



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 8:28-30

"The Spiritual Life of the Early Colonists"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] I did not bring my hearing aid this morning. So consequently I didn't hear what you were saying Marilyn. If I'm behind someone it's difficult. So I hope you told them lots of funny things. It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to talk to many of you. For those of you who are Arminians you are welcome to leave if you like.

[Laughter] Because the subject is going to touch Arminianism, Calvinism, and so I hope you won't be embarrassed or upset. I rather hope you will clap and shout and yell in support of the grace of God. But then of course that's probably too much to hope for in the midst of any theological discussion that everybody would fall one side or the other of some of the issues.

I'm going to read one passage, but it's not going to be the passage that I'm going to say anything about. Because really what I want to talk about are some historical matters and some theological matters. But these three verses are important for us and have a great deal to do with essentially the theology of what I want to talk to you about. So Romans chapter 8 verse 28 through verse 30. Romans 8:28-30. The apostle writes,

"And ye know (Well my text says, "And we know," but I hope ye know.) And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Very comforting text isn't it? Those foreknown are ultimately to be glorified. Well my subject is really "The Spiritual Life of the Early Colonists" in a very general way. Perry Miller, the illustrious Harvard historian of New England's mind called William Ames his "Medulla Sacrae Theologiae. That's the marrow of sacred theology. The standard textbook of theology in New England." What is really remarkable about that is that William Ames was a very strong believer in the sovereign grace of God and recognized for that, recognized also for the greatness and the succinctness of his theology. *The Marrow of Sacred Theology* incidentally is a book that you can find occasionally now and it has from time to time been reprinted over the years and is one of those remarkable brief comprehensive and yet brief outlines of the theology of the word of God. I recommend heartedly. But at any rate, Ames' marrow of sacred theology was the theology book of the early colonists.

John Houston, who has written a book on Ames, said, "No matter what their aspirations undergraduates of Emmanuel College of Britain, Leiden in the Netherlands, Harvard and Yale had to read the marrow in Latin as part of basic instruction in divinity." Remarkable when you think about it that in those days students at Harvard and others had to read this particular volume, *The Marrow of Sacred Theology* remarkably compressed, succinct, Calvinistic theology.

Thomas Hooker of Hartford and those of you who know something about the history of Connecticut know that he is really the father of Connecticut. Thomas Hooker

said with reference to Ames' book, "They would make him" supposing him versed in Scriptures, "a good divine though he had no more books in the world." That's quite a marvelous compliment for a book of theology.

Well, who was William Ames? Ames was born in 1576 in Ipswich in Suffolk where Puritanism had its tap root. He was educated at Cambridge, Christ's College, under William Perkins. Now if you know anything about history and the history of English theology, William Perkins is one of the towering figures of English theology. In fact I have in my library Perkins' works, and I treasure Perkins' works. Well, Ames was educated under Perkins who has been called, "The architect of Elizabethan Puritanism." He graduated in 1607, became a Fellow, and then stayed a Fellow for a while, although he was a non-conformist, a recognition in some measure at least of the skills of William Ames. He fled to Holland in 1610, pursued by some who according to Houston would have willingly shortened his journey. That is a remarkably succinct way of saying that they would have liked to murder him. [Laughter] But not John Robinson, the English pastor of the pilgrims. We in America know of John Robinson. We occasionally hear of him from time to time.

The disagreed over the church, Robinson called him Mr. William Amiss, instead of William Ames because of their dispute over the church and a few other matters. Ames was a consultant to the moderator at the Senate of Dordrecht. And the Senate of Dordrecht is extremely important for anyone to understand or who wants to understand Christian theology, because that synod was the synod in which the debate was Calvinism versus Arminianism. So Ames was a figure behind the scenes, but was often consulted by those who were officially delegates to the convention, because of his knowledge of the truth of God. So he was a very respected consultant. There was a saying about Ames, "Other theologians have slayed their thousands, but Ames his tens of thousands." He taught at Franeker in Holland.

Now, Martha and I were in Europe a few times, and one of the times that we were in Europe we decided that we would take a little trip to Franeker. I wanted to see the University, the building; it was a very small school, really actually one building. But I wanted to see it because of Ames' connection with it. So Martha and I traveled north in the Netherlands to Franeker and in Franeker there was still the building of the university. It was a very small school, and what is left is a very small building. But it's kept up, and we were able to walk in and look at all of the pictures of many famous old theologians that lined the walls of that institution. Ames taught at Franeker and in fact died at Franeker from fever and heart trouble. I take that back. I don't think he did die at Franeker, but he had been at Franeker and then moved south.

Ames planned to come to America and many in the United States wanted Ames to come, because they knew of him. They had read *The Marrow*, highly regarded it in England and were looking for him to come. But as he made his way to America he finally had to stop and in the Netherlands died, as I remember. Ames knew Thomas Hooker who was the founder of Connecticut, the most powerful orator of his day. Cotton Mather said of Ames "That profound, that sublime, that subtle, the irrefragable good that angelical doctor, William Ames." Well, that's an awfully high compliment for Ames. And I think if you'll read *The Marrow* and you can find it and read it, you will at least have a much higher regard of him than perhaps you have at the present time.

What did Ames believe and how did it influence the life of the colonists? Well, that's what we want to talk about for a minute. The colonial minister as scholar, first of all. Now, those men were different kinds of preachers from the preachers that we have today. I wanted to read you a little debate that was held. And perhaps I can find it if you don't mind waiting for a minute or two. The story is told of Thomas Parker of Newberry, which illustrates the condition of scholarship among the parsons. The theological opinions of this minister did all together approve themselves to his brethren. The brethren therefore visited Thomas Parker and engaged in argument with him. They spoke

in English, he replied in Latin. They took up the argument in Latin. He answered in Greek. [Laughter] They continued it in Greek, and he fled to Hebrew. They followed him into Hebrew, and he clinched the matter in Arabic. This was truly a cancer for them, because Arabic was beyond their requirements. But that incident gives at least a conception, my text says a fair conception, but it may seem very unfair to us. It gives you a conception of the scholastic conditions which prevailed among the preachers at that particular time. So Ames was born in Suffolk, educated, graduated in 1607, became a Fellow, although a nonconformist.

Now, he was a consultant to the counsel of Dordrecht, as I mentioned. He was a man behind the scenes. He was not an official delegate, but he was one to whom the others often came for counsel. Now, what did Ames believe, I ask? How did it influence the life of the colonists? Well, I think you can see that a person, who understood as much as these men did, gave a character to the colonists that would be quite different from the men of this particular day. These are the men from whom Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth came.

The colonial minister, as a preacher, let me just say a few words about this. Three things could be said of him. In the first place they were very learned men. They were peers of the best dialecticians in Europe, such as Jonathan Edwards, for example. Their sermons were logical arguments. One man is reported to have fifty-six divisions and subdivisions in his sermon. Now, I know you would not have like to have heard that particular sermon. I'm not sure that I would either, except for the historical fact that I could afterwards say I heard that sermon. But I think it will give you some idea of the kind of discourses that were given. One of the persons who has written with regard to these men has said with reference to one of them that he was a book in riches. [Laughter]

Well, they were learned men. They were long, and in fact, one person I wonder if I can find that comment that he made, which I thought was rather interesting about, I'm not sure I can do it. But this individual spoke about the fact that he judged sermons by

what he was drinking at the time. [Laughter] And he spoke about the fact that he had to take a second glass, at one of the meetings. I just do not feel that I can find that, but at any rate quite a bit different from today where you like short sermons pithy with a few jokes. But things were different then. They were long sermons. They were listenable.

Whitefield was perhaps the best of the crowd in both Britain and in the United States. I just finished reading two big books of Whitefield and he's one of my favorite individuals. Whitefield was a Calvinistic evangelist. We often hear people say, "If you're a Calvinist you cannot believe in evangelism." Well, that's just pure ignorance. Because George Whitefield is probably the greatest evangelist who has ever evangelized in the United States of America. Whitefield made seven trips across the Atlantic when a trip across the Atlantic took six weeks. He made seven trips across the Atlantic. In one of the first of his trips he founded an orphanage just outside of Savannah, Georgia called Bethesda. And for the rest of his life he ministered to that particular orphanage, taking up offerings in many of the places where he preached for the orphans in Savannah, Georgia on the edge of Savannah. In fact, Benjamin Franklin was a person who came to know Whitefield very well and was involved with Mr. Whitefield in a number of meetings and involved also in the support of the orphanage, Bethesda. At any rate, these individuals were very listenable.

And I say this because the orphan here, our Arminian friends tell us, if you're a Calvinist and you believe God has elected certain people, then you don't evangelize. It's just the opposite. If you know that God has elected a certain people and is to bring them to the Lord through preaching, which is what the Scriptures say, then all the more reason to preach the word, because you know that some preach the word, perhaps I, perhaps here, are going to be effective an instrument of the Lord in brining them to the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The knowledge of the fact that there is a body of elect people is the greatest of incentives to a person who preaches and teaches the word of God. So it's not surprising that George Whitefield's probably the greatest evangelist

who ever ministered in the United States. And ultimately Mr. Whitefield died in the United States in Newburyport, Massachusetts. You can go to a little Presbyterian church there, and you can even see where Mr. Whitefield's remains are there.

He also preached in my hometown of Charleston, South Carolina a number of times because his boats frequently landed in Charleston. He got in trouble with the Anglican church there, St. Philip's Church, well known to all of us Charlstonians. Because of the fact that he was preaching the word, and the church had ministers there at the time who were not doing that particular thing. So they were learned men. They were long. They were listenable. I wish I could talk about how listenable they were.

But the colonial minister as a man, "Raw manliness," someone has said, "characterized them." People were divided into man, women, and priests. But that did not describe the man who was the colonial minister of the gospel of Christ. Most of them were farmers, teachers, hunters, and they had a number of eccentrics as well. I know some stories about them, but we don't have time to look at that.

I want to say a few words now about what they really preached, the colonial minister as a theologian. The early colonists who were interested in spiritual things were largely Puritan in piety. They were Ramists in philosophy. Now, I'm not going to say anything further about that, because most of us, perhaps, are not prepared to talk about the history of philosophy. But they were Ramists in philosophy. And then finally, in theology they were Calvinist, not Arminian. That does not mean, of course, that there were not Arminians there. That there were not discussions and there were not struggles, there were. But the early colonists were generally, basically Calvinist in their theology, and the key word that described their theology is their faith in the sovereignty of God, true sovereignty of God.

There were two great emphases in their preaching. In the doctrine or teaching of living to God, faith and observance of the doctrine that they believed. True faith, they believed in the sovereign work of God and they believed in walking in accordance with

it, very simply. Now, Ames is probably a good illustration, because he was Calvinist. He was a preacher. He was also a professor, a very knowledge man.

What are Ames' views? Let me kind of just go down through them real quickly. For Ames on the doctrine of God, Ames believed that God was self-existent. We, I hope, believe that. I know that in Believers Chapel you are supposed to follow the kind of teaching that believes that God is self-existent, eternal, immutable, a sovereign God. As Paul says, "He works all things according to the counsel of his own will," Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 11. They were solidly Trinitarian, one God, but this God subsists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; Trinitarian. They were not Arians, they were Trinitarians.

As you may know in New England the Trinitarians were at one point dominant, but ultimately in New England Unitarianism became the principle views of the professing Christian, especially around Boston. In the doctrine of man they believed that man was created, that he had fallen, and that he was unable to respond. Now that is very important, unable to respond. In other words, no free will. That was the doctrine of the Calvinist. It is the doctrine of a knowledgeable Calvinist at the present day. Unable to respond for the simple reason that the fall affects our will, as well as the other aspects of our nature. So we are unable of ourselves to turn to the Lord. In turning to the Lord it is the work of the Holy Spirit who works and transforms us giving us the power to turn to the Lord. That's one of the major differences, perhaps the major difference between a Calvinist and an Arminian. Or the difference between a Calvinist and the popular evangelical theology of today, grounding in the free will of man. In other words, the fall is not a complete fall.

The doctrine of Christ, our Lord was the God-man, the God-man who made satisfaction for sin, who in the giving of himself on Calvary's cross satisfied the claims of God against those for whom our Lord was dying. In the doctrine of salvation, they believed in divine election, that God had truly elected a certain people, and he was

bringing that certain people to the knowledge of himself. We still believe that. Oh wait, I take that back; I still believe that. Martha and I believe that. Howard Prier and I believe that, unless he's changed his views. I know Ann does his wife. So what we're talking about is something that's very, very important for all of us here. Man created, fallen, unable to respond. "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." That just says it simply doesn't it? "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Very simple, but I see that you are, many of you at least, manifest the kind of faith that these colonial people had.

As far as the doctrine of salvation is concerned, or the doctrine of Christ, he was the God-man who made satisfaction for sin. In the doctrine of salvation they believed in a divine sovereign election and reprobation. They believed in the ministry of the Spirit calling men to Christ. They believed in justification. That is, when men are called to faith in Christ they are justified. Now justification does not mean, as you have probably been taught, made righteous. Not yet, declared righteous. The Greek word *dikaio* which is the word translated justified in the New Testament so frequently is a word that means to declare righteous, to pronounce a judgment of righteous. Not to make a person righteous, when you believe in Christ you are declared righteous. That is, Christ has paid your penalty. He has stood for you as your substitute. And as a result of that your sins are taken away in the sight of God and you are declared righteous. You're not righteous yet. We know that. The husband knows it; the wife knows it. Martha knows it, she tells me from time to time. [Laughter] And I'm sure that's the experience of many of you in the audience. To be declared righteous.

Now furthermore, we are, I mentioned elected, called, justified, and as a result of what has happened we are bound together in what is called the assembly, the church, the called out group. The word church is the Greek word *ekklesia*. *Kalleo* [ph 30:18] means to call, *feth* means out. *Ekklesia* is the body of people who are called out from the total body of human beings. So the church is a called out body. Wouldn't it be nice if

everybody understood that about the church, that is it's a called out body, called out from the rest of humanity.

As far as the doctrine of the future was concerned in the early days, particularly in the colonial days there were people who believed in the premillennial coming of our Lord, but there were many who did not believe that. Their doctrines of the future were not as well-defined as many of us would like for them to have been. But they believed in a visible coming of our Lord. They believed in a visible coming of our Lord. They believed in a bodily resurrection. They believed a bodily resurrection. They believed in a final judgment, and they believed in eternal life and eternal death as well.

The most famous sermon is probably the famous sermon of Edwards in which we have "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Edwards read that sermon, and he read it in a high squeaky voice. For that was kind of his voice. His text was Deuteronomy 32:36, "Their feet shall slide in due time." What a magnificent statement, "Their feet shall slide in due time." And Edwards preached that sermon and it's not been forgotten even to the present day. So this is kind of the colonialists as believers in the truth of God.

I have a few illustrations I would like to mention to you. There's an incident that I wanted to, I finally found it here. Of course the length of the sermons that these men preached was proverbial. Some of them preached one hour, some preached for one hour and then took an hour glass in hand and turned it over. And the minister would say as he turned it over, "Now we'll take another glass and go on preaching." There was a, this incident amuses me, and I must confess that I would have liked to have been there when this man said what he said. But there was a man at Exeter, Massachusetts who stood with stones in his pocket and one in hand, ready to throw at Edwards, but he dropped it before the sermon was far advanced, and going up to him after the preaching was over he said, "Sir, I came to hear you, with the intention to break your head. But God, through your ministry has given me a broken heart."

Then a shipbuilder was on hand and one asked what he thought of him, "Think," he replied, "I tell you sire every Sunday that I go to say," this is about Whitefield I should say, "but every Sunday that I go to Perish church I can build a ship from stem to stern under the sermon. But were it to save my soul, under Mr. Whitefield I could not lay a single plank." He was so interested from the beginning he forgot all about building the ship that he planned to build while the minister was preaching.

Benjamin Franklin became acquainted with Whitefield. And there's no indication, incidentally, that Franklin ever responded. But he was very friendly with Whitefield, and Whitefield saw him several times and even had some things to say about what Whitefield was trying to do in Georgia. He does say this, "I did not," said Franklin, "disapprove of the design, but as Georgia was then destitute of materials and workmen, and it was proposed to send them from Philadelphia at a great expense. I thought it would have been better to have built the house," that is the orphan house, "in Philadelphia and brought the children to it. This I advised; but he was resolute in his first project, rejected my counsel, and I therefore refused to contribute. I happened soon after to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection," that is a collection for the orphans at Bethesda, "and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me, I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold." I don't know what five pistoles of gold were, and Martha looked it up last night. And I forgot, what did you tell me? Spanish gold coins. I have not carried any of those around myself in my life, so far as I know.

But Franklin said, "As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver; and he finished so admirably, that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all." Well, that's kind of typical of Whitefield. The remarkable man, George Whitefield.

Now I'd like to, can we open up for questions? Okay. But I would recommend to any of you reading Whitefield's biography. The best of the ones that I've read is the two volume biography, and I have so enjoyed that, they're big books. One volume is four hundred and fifty pages. It's easy to read. The print's good. It's not small. The other is about three hundred pages, so you'll be reading maybe eight hundred pages. That may make you sick. [Laughter] But nevertheless it will be good for you, and you'll appreciate the labors that George Whitefield did for the lost.

Now mind you, this man was a five point Calvinist. So all you have to do, if you ever run into anyone who says, "I don't want to be a five point Calvinist, I believe in evangelism." Just say, "Have you ever heard of George Whitefield, the greatest evangelist who ever came to America, and certainly the soundest of the theologians." Mr. Wesley, John Wesley, the Arminian and he were very close friends. But they differed over Calvinism. Mr. Wesley preached Whitefield's funeral sermon. They had theological discourse and argument. And in fact Wesley wrote a sermon called "Free Grace" expressing his views and critical of the opposing views. Whitefield answered his sermon "Free Grace." And if you possibly get a chance, read that and read Whitefield's response. It will indicate to you that he knew what he was talking about. He was knowledgeable in theology. In fact in my opinion more knowledgeable than John Wesley himself. But at any rate, to remember those facts is enough to keep you, I think, interested in those things that concern them.

Well, I think it's time for me to take a few questions from you, so if you would like to ask a question or so, speak up. Raise your hand and speak up.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Well, it has been known that people lose positions as a result of Calvinism. You know, of course, the reason that I was not teaching at Dallas Seminary

was over that same fact. Now, I'm happy that it happened, don't misunderstand me, because I think often those things happen and give you a sense of freedom that is exhilarating. It lifts the bondage. Those are just the facts of life, you know. Some people react so negatively to certain things that almost anything can happen. But it's not uncommon today for people to leave a ministry because of Calvinism or Arminianism. In fact, way down the line now you may have some Arminian preaching in Believers Chapel and the elders, if they have any theological sense still, will say, "No we don't want that kind of theology taught in Believers Chapel." And make a change. Those are the facts of life. Any other questions?

[Question from the audience.]

[Johnson] Well, probably any of the theologically literate biographies of some of the important men, like biographies of Edwards, Whitefield, other people who were prominent in those days. Because there are many of them, just go into the library of a Bible school or theological seminary and look in the stacks where biographies of individuals are given or read some of the history of New England, for example. Get some names and look up some books. I think those volumes about Whitefield are an excellent place to begin. The librarian says that we have some here in our library.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] *The Marrow*, I don't think at the present time is being published. It has been, however, recently. I didn't bring my copy of it, but you might be able to find it if you look at any of the used book lists that some of our libraries put out.

[Comment from the audience]

[Johnson] Our librarian will check for you. But *The Marrow* is very interesting. It's not brief; it's maybe three hundred pages. It's very pithy. It's the kind of thing that you read and you think after you finish it, "Why is that so famous?" One of the reasons it's so famous that you can get through it, and he's compressed the truth into something that anybody can understand.

Ames was a great man. I have one thing that I forgot. Laurie, our church secretary, would be upset if I didn't say something about William Ames. These are a couple of pages that I write for myself if I'm preaching and the subject is going to come up, I like to write a brief summary. This is of *The Marrow*, and Ames was Puritan, a Calvinist I mentioned. And on the design of Christ's atonement he framed this brief syllogism. Quibus intenditur eis applicatur sed non omnibus obligatur ergo, therefore, *et omnibus intenditur*, so pithy and so to the point. [Laughter] I wouldn't have done that for anyone else but you Beverly. [Laughter] But anyway what that is is, "For whom it is intended, to them it is applied. But not to all is it applied, therefore not to all is it intended." Nothing could be simpler than that. If you believe that there is a purpose of God and that God does control the flow of theological thinking in the hearts of men, there are elect people. The Bible says it over and over; Old Testament and New Testament, there are elect people. There are therefore also non-elect people. For whom it is intended, the elect, to them it is applied. But not to all is it applied. There are people who die without Christ. Therefore, not to all is it intended. Isn't that simple? That's not easy, of course, because we remember that there are individuals who are elected. There are those who are non-elected.

So what do we do in a situation like that? We get down upon our knees, if there's any question and make sure in our relationship with the Lord, that we belong to those who are the elect company, we believe, we turn to him. Election is a great incentive to evangelism. It's a great comfort to a preacher also. So for whom it's, to me it sounds

better in Latin. [Laughter] I had eight years of Latin, so it sounds better to me. But for you and for me, "For whom it's intended, to them it's applied, but not to all is it applied. Therefore, not to all is it intended." The extent of the atonement is settled by the intent of the atonement. That's how simple it is really.

So now all of you ladies and you men, you've had the question brought before you. When do we stop?

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Here or at home? [Laughter]

[Question from the audience]

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]