard to the greatest question of life. What about this life and when it comes to an end, what then? And let me assure you, my friends, you who sit in the audience, those of you that are old, I don't know that any of you are as old as I am, but those of you who are old, you know that this life passes quickly. And those of you who are young, you may think that the life will not pass quickly for you, but there'll come a day when you will stand just like I stand and say, “Where has all of this time gone?”

And the question, therefore, that all of us must face, and if we face it the sooner the better, is what must I do to be saved, so that we pass from this life into the confidence of a relationship with a eternal God who has created everything and has provided a savior that all may have as theirs. It seems to me that all of the things that we talk about so frequently are just about as relevant as the removal of evil to the removal of evil as a band aid to cancer, for relevance, for true relevance, we need the inspired ministry of the prophets, our Lord, and the apostles found in the word of God.

Now the apostle has left Asia and he has come over into Europe. The first preacher of the gospel in Europe, and all of Europe is, humanly speaking, indebted to the Apostle Paul and this little company of people who crossed over, came to Philippi, found that while the man of Macedonia had spoken to them in vision and said, “Come over and help us” that there when they arrived in Philippi they discovered that there was not even

a synagogue. There were not that many Jews in the city of Philippi to have a synagogue. Usually ten were required. And so they had to go out to a little place by the side of the Gagetize River where there was a little prayer gathering of women. What a let down. The man of Macedonia in vision, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And so they arrive with great hopes. They discover they’re shattered first there is no synagogue to preach to. He’s just preached a great sermon in Antioch at the city found in the 13th chapter of this book. And now he is to go out by the little prayer enclosure by the side of the river and preach to a group of women. What a disappointment, you might think.

But then that’s the way God lets us know that the things that are really important are the things that he is doing. And they may be big sometimes, like the Day of Pentecost, but at other times they may be very small, just one person. And of course, Lydia was there. And as the apostle began to preach the word of God we read, “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized she begged us saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord come to my house and stay. And so she persuaded us.”

That’s a significant conversion. It was the conversion of a Jewish woman, a rich Jewish woman, a rich, successful, Jewish business woman. I’d like to liken her to Margaret Thatcher, one of my favorite 20th Century characters. But then I don’t know whether Ms. Thatcher could have made a living as a maker of purple, or whatever it was that Lydia was selling. She was a seller of purple. But I know this, that she was a success. And here God began with Lydia, the woman in this magnificent exhibition of the effectual grace of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of her heart. The Lord opened her heart. Not her free will. She didn’t open her heart. It was the Lord how opened her heart. It was not her good works that was responsible for the opening of her heart. It was the Lord God in heaven, a sovereign activity of God. So far as we know, there was no request on her part for an open heart, but she opened her heart. That was one conversion.

And then Paul came into the city and a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination, my text has. She was a soothsayer. She was a fortune teller, member of the signs and wonders group, but not a Christian woman evidently. And so she began to follow the Apostle Paul and she kept saying, and evidently, moved by the Holy Spirit, in what way, I would perhaps think it's part of God's common grace in dealing with the individuals of that way. She followed Paul and she kept crying out, “These men are the servants of the Most High God who proclaimed to us the way of salvation.” Notice the word salvation. It's probably how the jailor asks his question, “What must I do to be saved?” The thought of salvation was passed around in the city of Philippi. At any rate, Paul, by the ability that the apostle had to command the spirit, the evil spirit, to come out of her, commanded that “in the name of Jesus Christ” the spirit come out and “he came out that very hour.” Now whether she was converted or not, the text does not plainly say, but many feel that that was true.

Well that's interesting because she was an exploited Greek slave girl. And so the apostle is been responsible for the conversion of a rich Jewess and now if this person was a converted person, after the spirit had left her, a Greek now. Now the apostle will deal with a Roman official, because remember the commission that the apostle has been given is to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter, to go to the Jews primarily, Paul to go to the Gentiles primarily. And now the man of Macedonia calling him over and already God is working. “A certain damsel,” we read in the 16th verse, this demon possessed ventriloquist, whose involuntary utterances were thought to be the voice of God. She had the gift of prophecy, evidently, enough so that she was able to make money for those who were her master. Well the apostle was disturbed by that finally. He didn't appreciate the unsolicited commercials that they were getting. He had not asked them to say the things that they were saying. It's a very interesting thing because you might have thought that Paul would have said, “Well she's saying that God has sent us over here in order to preach the way of salvation, so why not let her do it?”

But there's a fundamental spiritual question that comes. Is it possible for those who do not know the way of salvation to preach the salvation of Jesus Christ? Well put it this way, is it desirable that those who do not know the way of salvation preach salvation? Well I think it's plain, from our Lord's activities elsewhere and our Lord's activities here through the apostle, that God does not wish the testimony of truth to be spoken by those who are not true themselves, who are not disciples of our Lord. Once we start doing that then we open up the ministry of the Scriptures to the outsiders to come in and who, by their own unsaved and unchristian mind and action and thoughts, will do nothing but destroy the testimony of Jesus Christ. The testimony to the gospel is given by those who know the gospel. In fact the Lord Jesus, when he met those demonic spirits who called out, “We know you, who you are. You are the Christ the Son of God.” And then we read, “He forbid them to speak.” You might say, “Well, weren't they preaching something that was worthwhile?” No, not when they come from evil spirits, because that's the first step to problems. “The hour of gravest peril” it has been said, “for the gospel in Philippi was not the hour when they put Paul in prison. It was an hour when the damsel with a spirit of divination spoke the truth.” It's a startling thing, but nevertheless I think you'll find it supported by the word of God.

Now, what that would teach us of course, that we are to refuse alliances with evil, even when evil contends in words that sound like the truth. What we know what happened is when the spirit was cast out those who had control of the woman now, knowing that this is going to pinch them in the pocket book, they appeal to prejudice. First of all they say, “These men are Jews. We're not Jews.” And then they say, “They are not of us. They have customs that are not like our customs.” One of the commentators said, “All that was sound and furry,” because what they were interested in was the pocket book. And so when they said, “These men are Jews, and their customs are different” it wasn't, that wasn't the real reason. As we would say today, on a political scene, “That was smoke and mirrors” [Laughter] because what they were interested in was the dollar,

the dollar, which they were losing because they didn't have the servant who could serve them by her prophecies and increase their bank accounts. The devil is always defeated when he imprisons Christians, when he attacks Christians, he'll always be defeated. Ultimately, God wins the victory.

Now, we know what happened as a result of this. Those who controlled the woman told the magistrates that “These men are Jews. They teach different customs from ours.” The multitude rose up together against the apostles and their friends and “the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes upon them” notice that little expression will come up within our text again, “laid many stripes on them, they threw them into the prison, commanding the jailor to keep them securely. And having received the charge” the jailor who knew that his life depended upon the security in the prison, of his prisoners, took the prisoners, fastened their feet in stocks and secured them against his own problems if they had escaped. So, I'm sure that those people in that prison might have had some discussion, some of them. Some of those with a weak faith like me, for example. Because the man of Macedonia, when he gave them the message, who pleaded with them, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” they discussed it afterwards and Luke says in the 10th verse, “After Paul had seen the vision immediately we sought to go to Macedonia concluding (putting two and two together is kind of the force of that word in the original text, putting two and two together) that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel.” And so they have come, and now shortly they find themselves in prison. And you can see the doubt rise in the hearts of the disciples saying, “Should we really have come over? We find ourselves now in prison. We can't even talk about the message that we have to proclaim them.” But one thing they could do, and that of course is what they did. They prayed and they sang praises.

Now anyone can sing outside prison, and anyone can sing in good health, but it's very difficult to sing inside a prison when your feet are in stocks, and listen, that was

painful, that was very painful, in constant pain, to sing and pray. Someone has said, “These birds could sing in a darkened cage.” And others have said, “Think of it, singing in a stir, or caroling in the clink.” [Laughter] And remember this would not be happy, a happy sound for the rest of the prisoners. I’m sure that there were many there who would’ve said, “Just wait until I get out of this, I will put an end to their singing.” What were they singing? Well so far as we know, they were singing the hymns of the Old Testament. They were singing Psalm 100. They were singing Psalm 23. They were singing other aspects of the ministry of the truth which they knew. And so, that’s what they were doing.

Well, we read in verse 26, “Suddenly there was a great earthquake.” God has the finest voice of all. I think it was Woody Allen who said something like, I wish I had brought that quotation, I can’t repeat it perfectly, but that, “God is the one who can create the greatest and most significant rumble in the desert when he speaks.” It’s really true. And so here, in the midst of the troubles, a great earthquake occurs, the foundations of the prison are shaken and immediately all the doors are opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. Why didn’t all of those prisoners leave? That’s what the jailor thought immediately. So he took out his sword. He was ready to put himself to death, commit suicide, but the prisoners were all there. It’s almost as if God had put upon their hearts a conviction they’d better stay right there, something unusual is happening. And so Paul called out with a loud voice to the jailor and said, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” And that was startling for him. He called for a light. He ran in. He fell down trembling before Paul and Silas, the conviction of the Holy Spirit upon his heart brought him to the place of worshiping, or at least reverencing these prisoners that he had himself put in the stocks. Fell down trembling before Paul and Silas and he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

That’s the cry of a dim consciousness lying dormant in many individuals before they come to faith in Christ, the sense of the need of spiritual healing. Human misery is

not solved by social and economic changes. If we had all the jobs in the world, and if we had all of the happiness that we'd possibly have in our economic life, there's one fundamental need that only God can meet. That's when you come to the end of life and where you're going. Well that's the kind of need that you have when you may face an early death.

I've often said this, and said this to many of you, that I've taught many a man in theological seminary who are now in heaven, many of them. And I used to say to them occasionally, things like, "I'll be in heaven before you, but" and many of them are already in heaven, and I'm still here. I'm grateful for that, but at the same time, it's important to remember we do not know our destiny. And I look out and they're many young children here. And you have no assurance that you'll reach maturity. I hope you do, but how much more you will enjoy your maturity if you settle the question of your relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ while you're young and what a different kind of maturity you will have.

So he rushed in, would have killed himself. I don't know what they said then, but being an unsaved man they said something like unsaved people say today, "My God, they're gone!" except he would put it like, "Jupiter" or "Zeus, they've gone!" [Laughter] I'm putting words in their mouth, that's not in the Bible of course, but it must have been something like that. Suicide was common, and it was only interrupted by Paul's cry and he came in trembling.

So, he asks the question, "What must I do to be saved?" That's the greatest question. I'd like to say a few things about it. Paul's reply of course, we all know, he didn't say, "Have you heard of the four spiritual laws" [Laughter] or any of the other things that we say. How much better and how much simpler and how much more to the point and how much truer to Christian theology is the answer of the apostle, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Not believe and surrender, but believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. There is a message of surrender in the New Testament, but it's

addressed to believers. The message to the non believer, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. I think in the answer of the apostle, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household” is the “infinite music of the gospel” as one interpreter has put it. Thrilling through all of this like one of the great anthems, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

So often it's true of us that we think that probably there are better answers of our important questions than a preacher. But that's not true. In fact, a preacher as a general rule, a godly preacher, a man who believes the word of God, has the most important answers of all. It was Voltaire who said, speaking of philosophers, “We've never cared to enlighten cobblers and maidservants. That's the work of apostles.” Of course, he disdains the work of the apostles because he was not a believer in the things of the word of God, but in the very fact of disdaining them he speaks the truth. It's the work of the apostles to speak to the individuals whom he calls cobblers and maidservants. And philosophers cannot answer them. They don't have the answer for them. The answer is found in the word of God.

One of the most famous of the New Testament professors of this century, in the earlier part of this century, said with reference to the remark that some people often make, “Paul just doesn't make sense to me or I cannot make sense out of him.” He said, “To say that Paul is unintelligible, or that he presents Christianity in a way which does it every kind of injustice and finally, is finally unacceptable to us is to fly in the face of history and experience. There've always been people who've found Paul intelligible, and accepted the gospel as he preached it. There are such people still, if not in theological classrooms, then in mission homes, on street corners, in lonely rooms. In fact, wherever you and I live.” He says, “It's not historic scholarship that is wanted, lacking for the understanding of him, and neither is it the insight of genius. What is it that we lack for understanding and appreciating Paul?” Well our great teacher says, “It's despair, despair.”

Paul did not preach for scholars, not even for philosophers. He preached for sinners. He had no gospel except for men whose mouths were stopped, and who were standing condemned at the bar of God. And when a man stands condemned before the bar of God and, as Paul says in Romans 3, when our mouths are stopped and we have nothing to say, and if we've come to that and we understand truly the despair that we have to find salvation in nothing that we may have thought important for us until now, when the heart turns toward the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel message, we discover the answer to our needs. Despair, the realization we're lost, the realization that our mouths are stopped, that we have nothing with which we can commend ourselves to the Lord God in heaven.

He goes on to say, “He had no gospel except for men whose mouths were stopped, who were standing condemned at the bar of God. They understood him and they find him imminently intelligible still.” It's interesting to me, I've seen that happen so often. I know lots of wise men who do not know our Lord, who've been exposed to the gospel, do not understand, and even some who think the gospel does not make any sense at all. And then along comes a person with an ordinary education and with experiences in life that do not mark them out as anyone important in our society, and they understand. They not only understand, they not only have come into the Christian family of believers, but they rejoice in the things of Paul and even grow in the knowledge of them, become knowledgeable in Pauline theology, though they might not call it such as our academicians would call it, but that's where they are. But what God has wrought in the heart, by bringing them to themselves and bringing to them their need, has caused their hearts to open to spiritual things. And that's what God the Holy Spirit does.

Lots of other answers are given to the question of the jailor, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer of godless philosophy of course is, “Forget it. You have a superstitious guilt complex, perhaps. Just calm yourself and pass by this particular time in your life.” Cold morality, Bunyan talks about the town of morality. That is, if you've

done wrong, do your best from now on, save yourself, change your ways, and everything's going to be alright because God is a forgiving God.” They get some message of the apostle. They understand that, but then they don't understand what's involved in that.

There are some, such as Paul comments in 1 Corinthians, who have the philosophy of eat, drink, and be merry. Hang Puritanism -- the Puritans incidentally, oh how they've suffered in the 19th and 20th Centuries, and they're smiling in heaven. Because they found out that those puritan, puritanical ideas, which were the ultimately the sovereign grace of God, not what the world says about them, but what the Scriptures say about them, those are the things that had brought them to the eternal joy and pleasure of the presence of God.

The ecclesiastics remind us of those ceremonies that we may go through, as a large professing Christian organization that invites us to a series of ceremonies; baptism, to remove original sin, the daily sacrifice of the mass, which removes daily sins, which should of course be observed frequently, every Lord's day. The oil of extreme unction, which removes those forgivable sins, and frequently is administered at the point of death, except we don't know the point of death do we? John Kennedy, when he was assassinated here in Dallas, said the oil of extreme unction ministered to him, but there's a question about whether he was alive at the time. He's already in eternity. And then the fires of purgatory, sins removed by water, bread, oil and fire. Sacramental system, that's no answer to “What must I do to be saved?” because mingled in that answer in every one of these, particular ceremonies is the work of a human being. And the apostle makes it very plain, “For by grace are you saved by faith and that not of yourselves” it's the gift of God. It's not of works, lest anyone should boast. It is the gift of God, the salvation that the New Testament sets forth for us.

Now I'd like to just say a few words about the answer itself. “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” and the answer is, “They said,” isn't that interesting, “They said.” This is an

authoritative answer. This is the [indistinct] answer of the apostle, and Silas, and those who were with him, “They said.” And those who speak this word incidentally, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” stand in their succession. If you ever ask, “How can I get to heaven?” just give the apostle’s word, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” It’s a simple word, believe. Not surrender, surrender’s addressed to people who already believe.

There is a lot of criticism of easy believism. You often hear people say, I’m quoting one person who many years ago said this, “There’s too much easy believism today with its syncopated jazz music style of Christianity.” Well, there is a point in that. If we take this to be something on the surface of things and just say, “Believe” and then do not have that sense of despair within the heart, then of course that’s not what the apostles talk about. But do not forget this; that the person who said only “Believe” is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. He’s the one who used that expression. It’s not easy believism if you’ve been brought to the place of despair. So, it’s simply to believe.

Now one might ask, “Well what is belief? What is faith?” Well the reformers, who thought a great deal about this, defined faith in this way. They said, “Faith is first of all knowledge.” *Notitia*, knowledge. Knowledge of the fact that Christ died for our sins. Second, *assensus*, assent. These words are all words upon which our English is based. *Notitia*, knowledge, notice. Knowledge, assent, and then *fiducia*, fiduciary institutions, trust institutions. We all know those things. So, knowledge, assent and trust, that’s what faith is if you want to define it. That’s how I would define it. The Westminster Confession of Faith puts it very plainly, “Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for our salvation.” Upon him alone, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Believe on the Lord Jesus. Not in the church, believe in the Lord Jesus. Not in the ceremonies of the church. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's very personal. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, very personal. I believe upon him, upon what he has done. My rest, my eternal destiny upon Jesus Christ, knowing he's died for sinners. Very individual too, Paul says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” You, will be saved, singular, you, individually, you, young people, middle aged people, thirty-five, don't forget that [Laughter] middle-age, thirty-five, biblically. And then older people, who have not come, but you're still breathing, and there is time. You will be saved. Notice too how certain it is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” You shall be saved. It's certain to take place. There's never been an individual who has ever believed in the Lord Jesus Christ who should be able to say, “I have believed in him but I have not been saved.” If you have believed in him, you have been saved. You may not realize it. There are some cases where people have a little bit of a problem over this, but if you have truly believed in him and rested yourself upon him, you have been saved.

And then this is for everybody, notice how he addresses the jailor and he says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, and your household” and any other households. This is the universal author of the gospel, which we proclaim. This gospel is addressed to all. Now we know that response is determined by the work of the Holy Spirit, but the gospel is for all. And so we preach it to you, and perhaps you'll say, “Well I don't know whether I'm elect or not. Why don't you settle the question?” Why don't you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ? That'll settle the question. But if you say to me, “I don't really want to believe in him” well, you're getting what you want. So you have no complaint, if you have not come to know him. You see, how foolish it is when the gospel is offered to all to say “I don't know whether I'm elect or not.” Obviously, only the elect will be saved, that's what the Scriptures say. No non elect people will be saved, but we don't know who they are.

Mr. Spurgeon used to say if the elect had a mark on their back he could go around picking up coat tails and looking and seeing if they had the mark of the elect and

he'd preach the gospel to them, but we don't know that. We preach the gospel universally. We know that the Holy Spirit works and brings his elect to him, but we preach it. And I say again, if you are sitting in this audience or any other audience, and you say, “I don't know whether I'm elect or not” that's inconsequential. You can, so far as you are concerned, you can settle the question if you truly believe in him now. Then you will learn that you were one of the elect. But I repeat also, and this is so important, if you have questions and you don't like that, then you have no complaints. You're getting precisely what you want. So why should you complain? The Bible's very plain on these matters if we just think about them.

Now I want you to notice, it's about time to stop, and I'm going about three minutes over, three minutes preacher-wise, may be five. [Laughter] We read, “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.” Now of course that's the teaching ministry that follows. The message is not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and that's the end of everything. No, the words that follow are the words by which the apostles explained and made plain the truth of God and they continued in the ministry that they gave to those believers, not only then but in the days that followed, “They spoke the word of God to them and to all who were in his house.” So, the gospel message is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

Can you stand a word from John Calvin? Too bad if you can't, [Laughter] the doors are there. [Laughter] This is all voluntary remember. This is what Calvin says about believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, “This definition of salvation that one is to believe in Christ is short and meager in appearance, and yet it is ample, for Christ alone has all the elements of blessedness and eternal life, included in himself. He offers them to us through the gospel, but we receive them by faith. But two things must be noted here. The first is that Christ is the one and only goal of faith. The only *con fidei scop*a, the one goal of faith, and that accordingly when the minds of men turn away from him they do nothing else but wander. Therefore, it's no wonder if the whole theology of the papers is

a vast chaos and a horrible labyrinth, because with Christ neglected they give themselves up to vain and wind to speculations. In the second place, we must observe that after we have embraced Christ by faith that, alone suffices for salvation, but the sentence which Luke adds immediately after gives a better description of the nature of faith.” Referring to the words, the speaking of the words of the Lord to them and to all who were in his house afterwards, the explanation of the truth, telling them about *notitia assensus fiducia*, just what I’ve told you.

Now, you know Augustine made an interesting statement. I mentioned it Wednesday evening, in our studies in 1 Corinthians. He said, “Take away diseases, take away wounds, and there’s no reason for medicine.” Then he said this remarkable statement, “If the great physician came from heaven, a great sick man was lying ill throughout the world. If the great physician came, there must be a lot of sick people out here in this world. That sick man” Augustine said, he was the teacher of Calvin and Luther in many ways, “That sick man is the whole human race.” That’s what we are. We’re sick, spiritually, on the way to the experience of eternal death, living in death now actually, on the way to the full experience of it.

But I did want to say one last thing about this jailor. Now we read, “Now when he had brought them” well no, verse 33, “He took them, the same hour of the night, washed their stripes, immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house he set food before them and he rejoiced having believed in God with all his house.” Having believed he rejoiced. What is so interesting about that is this night before that earthquake this man was hard, calloused, a jailor, a Roman jailor who could probably have found no harder man than that, and some of our legal officers, some of our law officers are like that too, if they do not know our Lord they’re hard and calloused because they deal with us sinners. This man is hard and calloused, but now, having received the gospel, gentle. He wipes their stripes, he cleanses their stripes. Tender, god-like, he brings them out, sets food before them. What does the Scripture say?

Psalm 23, maybe what he heard them sing, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” And so the jailor is the one who ministers to the apostle and his company, brings them out, sets food before them, rejoices with them. Perhaps said, “Teach me some of those songs you were singing when you were playing, singing there and praying in the jail beforehand.” believing in the Lord with all his house.

The gospel, as we read here, is for religious people. On Pentecost religious people were converted. The Ethiopian eunuch was a religious man who had come to Jerusalem, once in a lifetime visit. Lydia was a Jewish woman, member of the Jewish faith. The gospel is for them, it's also for the hard and the brutal, like the jailor. Both were lost and alienated, although one had the experience of religion and contact with religious people, but they both were lost and alienated, they are candidates for the gospel. The methods of the Lord God vary. He opened the heart of Lydia quietly. He shook the earth for the jailor, but in both of them the Lord was working. He was continuing that work that we read about in chapter 1 and verse 1 and 2. The means is always the word of God. This man called for light on life's deepest need. The earthquake is over. The prisoners are there, so he needed no salvation for Rome, he still had his prisoners, but he comes in and in spite of the fact that he could have escaped with his prisoners in control and not having responded to the gospel, but he responded. The apostle didn't say, “There's no cause for alarm, cool it” didn't say, “Change your ways.” He said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

That's relevance. That's relevance for human life. That's relevance for your life. You young people, you older people, that's relevance for you life. In fact, this is the beginning of the life that God has given us. May God in his mercy touch your heart. May you understand that Christ has died for sinners, shedding his blood that men might be saved. And down through the centuries millions have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Join them in faith in him. We appeal to you, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus

Christ, believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for this magnificent unfolding of the gospel message, so simple, so plain, so clear, and so rewarding and so marvelous for those who despair, those who've sensed their need, those who sense that their mouths are stopped before a holy God in heaven. Oh God, touch hearts through this gospel, among the young people in this room. May there be responsiveness to Thy word with a simple, "I thank thee Lord for dying for sinners. I am a sinner." Thank Thee for the promise that Thou dost...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]