



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Peter 3:1-9

“God’s Yesss! To His Saints”

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio begins] Well I appreciate the opportunity to minister the word here. I thank the elders, and Dan particularly, for inviting me and it’s a pleasure to be back. And for those of you who want to miss a Sunday next month, I’m scheduled to speak again on the twenty-fifth of February, [Laughter] so you have a good excuse to go elsewhere if you like.

The subject this morning is “God’s Yesss! To His Saints” and I listened to that hymn that we just sang and David, I understand you didn’t know the title of the message when you selected this hymn, so you were guided by divine providence because the third stanza says, “Yes, I to the end shall endure.” Now it’s not the yes that everybody’s using today like, “Yes! Go Cowboys” or something like that you know, cause it’s only one s, but still there it is, “Yes, I to the end shall endure” so, I thank you for being an instrument. We’re turning to 2 Peter, chapter 3 and reading verse 1 through verse 9 for our Scripture reading. The message is designed primarily to deal with the 9th verse, as I’ll explain later, but we’re going to read the entire nine verses that begin this chapter. So, if you turn there. Follow along with me as I read now,

“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly (my Authorized Version text has, but the Greek text is “willfully”) For this they willfully are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering (now, those of you that have a more modern version probably have longsuffering to you. That is probably correct. The Authorized Version text has “to us ward,” but actually it doesn’t make much difference because the “you” are we. That is, we believers, as you can see from the context preceding. But we’re going to read it “to you”) longsuffering to you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his words and let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father we are indeed grateful to Thee for this privilege, the privilege of lifting our voices to Thee and knowing that Thou dost hear us, that Thou wilt surely answer our prayers to our best advantage. We ask Lord Thy blessing upon each one gathered here, and their families, their friends. We ask especially Lord that Thou wilt

by Thy marvelous grace make us effective servants and representatives of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Give us the courage to give testimony to him in the society of which we're a part.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for the number of people who have shown an interest in the divine things here in Believers Chapel. We pray for the ministry of the word here, for Dan, for the Sunday school, for all who minister the word. May it be ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit, for we know Lord that that will be effective. We thank Thee for those who've requested that we pray for them and we do pray for them, for there are many needs. We ask that Thou will answer their petitions and our petitions in a way that will be most beneficial for them in the light of the teaching of the word of God. Give healing and deliverance where it is within Thy will. We thank Thee Lord that we're able to turn to a sovereign God and know that Thou art well able to do all of the things that have to do with our petitions.

We thank Thee for the ministry here and for those who minister the word regularly. For the Sunday school teachers as well, for all who give testimony to the grace of God in Jesus Christ in their businesses, in their homes, among their friends. Give us courage, give us boldness, in the Holy Spirit to speak the word that the Holy Spirit uses in the conversion of sinners. We are so grateful Lord for Thy blessing upon us.

We pray for our country. We pray for the president and for those associated with him in government. We ask for the United State of America that the sovereign providence, which Thou hast exercised toward this great nation, may continue. We commit the nation to Thee with thanksgiving. And Father we pray for each of us for those who have serious personal problems in this audience. We commit them to Thee and ask that Thou wilt minister to them. Bless as we sing in praise of our Lord and as we hear the word of God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] As you can see from the bulletin, the title for the message this morning is “God’s Yesss! to His Saints.” I want to pronounce that a little differently. God’s Yesss! to His Saints. That’s really the way it ought to be pronounced, and I hope when you leave this morning, you’ll at least understand why I want to pronounce it, “God’s Yesss! to His Saints.” My message is suggested, was suggested, I hope by the Holy Spirit, by a radio listeners comment. The lady wrote me a letter, a rather interesting letter, because she originally was from First Presbyterian Church, knew some of the people that I knew when I first came to Dallas, transferred my membership from South Highlands Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama to the First Presbyterian Church here. Among the people, who was among the elders was Johnny Mitchell, who was on the board of Dallas Theological Seminary and a civic leader. Many of you may remember him as a very significant civil leader in this city about fifty years ago.

And she had heard something that I had said and said something about the fact that she knew Johnny Mitchell and she wrote me several pages of letter, and expressed her appreciation for the ministry of the word of God over the radio. In the course of it she said, “I am now attending a charismatic church but I’m not too happy with the church because they’re interested too much in my money.” And she said, “Further, I’ve been listening to what you’ve been saying and I’m getting persuaded that what you’re saying is truth about the sovereign grace of God, his divine election, his predestination of us who believe to eternal glory.” But she said in her letter, “I still have a bit of a problem with 2 Peter, chapter 3, verse 9.” I don’t even know whether she used the reference, but she said, “The passage that says that ‘God is longsuffering to us, would not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.’” So, I called her on the telephone and had a discussion with her and tried to explain to her what that passage really meant in the light of the sovereign grace of God. I don’t know that I convinced her. In fact, I wasn’t sure at all that I had convinced her, but she did listen.

And so that’s the thing that stirred my mind as Dan asked me if I would come and minister the word this morning. I thought it might be a good idea to say something about this, because there probably are some others who have had some puzzlement over this statement that Peter makes in the light of divine election and divine predestination of believers to likeness to our Lord and savior Jesus Christ forever. The Bible does say here, “he’s longsuffering to us ward” or “to you” as we have said, “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

Well actually, Ms. Palmer, for that was her name, is not the only one who has found this passage a puzzle. In something that I had read, approximately the same time or just before, in the autobiography of William J. was parallel with her experience, because John Newton, as many of you know, was a clergyman, converted in a most remarkable way, because he was in the slave trade at one time. And actually was a servant of a slave trader. But was converted in the midst of a storm on the Atlantic, which was so great that he began to think about divine things. Later became an Anglican clergyman and has written some of our best known hymns. The best known of which is Amazing Grace. And he also has written How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds, and Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken, things that we sing in Believers Chapel.

Mr. Newton had a habit of sitting around a breakfast table with some friends, he would invite some in and after they had gathered he would then open the Bible and read the Bible before they ate their breakfast. So one morning he opened the Bible to 2 Peter chapter 3 and he read down through this verse. And when he came to this verse he said with reference to it, “I suppose these words are a hard bone for a Calvinist to pick.” So I want to pick that hard bone this morning. But anyway, they had a little discussion afterwards and there was a person there that he said was very forward, as well as very high, I presume that means in the high church of the Church of England, and afterwards at the breakfast table asked him, “Pray Mr. Newton, are you a Calvinist?” He replied, “Why sir, I’m not fond of calling myself by any particular name in religion.”

I'm not either incidentally, I don't like to say I'm a Calvinist, but it saves so much time. [Laughter] I could say I believe in one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten points, but why do that when I say to a man who is knowledgeable at least, “I'm a Calvinist” he knows one, two, three, four, maybe of the ten, might know all. So I use it as a nickname. Mr. Spurgeon called it a nickname for the gospel. I guess I shouldn't say nickname. I use it for short hand for letting you know where I stand. Then we can discuss any one of those ten points that you may be interested in.

But anyway, he said in response to “Are you a Calvinist?” the person added, “I'm not,” he's not fond of calling himself by any particular name. And then, he asked, “Why do you ask me this question?” and the individual said, “Because sometimes when I read you and sometimes when I hear you I think you're a Calvinist, and then again I think you're not.” “Why sir,” Mr. Newton, said Mr. Newton, “I'm more of a Calvinist than anything else, but I use my Calvinism in my writings and my preaching as I use this sugar.” And with that he took a lump of sugar, put it in his tea cup, and stirring it added, “I don't give it all alone and whole, but mixed and diluted.” I didn't like that [Laughter] so I'm going to give it to you unmixed [Laughter] and undiluted. But Mr. Newton was basically a Calvinistic man and is known to be that, and his hymns reflect it also. But that's what lies behind my message this morning, the letter I received, the conversation that I had with Mrs. Palmer, a very nice woman.

Well Peter here in his final chapters, directing his reader's attention to another of the damnable heresies that he referred to in chapter 2 verse 1. Take a look there. He said,

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, (the original text reads “heresies of destruction” heresies that destroy people's spiritual well being) even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

I'd like to speak on that text one of these times, and since Dan has invited me back for the twenty-fifth next month, I may do that. But at any rate, Peter is talking about damnable heresies. And so this is in his mind. And so the thing that he has in mind are the scoffers denials of truth. Now I want to say this with reference to this, that when he talks about damnable heresies and he adds this particular heresy, that he refers to here, the scoffers say, “Where is the promise of his coming for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” he's really talking about heresies of libertinism. That is, individuals who say they believe certain things, but their lives are thoroughly contrary. The man who sits in the church, just as you are sitting in the church, but at the same is committing adultery, or other forms of sin, and thinks that he may get away with that, a libertine, interested in the things of the flesh. Peter is particularly speaking of them. I wish we had time to read all of chapter 2 because over and over in that chapter he points out that very fact. So here is another one of the damnable heresies, and this one concerns prophetic scoffers. They're individuals who say that the Lord is really not going to come, because everything continues as it has since the beginning of the creation. You say things are going to change, but everything has continued to the present day.

We have lots of scoffers still with us. I can remember back over my history here in the city of Dallas, one pastor of a very large church in the city in north Dallas for that matter, heard a clear testimony from John E. Mitchell, the man we mentioned, because Mr. Mitchell told me this. He sat down with him. They had an opportunity. They were talking about civic things, but the conversation turned to spiritual things, and he said, “I was able to explain to him my Christian faith” and said, “Finally when I stopped he said to me, ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’” Another preacher in Dallas in another part of the city, in the same denomination as a matter of fact, said the Bible was

like a banana, “You keep the part you like throw the rest away.” These are ministers, who were serving in our churches at that time.

H. A. Ironside has a lengthy account of a meeting in California in which over forty preachers came together to discuss spiritual things and the topic turned to the Lord’s coming and the same objection that Peter refers to here was made by them, “Where’s the promise of his coming, everything has continued the same since the beginning of the creation.” And Ironside writes about the discussion and then another meeting a week later in which they had an hours discussion and in the course of the discussion the individuals expressed the fact that they didn’t really believe in the coming again of our Lord at all. One of the ministers said to me, “Therefore,” dramatically, “I believe my brethren in the apocalyptic coming of Jesus. I never expect to see him in a body, but I believe in the ever coming Christ. He’s coming in the clouds, but they’re not literal clouds. He comes in the clouds of affliction, and the political clouds, and the war clouds, and the clouds of sorrow and distress, but a personal pre millennial advent is, in my judgment, an utter impossibility.” You don’t even have to say pre millennial advent, but just an advent.

But we know from the facts of present day Christian theologians and theology and ministers that this is still with us, in fact, maybe more severe than it was a generation ago. Today’s attitude is slicker, if I may say so. In our churches we stand up and we repeat the Apostle’s Creed and we say “Thy kingdom come” maybe, referring to aspects of Christian theology. We will say, “He shall come to judge” and we don’t believe it, but we repeat it and we stand up and do it as if we do believe it. But in this context the scoffer’s denials arise from their libertinism. They are individuals who believe you can make a confession of faith in Christ and then live contrary to the word of God and God will accept you as a believer in him, a very, very dangerous position. In fact, an impossible position, but very important for all of us to hear, because the way in which we live is a reflection of what we believe in our minds and in our hearts.

So Peter takes up the question. And I'll just briefly run through it because we don't have time to do anything more than that. I want to lay special stress on that 9th verse. The failure that Peter speaks about here, that is the failure of the second coming promises in the churches' early days was a failure that they thought reflected the fact that the Son of God was not going to come at all. Because after all, he had made suggestions in his ministry and the apostles had made suggestions in their ministry that the Lord was going to come. As a matter of fact, our Lord made a statement in John chapter 21 that some have thought indicated he was going to come before they died, some of them at least. That's a misinterpretation, but one could see how it might be given.

So after a while, after thirty or forty years, one might reasonably say, “Did not Jesus promise that he was coming again?” Yes he did, he did promise that, Matthew 16:28, or just many places. But he did promise that he was coming again. But nevertheless what about this time? To them, it was a relatively few years. To us now, it's almost two thousand years. It's the same thing no doubt puzzles some believing men. They read our Lord promised to come again, they read the apostles prophesying his coming again, they read the prophets, and he hasn't come. So is it not possible that all things continue as they have been from the beginning of creation and we're not to expect any intervention. This is the fundamental principle of an evolutionary kind of mind that it is impossible for God to intervene in our society, or he will not intervene. The non intervention of the deity in our society has given rise to a doctrine of uniformity to which we're all exposed in one way or another.

So Peter writes about it and he says verse 3. First of all he writes to them as beloved individuals,

“I'm writing to you how I might stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: I want you to be mindful of the words that were spoken before by the holy prophets and of the

commandment of the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that in the last days there shall come scoffers.”

Now that’s incidentally that’s rather comforting, because what Peter has said in the last days they’re going to be scoffers, and my friend we have the scoffers. And so here, the apostle has made a prophecy that it appears may be being fulfilled right before our eyes. Scoffers are here. And so they’re going to walk after their own lusts and they’re going to say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” And they’re going to have a theory. The fathers have fallen asleep, thousands of years ago all things continue as they have since the beginning of creation. There is not going to be an intervention from the Lord God.

And Peter then makes a comment on this particular attitude, “For this they are willfully ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:” In other words, what have these individuals forgotten? Well first of all, they’ve forgotten the flood, a fact of the past. They have willfully forgotten it. They’re acquainted with the records of it. Incidentally the Christian church until the 19th Century almost believed universally in the fact of the flood. Today that is not true. But from the standpoint of Scripture they have forgotten the flood. God does intervene. He did intervene. He intervened in such a way that there were no one’s left but a small company who were on Noah’s ark, together with their animals.

But that’s not all Peter says, they’ve forgotten another thing. He says in the 7th verse, “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” I love that little expression by the same word, because so far as Scripture is concerned, the flood has come to pass. There are ample records of it in history and in science. There are, of course, those that dispute that, but there are ample records, can’t say anything

more than that. But what is interesting to me is that he says, “The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word” what word? Well, the word about the coming flood, which did come to pass. “By the same word, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” In other words, if the same word promises the coming of our Lord that promised the flood, then look out, he is coming. And further, as the earth had water treasured within itself, which was poured out upon the earth in the flood, in the physical creation about us there is stored up the fire, which of course science recognizes is true. So “By the same word” the heavens and the earth are reserved against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Now, at this point, Peter says, two things you want to keep in mind. Notice carefully what he says. First of all, you need to remember a particular relationship, “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Now he does not say, look carefully at your text, he does not say that one day is, is with the Lord a thousand years. He’s not setting up any kind of a year day theory of interpretation. He says, “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years.” He’s not also refuting a kingdom of God upon the earth for one thousand years. He’s saying “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years” not is the thousand years, as if someone then would say, “Well the thousand year kingdom is just going to be one day long. It’s no such thing as a kingdom of God upon the earth.” He’s not saying that. He says, “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years.” As with the Lord, why he’s the high and lofty one who inhabiteth eternity, so Scripture says. So one day with him, who has never been born, who will never die, is like a thousand years with us. One day with the Lord is as a thousand years is with us. A thousand years is a long time. I’ve lived a long time. I’ve forgotten some things in my youth, purposely of course and some not purposely. But, eighty years is a long time, but one thousand years. But he says “as.”

Then he says, “and a thousand years as one day.” Time makes no difference to the one who has made this promise. The fact that he delays two thousand years doesn’t mean the promise is not true. As a matter of fact, if one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day, when in John chapter 14 the Lord Jesus said to, in the upper room discourse, to his disciples, “I go and prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also.” That promise was made approximately two thousand years ago. That’s as if, in the divine thinking, he made it day before yesterday. It’s not something that we are to regard as an impossible thing, or there is a faint possibility that it may be realized with him. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, a thousand years as one day. As a matter of fact, God can crowd all of his judgment, which is set forth in the word of God, in one day. So, Peter reminds his critics of this fact. The promises are as certain as if they were made day before yesterday as far as the Lord is concerned.

But that’s not the major thing. The major second thing that Peter is to remember is, tells us to remember, is to remember a reason “The Lord, verse 9, “is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Now, this text has been misunderstood, in my opinion, by lots of people. Other texts also have been misunderstood. I’ve been misunderstood some. Fortunately, I’ve been delivered from some of them. I have a few friends who think I’m, have misunderstood a few others. This is the continuing debate that goes on among the Christians over the interpretation of God’s word.

Now, in my opinion, the interpretation that some people put upon this, the interpretation that Mrs. Palmer for example, had been exposed to is an interpretation that cannot stand the test. That is, he’s “long suffering to us would not willing that any should perish,” “any” inclusive of every single individual who has ever lived or ever will live. He’s “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

First of all, my friend, it's just not true. It's just not true that God is not willing that any should perish. The very fact that there are people who perish is proof of that fact. But the word of God also states that, states that he will send strong delusion into the hearts of some so that they disbelieve, that they may be damned. I have a series of texts, if you want to look up some of them you can, but we don't have time to look them up; 1 Kings 20:42, Jude 4, Romans 9:22, 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, 2 Peter 2:3. You could list a long list of them. I will turn to just one. Turn to Jude verse 4, and in the 4th verse Jude writes, “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, it's just not true that God is not willing that any should perish. Many have perished down through the centuries. Many will perish, evidently, until our Lord comes. It's just not true to say God is not willing that any should perish, because men have and will perish.

But that's not all. Let's take a careful look further, a more careful look. I believe, frankly my friends I believe that the greatest error that is made in Christian circles is not reading the Bible. The next greatest error is not carefully interpreting the Bible. And what we need is accuracy in interpretation.

Listen to some witty little bits to illustrate the point. A stranger entered the building, asked a boy standing in the lobby, “Can you tell me where Mr. Smith lives?” The lad smiled and he replied pleasantly, “Yes sir, I'll show you.” Six flights up the boy pointed out a room, said it belonged to Mr. Smith. The man pounded on the door repeatedly and when there was no response he said, “He's not here.” The boy said, “Oh no sir, Mr. Smith was down stairs waiting in the lobby, but you asked where was his room.” It is important you know, to pay attention to what we are saying, and what Scriptures say. Think about the want ad that the secretary put in the paper, “Secretary wants job. No bad habits. Willing to learn.” [Laughter] One has to interpret that you know. Could be interpreted the wrong way, right way. A lady was trying to impress

people at a party, “My father, my family’s ancestry is very old” she said, “Dates back to the days of King John of England.” Then turning to the lady sitting quietly in a corner, she asked, condescendingly, “How old is your family my dear?” “Well,” said the woman with a quiet smile, “I can’t really say. All our family records were lost in the flood.” [Laughter] That’s given me an idea. I can say that too. I’m from Charleston. In Charleston they glorify your ancestry. It’s said where they, in Charleston’s where they worship your ancestors and eat rice. So anyway, maybe that’s it.

But now, let’s go further. Not only is it not true to say the Lord is not willing that any should perish, he is willing and he’s also willing that those who refuse the gospel offer spend their time in the eternal lake of fire. Secondly, now the text says, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to you.” In other words, there’s a difference between “some” and “you.” And what this promise pertains to is the “you” to “you.” Well, who are the “you?”

Well, what does this text say? Well this text began in verse 1, this second epistle, “Beloved.” Verse 8, “But beloved be not ignorant of this one thing,” verse 14, “Wherefore beloved,” verse 17, “Ye therefore beloved.” This text is about the beloved, those who are the objects of the eternal divine love of the Father in heaven, “but beloved.” So, what we have then is evidently, when Peter says, “The Lord is not willing” “is long suffering to you not willing that any should perish” he means any of you, any of you beloved should perish, but that all, all what, all everybody? No, all of you, all of you should come to repentance, all of you beloved.

In other words, there’s not one single elect person, elect in the ages past, who shall not eventually come into the presence of the Lord God in heaven, thanking him for promises just like this. This is God’s yesss to his people. He’s not willing that any of us, who believers, not willing that any of us should perish, but that all of us, the object of unconditional love, should come to repentance. How shallow is the interpretation to suggest that the “all” is a reference to everybody. And Peter hasn’t mentioned everybody.

He’s talking about the difference between some and you and all is all of you. You get the point, get the point. This is a great promise for believers that every elect person shall find his way into the presence of the Lord God.

Now it’s very interesting that this expression here, “all should come to repentance” that’s a word that means to have room for, to make room for, repentance. So, he’s longsuffering to you, believers, beloved ones, not willing that any of you, believers, loved ones, should perish but that all of you should make room for repentance. Now what that means is down through the centuries God works as elect ones come physically upon this earth and gradually he works in their hearts, sometimes abruptly, sometimes over a long period of time, but there is not one single elect person who has not found room for repentance.

What a magnificent promise. We talk about eternal security. Look, eternal security was security that was eternal when the promises and divine election had their beginnings. It was certain we would be there. And if you’re one of his, you in eternity were upon the heart of God, and in time, when you appeared, “Ah, there’s Lewis, Samuel Lewis Johnson Junior, little baby, one of mine, yesss!” I’m his. In time, by marvelous grace, I was brought to the knowledge of the Lord. Came to know my savior who died for sinners, saw plainly in Scripture that the responsibility of me was to believe that message and rest upon it, and now, over fifty years ago, fifty years in the church of Jesus Christ. That’s what Peter is talking about, he’s encouraging the saints, “make room for.”

Now I want to, I think we’ve got time to do this. When our Lord died there was a dying thief by his side. You remember him. There were two dying thieves as a matter of fact. One never turned to him, one did. One said, “Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” And our Lord gave the promise to him. But he said, our Lord did, in chapter 23 and verse 34, I’d like for you to turn back there. If you just turn just for a moment, Luke chapter 23, verse 34, I’ll read it for you. If it takes you too long to find it, Luke’s New Testament you know, “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know

not what they do.” His first statement he made on the cross. Lord, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Forgive them.

It’s not often pointed out, but the term forgive is a Greek word, athiemi. You don’t have to think of it, it’s athiemi. Athiemi has other meanings besides to forgive. It may mean to let go, to release. As a matter of fact, it’s found in the New Testament in that way, more than once, in the sense of release, let go. Some of the places are Acts chapter 5 verse 38, John chapter 11, verse 48, I think verse 44 also, but let’s think of it that way, “Father, release them, for they know not what they do.” Now if that word meant forgive, then there would be reason for people to say that ignorance is an excuse, wouldn’t it, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” The way to save the greatest number of people is to keep the gospel from people and consequently, forgive them because they know not what they do. You know there’s something crazy about that, but often people don’t know why. Well it’s because they’ve forgotten that this term forgive has more than one sense. To let go or to release is something else.

Now if you’re driving down the street, this happened to me about forty years ago, I thank the Lord I cannot say I’ve not exceeded the speed limit, but I haven’t had a ticket in about forty years. And I still remember when it happened. And I remember pulling over to the side, and at this time I did not really know I was exceeding the speed limit as much as I was, oh a little bit you know, fudging a little bit. But I found out that the speed limit at that particular place had been modified and the officer was very careful and just in pointing out to me my error. I remember saying to him, “I didn’t know that I was going that fast.” I didn’t say I didn’t know I was over the speed limit cause I knew I was, but I said, “I didn’t know I was going that fast.” But that didn’t seem to disturb him. He kept writing. [Laughter] He gave me that ticket. Ignorance is no excuse as far as the Lord’s concerned.

But now there is such a thing as an excuse for ignorance under certain circumstances. An excuse in this sense; there is reason for further opportunity. Even in

law it's possible for ignorance to have an effect upon a case and certain aspects may be postponed or not immediately carried out. Those aspects of law, I don't have time to talk about it, I'm not a lawyer but I do have it in my notes here.

What I'm suggesting is this; that when the Lord Jesus said, “Father, release them for they know not what they do” it's not to release them from the guilt that they have, but to give them an opportunity, release them, give them an opportunity to respond. They're lost, they're headed for a Christ-less eternity, “Father, release them for they do not know what they do.” Ignorance is reason for an expansion of the opportunity, doesn't cancel the guilt at all, or the certain execution of the punishment.

That's what our Lord was praying for when he said, “Father, release them for they know not what they do” because it's obvious that people weren't forgiven. “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” One of the thieves himself died unforgiven, so, release them. Why? Well our Lord is praying with history in mind, secular history, spiritual history. And what he is suggesting is that there may be an extension of history in order that the special history of the divine program may continue. So he prays, “Father, release them.”

And I want to tell you this, my Christian friend; that prayer of our Lord is still being answered. The fact that you are not, as an unbeliever, already plunged into eternity without any recourse under eternal judgment is because this prayer was answered. For two thousand years approximately now, our Lord's prayer has been answered, opportunity has been given to preach the gospel, and out of this prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ and the delay in answer to it have come the great saints of the past. Calvin, as a result of this prayer, “Father release them” so that Irenaeus, and Augustine, and Luther, and Calvin, and Moody, and all of those great men of the past, Charles, and John Wesley, even those Arminians who were believers, when they were believers, they too are the answers to the prayers of our Lord Jesus on Calvary's cross, “Father, release them for they know not what they do.”

So, as a matter of fact, not only are those, of course and us, and you are believers as a result of our Lord's prayer, “Father release them for they know not what they do” but Israel, ethnic Israel that shall ultimately turn to the Lord as the Scripture says, is also the product of the prayer of our Lord upon the cross at Calvary, particularly sits around the cross were the Jewish people, “Father, release them for they know not what they do.” And that prayer will be answered, and as Paul says in Romans, “and so all Israel shall be saved” Romans 11 chapter 25, verse 26.

So what I'm saying to you, my Christian friend, and my non Christian friend, that this is one of the great statements of the word of God. Its' not a bone for a Calvinist, it's not like swallowing a bone. This is like eating ice cream. This is a great text. This is one I love. I just can't wait for an Arminian to say to me, “That's a bone I guess that you Calvinists have a hard time picking at.” No, my, this is a great text. He's not willing that any of us should perish but that all of us should come to repentance.

Now, as you can tell I'm a Calvinist too. I don't think anybody in the Bible who reads the Bible, if he reads it long enough, is going to stay and not become a Calvinist. Some people die before they have a chance to do that, or die before they get around to studying it. Oh, what you're missing, what you're missing.

Robert L. Dabney was a southern theologian of the last century. He said, “Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. Well that's something our Lord said isn't it? But the greater includes the less. Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends; oh there is a greater love. There is a greater love. Our Lord lays down his life for his friends, but he doesn't do anything about bringing them to faith in him. He just dies for them, but he doesn't exercise his marvelous grace by which he brings them to the knowledge of himself.” In other words, efficacious grace, it's great for Christ to die for us, but within that greatness of his death for us there must come the efficacious grace that brings us to the knowledge of him. Otherwise, there is a greater love than a man who lays down his life for his

friends. The greater love is the man who lays down his life for his friends and brings them to the knowledge of the Savior. That's why this must be meant when he said, “Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Dabney's right; the greater includes the less. Therefore it follows that if God the Father and Jesus Christ cherished for a given soul the definite electing love which was strong enough to pay for him the sacrifice of Calvary, it's not credible that this love should then refuse the less costly gifts of effectual calling, sustaining grace, and all of the things that make up the fullness of salvation. Do we get it? Do we get this? This is the grace of God. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God. And we're not preaching the grace of God unless we include this within our message. Oh fully, I'll admit that.

What should a believer say in response to Peter? Well Peter said, “I want to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the prophets and the apostles.” He wants us to be mindful. He later on will tell us, a couple of times, three times maybe, to wants us to look with reference to the future, expectantly for it, for that's the meaning of the term.

There's a wonderful little story that I'm going to repeat and then I'll have to close because the clock up there has become very impatient. Some years ago a tourist was traveling in northern Italy and when he reached the castle that he'd been looking for a family gardener opened the gate. He was an old man, probably like Dr. Johnson. Showed the grounds around, which the old man kept in perfect order. The tourist then asked when the owner of the castle was last there. He said, “Well twelve years ago.” “Does he ever write to you?” “No.” “From whom do you get your orders?” “Well I get my orders from his agent in Milano.” That's the name of Milan, by those who are the intelligentsia, Milano. “Does he come, does he that is the agent?” “No never.” “Who then comes here?” “Well,” he says, “I'm almost always alone. Only once in a while a tourist comes.” “But you keep the garden in such fine condition just as though you expected

your master to come tomorrow.” The old gardener replied, “Today sir, today.” That’s the Christian’s attitude to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Today, today, this is the time.

Well our Lord’s great promise still holds, he’s not willing that any of us should perish but that all of us should come to repentance. The question is, are you one of the us? If you are, you’re sure to come. But the only way you can know that is to come. It’s the only way, come. Arminians tell me you can’t preach the gospel like I. You cannot say to an individual, “God loved you and gave himself for you.” No I cannot, because I do not know if he’s one of the elect. I cannot say that God died, Jesus Christ died for you. That’s more than my knowledge, more than your knowledge too. You may be saying it, but it’s more than your knowledge. You don’t know that. But this is what you can say, “God died for every person who believes in Jesus Christ. He died for every single person who believes in Jesus Christ.” That’s a universal invitation. He dies for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. That’s what the Scriptures say.

So if you want to know your condition, believe in Jesus Christ. Give yourself to him. Confess your sins to him, not to me. Acknowledge your sinfulness. Receive the gift of the grace of God, eternal life. And then, by God’s marvelous grace, you’ll be able to say, concerning this text, “That’s God’s yesss to his people.” Come to him. Believe in him. Trust in him. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father what a marvelous text that the apostle has written. Thou art longsuffering. Oh how longsuffering with me, with us. How marvelous to know that Thou art not willing that any of us should perish but that all of us should come to eternal life. Lord, for anyone who may be in this audience, I know there are some who haven’t been in this audience in a good while, by Thy wonderful grace touch their hearts. May they at this very moment be saying to Thee, “I am a sinner...”

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]

“God Yesss! To His Saints” by S. Lewis Johnson
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