



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various

“Epilogue to the Discourse”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee again for the opportunity to study Thy word together. We thank Thee for the instruction that the Lord Jesus has given to the eleven. We remember that these words were given to them in the light of the age that was to come, but the age in which we ourselves are living. We thank Thee for the light that these words shed upon our own daily paths. We pray that as we conclude the section of the upper room discourse that has to do with the discourse itself that the things that our Lord says may strike home to us and be of use to us in our own daily life. Enable us Lord to be submissive to the truth that is found in Scripture. We commit this hour to Thee and the hour that follows and we pray Thy blessing upon each one present. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We're turning tonight to John chapter 16, verse 25 through verse 33, and our subject is the “Epilogue to the Discourse.” This is really the concluding section of the discourse proper, although it is very common for people to speak of the upper room discourse as the section that begins in chapter 13 and concludes with our Lord's high priestly prayer in chapter 17. The discourse proper however, is concluded with chapter 16, and chapter 17 is the final prayer that our Lord prayed.

There are three cycles of thought in this last section. In verses 25 through 27 the Lord Jesus speaks of proverbs and plainness of speech. And then in verse 28 through verse 30 he speaks of return and their response is given. And finally in the last section, verse 31 through verse 33, he reminds them of the trial that they are going to face as believers, but at the same time of the triumph that he has accomplished, or will shortly accomplish and in which they have a part.

So let's turn now to verse 25 through verse 27 and we look at the section that has to do with proverbs and plainness of speech,

“These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.”

Now you'll notice that he says in verse 25 that he has spoken to them in proverbs, but he is going to speak to them no longer in proverbs but show them plainly of the Father. Now this is a rather strange thing when you think about it because if, as so many say our Lord Jesus is simply a man, here is a strange teacher who will die in twenty-four hours and yet at the same time calmly suggests that he is going to continue to teach long after his death. You see again that undergirding this whole discourse is the conscious conviction on our Lord's part that while he faces death and while he faces leaving this present scene, it's leaving this present scene only in the physical sense and not in the spiritual sense through the Spirit. The Spirit will still teach them new truth. And so consequently, he will show them plainly of the Father through the Holy Spirit.

Now I think that when he says he will show them plainly of the Father he does not mean that he is going to give them new themes, but rather he's going to expand the

things that he’s been teaching them up to this point. Because notice he says, “I will show you plainly of the Father.” It has been our Lord’s aim to inform the apostles and others of the Father in heaven. In fact, that is really the aim of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. It is not so much he himself says, to make himself known as it is through himself to make the Father known. And the great desire of our Lord’s heart is to bring a believer to the place where he is attached, not so much to himself, but through himself, because we cannot help but be attached to him, through himself, to the Father. So he says, “I will show you plainly of the Father.”

So he will not give them new things, but he will inform them of the things that he has taught them through the Spirit. He will unfold all of the implications of the germ form of the teaching that is found before the time of the cross. He will not give them a new creed. Incidentally there’s nothing wrong with a creed of course. By the way, creed, the word creed comes from the Latin word credo, which means to believe. So consequently, a creed is simply something that is believed. There are people who like to say, “I don’t believe in creeds, I believe in the Bible.” Well, that’s your creed, you do have a creed, it’s something in which you believe. In fact, the word believe is the same as the word creed. That is, they mean the same thing. One is a Germanic, Anglo-Saxon word and the other a Latin expression, but they mean the same thing. So the Lord is not going to give them new creeds but he is going to inform them of the Father, giving them through the Spirit further instruction on the implications of the faith.

Now it’s interesting that he says in verse 26 “at that day ye shall ask in my name and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me and have believed that I came out from God.” In other words, at that time they will ask in his name, but that will not be necessary for the Lord Jesus to ask for them. That is, they will be able to go directly to the Father through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You’ve often seen young people, two children of the same parents, but one of whom feels for some reason that he does not have quite the access that the other has. Brother says to sister, “Would you ask Daddy, so and so, for me” because he knows that perhaps the relationship that exists at the present time between son and father is not nearly so good as the relationship that exists between daughter and father, and vice versa. Now if you’ve ever had any brothers or sisters you know exactly what I’m talking about. Well the Lord Jesus in effect says, “Now it’s not going to be necessary for you to come through me and for me to ask for you, you’re going to be able to ask directly the Father in my name that is by virtue of what I have done.”

Then in verse 28 through verse 30 we have the themes of return and response. Notice verse 28, “I came forth from the Father and am come into the world. Again I leave the world and go to the Father.” Now in verse 28 we have something of a complete summary of the Christian faith. We have his preexistence referred to, “I came forth from the Father.” The Greek preposition “from” is a preposition that means from the side of, “I came forth from the Father.” And it suggests fellowship with the Father. It suggests that he was in fellowship with the Father and from that fellowship he came forth in the world. So it suggests his preexistence. But it also states, “I came forth from the Father” and the suggestion is that he has come into the world, and it goes on to say, “and am come into the world” and so we have the idea of the incarnation. So we have preexistence and incarnation. But we also read, “again I leave the world” and that of course is a reference to the time of his death. And finally, he says, “and go to the Father” and so we have his ascension. So it is a kind of complete summary of the Christian faith; his preexistence, his incarnation, his death, and then there is implied his resurrection because he speaks of his ascension to the Father.

Now the prepositions that are used are rather interesting here in verse 28, he says, “I came forth from the Father” and the idea is from the side of the Father. But then in verse 28 we read, well I said “I came forth from the Father,” in some of the Greek

manuscripts in verse 28 we have the Greek preposition *para*, “from the side of,” suggesting as I just mentioned a moment ago, the preexistence and the fellowship and communion with the Father, but some of the other Greek manuscripts have the Greek preposition *ek*, which suggests origin. In other words, I’ve come forth as my source the Father. And finally, down in verse 30 we read, “Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things and needest not that any man should ask Thee: by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God.” and a different preposition is used here, the preposition *upo*. Here the idea is the idea of separation only. So in, if we put together all of these statements we really have probably three ideas. He came from the side of the Father, suggestive of the fellowship with the Father. He came out of the Father, suggestive of his origin in the Godhead, and then, and that incidentally only with reference to his son ship, not with respect to his eternal essence. And finally, simply the statement “I came forth from God,” having the idea of separation only.

Now then, in verse 29 and 30 we have some comments from the disciples, “His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee: by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God.” What an interesting thing this is, this succinct verse, in verse 28, which doesn’t say anything new, “I came forth from the Father, am come into the world, again I leave the world, and I go to the Father.” Now we grant as we’ve said that this is a kind of summary of the Christian gospel. It’s a succinct verse, crowded with great words that have great august facts behind them. Because if you take away the incarnation and the ascension of the risen Lord, well you have a moving and gallant and inspiring story left, but you do not have any true Lord God, and the whole of the gospel is gone.

Now while we say all of that, really that’s nothing much different from what our Lord has been saying all along isn’t it? He said, “I’ve come from the Father, am come into the world, I’m leaving the world, I’m going to the Father.” There’s nothing new about

this, but the disciples respond in verse 29 by saying, “Lo, now speakest Thou plainly and speakest no proverb.” So simple words, which he’d spoken evidently many times to them, suddenly are words by which they understand. Suddenly the light has broken in upon them.

William Temple has written a book on the Gospel of John, in fact, several volumes. And in this book he has a number of very interesting thoughts. It’s an attempt to expound the gospel, by a man who was well, as we would say, a liberal conservative, sometimes liberal, sometimes conservative. Mr. Temple was a great mind, a great leader, and was a great academic as well as a great churchman. And so, the book that he has written on the Gospel of John is a very interesting book. He speaks out of a great deal of experience and a great deal of learning. But commenting on this text he puts down rather humorously, and at the same time wryly, but seriously, some illustrations of how this often happens in the life of teachers. He comments on the fact that very often teachers have old pupils come to the teachers long after they’ve been in the classroom. And now they come back to the teacher and they begin to speak about some enthusiastic series of messages or lectures, he said that they may have just heard and how the light has been so tremendous that they have seen through this course of lectures. And Mr. Temple has said as the former pupils have expounded with enthusiasm the new things that they have learned, in his mind he is remembering that they are the very things that he had taught them before which they had heard, had heard more than once, and had seemed rather bored when he told it to them. And he finally put it down to the fact that of course there are truths that we have heard many times but nevertheless, we are not yet ready for these truths, and consequently, the truths when they come, make no impression upon us.

Now I want to say that Bible teachers are often very difficult to follow. I know I’m very difficult to follow. Sometimes I have difficulty following myself. [Laughter] The thoughts that I’m seeking to present are not always absolutely clear in my own mind. It

would be nice if everything I ever said was pellucid, to me. But it's not always that way, and so I can understand how someone sitting in the audience might not be able to follow me, not because the truth is difficult so much as I'm difficult in the expression of it. But then there are many times in which I know that I have spoken very plainly and very simply. And then someone has come and has said to me, “Well that was a little over my head tonight, teacher” or something like that. Now that's a kind of a put down and I don't mind it, [Laughter] because I've had it enough now my skin I guess is pretty tough. But, often I do know that the reason is not that I was not plain that night, the reason is for some reason they were not yet ready for that truth or uninterested in that truth.

Now it would seem to be an illustration of it right here when the Lord Jesus says, “I came forth from the Father, am come into the world, I leave the world, I go to the Father,” and the disciples say unto him, “Lo, behold now speakest Thou plainly and speakest no proverb, now are we sure that Thou knowest all things and needest not that any man should ask Thee, by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God.” So, they've come to a confidence in the Lord, at this point. That of course will be very fruitful in the time to come. So, I believe that's probably what is involved when they say, “Lo, now speakest Thou plainly.” So I guess that even the Lord Jesus found that in his teaching, there were times when it wasn't so much that he was not clear, but those who were listening were not ready for some reason, for that truth.

Well finally now, in verse 31 through verse 33, we come to the third of the cycles of thought. And so the Lord Jesus asks them, “Do you at this moment really believe?” You see he even thinks that possibly at this moment they're speaking beyond their experience. They've claimed that they believe, but do you really believe, do you know what you're in for, in effect, “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” So he speaks to them of the fact that there is going to be a time of trial and they are going to be scattered. They're going to leave him alone, but

he's not alone. He knows that he's not alone, he is with the Father, the Father is with him. Incidentally, I think that's the secret of our Lord's calmness amid the turbulence of his life. And it's the secret of calmness for every other one.

Now the presence of the Lord Jesus, with them at this point, does not evidently have the force and power that it will have later on. But they should be learning from him, because that's what he's trying to say “the Father is with me.” Someone might say, “Well what about the time in just a moment or two when he will cry out on the cross, ‘My God, my God why has Thou forsaken me?’” Well even then the presence of God was still with the Son, but it was like the sun, s-u-n, behind a cloud. Because it was at that point that the sin question was settled. But even then our Lord addressed his prayer to the Father, knowing that the Father heard the petition.

But let's look now for a few moments in the remaining part of our study at verse 33, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation.” Now here are the two spheres of life in which a Christian always lives. He lives in the world, and then he lives in Christ, “in me, you have peace, in the world you have tribulation.” You've noticed of course, how the apostle addresses his letters often to the church that is in Colosse. But at the same time, he often in the passage in which he speaks of the church being in a particular place, he speaks of that church being in Christ. So there are two spheres of existence which we all have. You here tonight sitting in this audience, if you're a believer, you are in Christ. That is one sphere of your existence, the spiritual sphere. But at the same time you're in Dallas, and at this present time you're in the auditorium of Believers Chapel. So, we have two spheres of life in which we live. “In the world,” the Lord Jesus says we will have tribulation, “but in me there will be peace.”

What is peace? What is a proper picture of peace? Now, I read somewhere and I think I have a reference here in my notes to two artists who agreed to paint pictures that would portray their respective pictures of peace. And the first artist painted a calm little

pond surrounded by woods and an open plain. There was no sign of life in the picture, not even an indication the breath of air was stirring. That was his idea of peace. The other artist had an entirely different idea of peace. So he painted a scene with a wind swept landscape. There was a raging torrent in the foreground. A large tree hung over the river bank. And on a slender bow, just above the raging torrents of the stream, there were two little birds sitting and they were singing. That was his picture of peace, amid the turbulence of the storm the birds singing. Now probably, that's a much truer picture of peace than the other. In fact the first scene is a picture not so much of peace as it is of stagnation. When the Bible says that “in me ye may have peace” the Lord Jesus is not suggesting in any way that he intends that we shall have a life free from tribulation, free from trials, free from tragedies, free from the disappointments of life, free from the problems of life, free from all of those things that make up human life. But, he does promise us that amid the wind swept landscape and amid the turbulence and the raging storm it's possible, like the two little birds, to sit and sing, that “in me you may have peace, in the world you shall have tribulation.”

There's a story that I have in my notes also about a little Scottish village. It's a story told by C.H. Morrison, who was a well known preacher of a few generations ago. He tells the story of a friend who used to collect charities in a small Scottish village. And at a certain time in the year he would go out and knock on all of the little cottages and ask for some donations for the local charity. And one of the cottages that he had to visit was the cottage of a pious and reverent old woman but she had practically no money. But she would have been insulted if they had not knocked on her door, because she kept a little mite or a little bit of money there to give for the charity. So when the day came for the little girl to knock on the door and collect for the charity, she made the knock and she was invited in and it so happened that the lady was having a cup of liquid on the table. And when the girl knocked she hastily took a napkin and put over the cup and what she had on the table so that the little girl might not see it. And she invited her in

and she went over to get the little money that she had saved. And while she did the little girl was a little curious and so she went over and she picked up the edge of the napkin and she looked down and she said, “Why Betty, it isn’t tea you’ve got here, it’s water.” And she said, “Aye my dear, it’s just water, but he makes it taste like wine.” What a beautiful little story of the difference that our Lord makes in life. In the world we shall have tribulation, but in him he promises that we shall have peace.

Now I think it’s also rather startling that we read here, “in the world ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” Well that’s nice, that the Lord has overcome the world, but what about me? We might have expected him to say, “be of good cheer; you shall overcome the world.” But he says, “be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

You remember Constantine, who was supposed to have seen the sign in hoc signo vinces. And in this in hoc signo vinces he interpreted that as meaning that it was possible to conquer by the sign of the cross. Well I think that’s something of what our Lord has in mind here when he says “be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” and because he has overcome the world all who are in him have overcome the world. So here we have right here in the upper room discourse, in germ form, all of the teaching that the Apostle Paul will later give us in such fullness of the representative character of our Lord’s work for his own. His death, his burial, his resurrection, is a death, burial, and resurrection of each one of us. This is why our guilt of sin is covered by the death that he died because there we bore our penalty and consequently, heaven is now unable to bring against us any charge because he’s borne all of our sin.

If heaven were to bring a charge against me I should just remind heaven of what Christ has done as my representative. If heaven were to say, “You have sinned” I would say, “But Christ has died for my sins.” If heaven were to say to me, “But you must believe” I would ask heaven, “Is not unbelief a sin? And if it is a sin and it is the greatest sin, then our Lord must have died for it or else he died for all sins but the most important

one, the sin of unbelief.” You see, he died for that too. So that because of what he has done it is impossible for anyone to bring any charge against those whom the Lord represents. That’s why the Lord represents the believers, because his representation is a valid, substitution for them that avails. That’s why we believe that the Lord Jesus died for his own, because his substitution was a valid substitution, a real substitution, not a false one. Not a maybe if you do something, but it was a true substitution. He has overcome the world and that victory will be seen ultimately in his Second Advent and Kingdom, and in the eternal state. And we participate because we are identified with him. Now understanding the representative work of the Lord Jesus then we’re not surprised by “I have overcome the world” therefore, “be of good cheer” because in him we have overcome the world too.

Well, what does that really mean? Well I think it means at least these things. Now I’ve got some little words written in my notes and I’m going to have to take my glasses out. [Laughter] I can read the typing, but my printing is something else. [Laughter] This means or suggests three more things. Alright I see some of you laughing. You know I’m getting old, alright [Laughter] I admit it. The truth must out. It means liberation of life. If he has overcome the world then what about worry? What about fear? What even about, what about self-contempt? He has given us liberation. And then secondly, we have here the doom of sin, the ultimate defeat of evil. This is a kind of fore view of, or rather we have a kind of fore view of this when the seventy remember went out on their ministry and then they came back, and we read in Luke chapter 10, verse 17 and 18 these words. Let me read them because I’ve forgotten exactly how they start. Luke chapter 10, verse 17 and verse 18,

“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us through Thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from

heaven. Behold, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.”

In the Lord Jesus Christ we have the doom of sin. And finally, we have also the comfort that we need in time of sorrow, “I have overcome the world” and consequently, in the midst of all of the experiences of life, we can be victorious.

Can you not imagine as you were in the company of the apostles, the quiet majesty in the face of our Lord Jesus amid the seeming crash about him of all that he had lived for, for that’s what it looked like to them. They were in a little upper room, the Romans and the leaders in Israel were anxious to get their hands upon his throat. Everything seemed to be crashing round about him and soon he would be dying but nevertheless, in the midst of this, “I have overcome the world; be of good cheer, in me ye shall have peace.” This is a faith that cannot possibly be beaten. And of course in the Bible the Lord Jesus is the supreme illustration of faith for us. And I think in the light of these words that the Lord Jesus has uttered we have not only this beautiful illustration of a faith that cannot possibly be beaten, but we also have a master who is worth following, the Lord Jesus, “In me peace, in the world tribulation; be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Isn’t it great as a Christian to know not only that the Lord Jesus has done all of these things for us but nevertheless has undertaken our cause, has undertaken to be our leader, has undertaken actually to be with us constantly, and has invited us to follow him. How great it is to have a master and Lord who is so worthy of all of our trust. May God enable us to give him the trust that pleases him and that is for our own best good. Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for these wonderful words spoken in the upper room discourse. We rejoice that he has come from the Father. That he has come

into the world, that he has also left the world and ascended to the Father. And we thank Thee that through the Spirit he plainly today shows us the Father. And we rejoice that in him, in the midst of the tribulations that we find in the world, we have peace. Not stagnation, but peace. So oh God, we pray that amid all of the experiences of life, we may enjoy that peace. Give us Lord something of the hope, some inkling of the prospect that lies before us, so soon before us, to leave this present scene and to enter the presence of our great triune God, and enjoy Thee forever and ever. Oh God, in the time that remains enable each one of us to be faithful to the vision that the Scriptures present of him. Give us Lord the skills, spiritual skills, to apply our faith in the experiences of life. Deliver us Lord from a simple theological understanding of things, unaccompanied by any experience of the truths that mean so much to us. Enable us to have theology, and then theology in action. Lord we pray for this company of believers here. May they be strengthened and built up in the faith and encouraged through the word, to launch out in faith, believing Thee amid all...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]