



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

“The Saint’s Tribunal”

TRANSCRIPT

Is it true, Mr. Pryor, that the elders have thought if the good Christians of Believer’s Chapel do not respond to this appeal to help out in the nursery that we are going to establish an adult nursery for them? [Laughter] Is that true?

I wasn’t going to say anything about the message on Wednesday night at all because I think it’s almost self-explanatory except to say that the title is fairly carefully chosen, that what I will be talking on is a Christian response to AIDS and not making any claim at all to give the Christian response to AIDS.

Mr. Pryor likes to mention in the announcements that in Believers Chapel, generally speaking, we seek to carry on a consecutive ministry of the word of God teaching in our 11 o’clock and 8:30 ministry of the word services regularly and systematically through a book of the Bible, and that has generally been true, although not completely. But I ran across again, Howard, the statement which you’ve heard before from *John Knox’s First Book of Discipline for the Scottish Church*, and in it he says something that I think you would appreciate and perhaps others as well. Mr. Knox said in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, “We think it most expedient that the Scriptures be read in order. That is, that some one book of the Old and New Testaments be begun and orderly read to the end. And the same we judge of preaching where the minister, for the most part,

remaineth in one place. For the skipping and navigation from place to place, be it in reading or be it in preaching, we judge not so profitable to edify the church.” [Laughter]

So that is really what we have tried to do, not because John Knox said it, of course, but simply because that over the years we have judged it to be a bit more profitable for ministry of the word of God. There is always a place for handling special topics and special subjects and themes, and we don’t want to suggest in any way that that’s not perfectly legitimate and, in fact, at times very necessary. But for the general ministry of the word of God, we have sought to follow this method of taking books of the Bible and expounding them from chapter 1 through the concluding chapters of them thinking that being acquainted with the Bible and studying the Bible in this way will not only minister to our needs but will also enable us to read the Bible ourselves with much more understanding than if we took isolated topics or even isolated themes or even link the themes through the Bible and developed them profitable, though that may be in certain circumstances.

Well, we are turning to 2 Corinthians again because this is the book that we are expounding, not skipping about, or navigating to use Mr. Knox’s words, and we are reading today for the Scripture reading verse 6 through verse 10 of chapter 5, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 6 through verse 10. And of course, those of you who have been here regularly, you know the apostle is defending his ministry, explaining it, expatiating upon it, and speaking about the things that really move him as he seeks to carry out his commission as an apostle, in fact, the apostle, to the Gentiles. So in the 6<sup>th</sup> verse of chapter 5 he writes,

“Therefore, being always of good courage,” (a word that does mean frequently “confident”) “Therefore being always of good courage (or confident) and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord -- for we walk by faith, not by sight -- we are of good courage, I say, (that is confident) and prefer rather to be

absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Now, we’ll say a word about that adjective “bad” later on. It probably should be rendered “worthless,” but we’ll say something more about it in the exposition. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks and we praise Thy name for the blessings that are ours through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. And we thank Thee for this gathering and for those who are here who want to hear the word of God. And we pray that as we study together we each, both the preacher and those who hear the message, may be edified and built up in our faith. And, Lord, if there should be some here who have never responded to the good news of the gospel of Christ, may there be response today an acknowledgement of our lost condition, an acknowledgement of our need of relationship to Thee, and a casting of ourselves upon him who has loved us and loosed us from our sins in his own precious blood.

We thank Thee that the one of whom the prophets and the psalmists and others in the Old Testament have spoken has come, and that we look back now upon the finished work of redemption that the Lord Jesus has done. And we thank Thee and praise Thee for a living savior in heaven who is waiting to put the capstone upon his work and his coming and kingdom. In the meantime, Lord, enable us, as Paul has said, to be pleasing to Thee and to respond to the responsibilities that we have that arise out of the grace that Thou hast shown to us.

We pray for those listed in our calendar of concern especially. Bless them. May their needs be met. We pray that Thou wilt minister to those who minister to them, give

wisdom and guidance. And, Lord, may there be occasion on the part of those who are ill or those who have problems and difficulties and those who are associated with them, their family and friends, may there be occasion to give Thee thanks for a special grace. We worship Thee our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and may Thy presence be in our midst as we study the word of God together.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] They have changed the microphone on us since eight thirty this morning, and that’s why I wasn’t sure exactly where to attach it in this hour.

The subject for today, as we continue our exposition of 2 Corinthians, is “The Saint’s Tribunal.” The apostle has been expatiating on the things that moved him in ministry. He’s been talking about the gospel of the new covenant, expressing himself as being one of the ministers of the new covenant. He has spoken about the constant danger of death that he and his fellow ministers have been exposed to, concluding in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter by saying, “For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death, for Jesus’ sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”

And further, he has been speaking now recently in the exposition about the intermediate state. For he has been thinking about his exposure to death and how in the midst of his experiences he has attempted to keep his eyes upon the things that are not seen, but the things that are eternal. Because the things that are seen are temporary, the things which are not seen are the eternal things with which he wishes to be exorcised and with he wishes to deal.

To Paul, the ministry of the glad tidings of Messiah’s glory was a solemn calling given him by God as the minister of the gospel to the Gentiles. It was not only solemn, it was glorious. As he goes on to say, but costly, and the experiences that he underwent are just some of the things that he mentions here. When he writes to the Galatians, he says that he bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus; that is, the

evidences of the suffering that he has undergone for his commitment to the message that was given him by God.

Someone has facetiously said that there are three essentials for Christian work. One should have the head of a Father, the heart of a mother, and the hide of a rhinoceros. [Laughter] Well, the apostle, I don’t know that we can say of him that he had the hide of a rhinoceros, but he certainly was an individual who by God’s grace was faced with many an affliction and kept looking up through them and gave God glory and the experiences of his life. If tradition is correct, he ultimately gave his life as a Christian martyr.

Well, we are turning again in chapter 5 to his defense of his calling. He is explaining his high regard for the heavenly, the unseen things, and he says that it springs from his confidence regarding the future. After saying in verse 18 of chapter 4, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” He explains in chapter 5 in verse 1 by saying, “For we know that if the earthly tent, which is our house, is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.” So the apostle, in the light of the fact that he has a home in heaven, is able to carry out this ministry successfully and victoriously.

Now, we are going to look further at what he goes on to say in chapter 5 in verse 6 through verse 8. And so if you drop your eyes down to verse 6 there we read, “Therefore, being always of good courage (or confident) and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord -- for we walk by faith, not by sight -- we are of good courage, I say, (he repeats himself, very confident) and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” You’ll notice the 6<sup>th</sup> verse begins with a characteristic Pauline word “therefore.” The Revised Standard Version renders it “so.” So being confident, or therefore being always of good courage.

Why is it that the apostle is confident, and why is it that he is of good courage, in fact, can repeat that fact? Well, looking at the preceding verses, it’s simply this; he knows

that though his present body is like a tent and therefore a temporary home. He has a house in heaven that is eternal. That’s the first reason why the apostle feels confident or of good courage. And the second is related to God’s work in his soul. Notice the 5<sup>th</sup> verse, “Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.” And so the fact that the apostle has been given the Holy Spirit as the permanent indwelling guest in his house is further consolation for him and further source for this good courage of which he speaks or this confidence in the present situation.

Now, he says he’s confident, although he’s at home in an earthly tent. One of the most interesting things, I think, about that 6<sup>th</sup> verse is this -- now I’ll try to explain it. It, I think, is easy to comprehend if you just remember one little point, “therefore being always of good courage and knowing that while we are at home.” Now, when he says he is at home, he means he’s at home in this present tent or house. But at the same time, he says we are absent from the Lord. Now, the word “absent” is a word that is built on the same root as the word at home in the body. In other words, we could render it this way. For as a paraphrase for you to get, I think, the flavor of it. We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from home from the Lord.

Now, that’s a striking expression because what Paul is saying, it seems, is he has two homes. He is at home in the body, but he’s away from home in the Lord. So that there is one sense in which Paul can say I’m at home in the body, but there is another sense in which he may say I’m away from home from the Lord -- or with -- from the Lord.

In other words, there is a sense in which there is an at-homeness that characterizes the apostle and all of us who are believers in Christ, and in fact, everyone universally. We are at home in the body, but it is a temporary home. It’s a temporary home for believers, and it’s a temporary home for unbelievers as well. Now, Paul goes on to say that while we are at home in the body, we’re away from home with the Lord. Now, that is something that can only be said of believers in Christ. In that sense, Paul says, we have two homes, we are at home in the body, we are away from home from the Lord. But that

is our eternal home. That’s our real home. That’s our citizenship as he puts it in Philippians chapter 3. Our citizenship is in heaven. So we are citizens of heaven, but we are temporarily in this body, which is our present possession.

Now, I think that what Paul means is something like this. He means that we are at home in this body, like for example, a soldier may be at a camp bivouacking when that’s really not the place where he lives. It’s a temporary thing. Or Paul is saying, we are at home in this body like an individual who is traveling from the United States to Europe and who is for eight to ten hours or so at home on the airline in which he is being taken from one continent to the other. It’s a temporary kind of arrangement. So he is a passenger. He is, as a matter of fact, according to Biblical language, he’s a sojourner. Abraham was a sojourner in the Old Testament. The Scriptures speak of him as a sojourner, a stranger and a sojourner here upon this earth because he was looking for the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God, looking for the heavenly city, the city that would come from heaven for him.

Now, that means also that while we are at home in the body being likened our body, as it is here, to a tent that we are as our physical homes or residences is subject to decay. Unfortunately, however, we stay in them. We cannot, because this body is decaying, decide that we will go down to Sears Roebuck or even to Neiman Marcus and buy ourselves a new body. Such is impossible. We are stuck with this body. So like a tent that has rents in it, we try our best to fix up the rents, and the doctors are our aids in doing that. So as you can see I’m living in a patched tent. Doesn’t take much to see that and every time we visit the physician or visit the dentist, further patches are placed upon the tents in which we find ourselves. And as a matter of fact, you can see that in all existence even in the Cowboys offensive line, which also has patches and rents, and it won’t be long before it will have to be transformed entirely. So the apostle then is saying that we know that while we are at home in our temporary body, we are absent or away from home from the Lord.

Now, Paul, of course, has been talking about ways by which he may leave this present existence because having said just above death works in us but life in you. In all of his experiences he naturally thought of death constantly, and he reflected upon the fact that there were two ways for him to leave this present existence, one by death. Now, if he left this present existence by death, he regards that as better than living. Now, he doesn’t say that right here specifically, but he says it in his letter to the Philippians. He said he has to desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better. But he said, I have to stay because of the task that has been given me to perform by the Lord. So we have the apostle saying in his literature that for him to die is to enter into a better existence than his present existence. But there is a further point that the apostle has made in the preceding context. There are two ways by which we may enter into that which is better. We may die physically and that is the pathway into the presence of the Lord, or we may, if it should be God’s will, live until the coming of our Lord when the resurrection body is given to the saints, not until then.

No one has been resurrected at the present time except the Lord Jesus Christ. That is no one has been resurrected in the Biblical sense, possessed of a resurrection body. Christ the firstfruits, those that are Christ’s at his coming he says in his first letter to the Corinthians. So the apostle knows that there are two ways to enter into that which is better, more by much better. As a matter of fact, he says in Philippians one is to die before the resurrection. We enter into the presence of the Lord as a spirit. We don’t have a resurrection body, and Paul is just in the preceding verses called that state entering into a state in which he is naked. That is, he does not have his resurrection body.

He says also the other way is to live to the advent of the Lord and that he much prefers. He wants to be not simply unclothed -- that is to die and to enter into this state of fellowship with the Lord but without a body -- he would like to be clothed upon, verse 2 and verse 4, he states that specifically. He would like to live until he’s caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Now, in the 7<sup>th</sup> verse having said this and on the way to speaking about his confidence about life and death, he lets us know the guiding principle of his life and so important it is for we walk by faith, not by sight. This is a parenthesis in Paul’s discussion here. This principle has both personal and ecclesiastical application. We all know, of course, that in our Christian lives we live by faith that is we live by trust in the word of God, relying upon our Lord to accomplish the promises in the written word through the Holy Spirit for us. So we live by faith.

There are some who live by faith in a remarkable way. Men like George Muller, Hudson Taylor, and many others whose stories we have read. Managed in remarkable ways after the time of the apostles to live by faith, to trust the Lord, and then this has, I say, ecclesiastical applications, churches are to live by faith. Being convinced of this and trying to follow this out, no doubt imperfectly, the elders of Believers Chapel, as you well know, do not make any appeals for funds. We don’t take up a collection. At the Lord’s table, we do Sunday evening reminding those who are there that giving is a Christian privilege, and therefore no offering plates are passed this morning because we don’t want people to think the gospel is something for which we charge. And furthermore, the Christian’s experience in a Christian church should be governed by we live by faith and so we trust the Lord to meet the needs. When the money comes in there are certain things that we carry on as a ministry which we seek to carry on. And if the money does not come in, then we try to cut down in order not to go into debt. As you well know those of you that have been in the Chapel for any time a number of the ways in which we try to, in a missionary way, carry out our responsibilities is through the radio ministry. And, therefore, if the money comes in, there are many stations who would like to have our program. You know why they would like to have it? Not simply because of the preaching and teaching, I don’t think that’s really the reason. They like it because we don’t appeal for funds. They are embarrassed by that. And so, consequently, they like to have a program in which there is not appeal for funds.

That’s, to my mind, one of the ways in which we as an evangelical church have surely failed. And we have seen, of course, in recent weeks some evidences of this. And now we are told that in Oklahoma if you want to you can write to a certain place and you can get a little packet of water that has been blessed by some man. And furthermore, if you will take that water, you will find it will do remarkable things for you. For example, if you have financial needs, anoint your pocket book with this water. [Laughter] And you will become prosperous. If you have physical problems, heart problems, whatever, anoint your body at that point and you will find relief. And furthermore, if you write for it, of course you are expected to add some financial remuneration for it, these things will transpire for you.

Now, I think a person has to have very little intelligence to really respond to that kind of thing. I asked Dr. Howard this morning, one of our elders who is a surgeon, would this work? He said, no, I don’t think so. [Laughter] And so what, of course, makes it absolutely certain it will not is that the water comes from Oklahoma. [Laughter]

But anyway, the Christian church has forgotten that we want by faith, not by sight because we know that propaganda works. There are people who will respond to this in spite of the fact that their good intelligence should tell them that they should never do that, never pander to that, that only gives individuals more reason to do that which is contrary to the teaching of the word of God. So Paul says we walk by faith; we do not walk by sight. That is something that we in the Evangelical world need to pay careful and more attention to.

Well, Paul’s confident expectation and inclination is stated in verse 8, “We are of good courage I say and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. In other words, the apostle states if it came down to my preference I would want to be with the Lord. I would not want to be experiencing the sufferings that I experience now, but I have a commission. Further in the immediately preceding context

he said I would like to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. That is to be clothed upon. That’s his preference. Departure by air.

Now, if that’s really Paul’s preference, in other words, if he prefers the disembodied state to his present state which in Philippians he describes as for me to live is Christ, then to be in this disembodied state, which is not the best state, is still a thing that the apostle longs for. For it means he is at home with the Lord. Now, that’s really true. If it’s really true that it’s a thing to be desired, to be longed for; in fact, so longed for that he says in the preceding context that he is groaning in his present house, then can we say that the next stage of the apostle’s experience is annihilation? It’s quite obvious if the apostle believed in annihilation, he could not say that he longs to leave this present existence.

Well, of course, I know that we don’t have anyone in this audience, any thinking person at least, who believes in annihilation. But this preference for the disembodied state has something to say about the doctrine of soul sleep, also. It’s quite obvious the apostle doesn’t believe in the doctrine of soul sleep if he longs to enter into this disembodied state, though it’s not the greatest longing of his life, to be with Christ. And further, it is quite clear that he did not have any idea that the life beyond this life meant that he was going to enter into purgatorial fires in order for his sins to be further cleansed. It’s quite obvious that the apostle did not believe that for he could not say I’m burdened in this life I long to enter into my disembodied state. All of these things indicate that the apostle did not believe in annihilation. He did not believe in soul sleep. He did not believe in Purgatory and a number of other of the things that have been the viewpoints of men outside the Orthodox Christian tradition.

We believe, the Christian church, has believed historically that when a person dies he enters the presence of the Lord. Some years ago, in Birmingham, Alabama, when I was very young, a member of our family died. He was a young boy, a very fine young

Christian man, about 22 years of age. He had just graduated from college. He had married, and his wife was pregnant.

And one night, during the middle of the night, he was afflicted with what turned out to be a brain disease. They rushed him to the hospital that night and that very night he died. Well, of course, when we heard about it, we went to the hospital, it was two or three in the morning as I remember, or three or four in the morning. We walked into the hospital and his mother was there. He was an only child. She literally, in the finest Christian way, doted upon him. When we met her in the hall, she said, My boy is gone. That has rung with me down through the years. My boy is gone. Not dead, though one could say that. But my boy is gone, and she recognized that his spirit was with the Lord. That’s Christian attitude. That, I think, is what Paul is speaking about here when he says he would rather be at home with the Lord. So my boy is gone, the sequel of a Christian’s death is to enter into the presence of the Lord.

In the light of the fact that one of the characteristic expressions of God himself is light, we can gather from that that light reigns in the life beyond this life and that death is like -- it’s of course difficult to speak of any kind of figure that must be something like, going through a tunnel to the light that lies beyond it. And further, if there is light then there must be sight. And so light and sight are characteristic of the Christian’s death and his entrance into the presence of the Lord. But most of all, he’s with the Lord.

Now, the expression in the original text here in verse 8 is very nice to be at home with the Lord. The preposition “with” here is not the kind of preposition you might expect. There are prepositions often translated “with” that mean simply “in the company of” or “with” in the many ways in which you use the term in English, but this is a very vivid living term. It means “with” in the sense of “in communion with.” In fact, its basic meaning is “facing.” It’s the term that’s used in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the word and word was with God, the eternal Son with the Father in the eternal fellowship that they have enjoyed. That’s the term that is used here. To be at home with the Lord is not

simply to be in his presence but to be in his presence and to be in the relationship of communion with him. It’s referred to when the Lord Jesus spoke to the thief on the cross and said today thou shalt be with me in paradise. Now that term is not used there but that’s the meaning of the word that our Lord gives there because he is explaining what it means for the thief on the cross to die. It’s to be with the Lord in paradise. Marvelous to be in paradise, but to be with the Lord in paradise, how marvelous that must be.

It’s the term that is used in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 when the apostle talks about meeting the Lord in the air and then saying that the Thessalonians are to comfort themselves with these words. He says, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and thus we shall always be with the Lord, therefore, comfort one another with these words.” As the years go by, these great texts concerning what happens to believers as they die come to be more and more meaningful to Christians.

Now, in the 9<sup>th</sup> verse, the apostle having finished with that says “therefore,” that’s the second “therefore” that we have in this passage that we are looking at. “Therefore also, we have as our ambition whether at home or absent.” That is, whether we are here or whether we are there to be well pleasing to him. The sum of all ambition that is truly Christian is to be well pleasing to the Lord. Not well pleasing to the world, not well pleasing to our colleagues, not well pleasing to the church, not well pleasing to our friends, not well pleasing to our family, not even well pleasing to us, but to be well pleasing to the Lord. That’s the Christian’s ambition.

Paul uses this term ambition in two other places there is no need for us to refer to them. He refers to the word in 1 Thessalonians 4:11 and Romans 15 in verse 20, but here he is talking about the Christian’s ambition. It’s to be well pleasing to the Lord. I think the only time that I would question our Lord is if when I enter his presence he should say to me, well done thou good and faithful servant. Every Christian who seeks to serve him, and we all serve him, have as our ambition to be well pleasing to him.

Now, further, there’s a further reason why we should be well pleasing to him, the apostle says in the 10<sup>th</sup> verse, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done whether good or bad.” Now, you can see what the apostle has done. He has to move from his present existence and his desires to enter the presence of the Lord, preferably to have the body given to him over this body without death at the coming of the Lord, and now he has spoken in the 8<sup>th</sup> verse of being with the Lord. And so now in his thoughts he has moved from the outside of the house, so to speak, the eternal home into the inside of the house having said in verse 1, “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our home is torn down we have a building from God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.” And now having moved inside the house in his thought, something very appropriate for this time of the year, the apostle is called to examination.

Now, looking out over the audience, I see some young people, you probably just have had some examinations. Your semester is over. The year is over, and you’ve had to face examinations. Those are good for you, never liked them, always hated them, always waited until the last minute to study for them, too. But examination is a part of life. It’s part of the Christian’s life, too.

Paul is now within the house. He’s called to examination and the question is what have we gained by trading? That is, trading on our privileges with our privileges. You remember Jesus tells the parable of the talents. He tells a story of a man who gave five talents to one man, two talents to another man, and one talent to still another. And then in this passage in Matthew chapter 25, he says he went on his journey and immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them and gained five more talents. In the same manner the one who’d received the two talents gained two more by his trading, but he who received the one talent went away and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. And if you’ll remember the end of the parable is that the Lord praised the one who had traded with the five talents and gained five more. And

praised the one who had traded with his two talents and gained one more, and then exposed the third who saved the talent to judgment and called him a worthless servant.

So when we enter the presence of the Lord there is coming a time when he is going to ask us what we have gained by trading with the talents, the gifts, the privileges that have been given to us. 1 Corinthians chapter 3 speaks of that in some detail. I think it would be nice to turn over there and read it. Chapter 3, verse 11 through verse 15 the apostle writes there to this same group of people and they had this in their background, no doubt, as they read the second letter. “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality” (not quantity, but quality) “of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.” That’s the reason Vernon McGee likes to say at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ many of us are going to smell like we’ve been bought at a fire sale. [Laughter] But that is hardly what the apostle says here in the context, although that may be in harmony with the spirit of it. The apostle is concerned about what we gain by trading with our privileges.

Now, one notices in verse 10 that he says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” In other words, this is a necessity for every one of us. We must. Now, remember, we are judged as sinners at the cross of Christ and therefore if we have believed in the Lord Jesus and then rested our hopes upon the cross, we -- as he says in the first epistle in chapter 3, we do belong to him, we have been saved, and we are always saved. He himself shall be saved. So we are judged as sinners at the cross. Our eternal life with the Lord is not at stake at the judgment seat of Christ. We are judged as sons in this life. And when we step out of the will of God, we may be disciplined by the Lord. We are judged as servants at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, and that’s the

purpose of this particular event and there we are stripped of every facade and we stand before the Lord alone.

Now, I know that occasionally we are inclined to say we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ as if the whole church is to be judged as a body. Well, that of course is not true because he goes on to say in this same verse that each one may be responsible or recompensed for his deeds in the body. So we are not judged as a whole church, in fact, we are not judged as Believers Chapel, we are judged individually but every one of us is to be judged. I don’t think that this is to be understood as if we are all in some place like Texas Stadium or the Cotton Bowl except much bigger, and every Christian comes to the front and the whole church is privy to the judgment pronounced upon each of us. The Bible doesn’t really say anything like that, and we have to leave that for the time that is to come, but we must all individually stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ.

What is the purpose of it? Paul explains, he says that “each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body.” That is the things done by means of the body, according to what he has done whether good or bad. In other words, we are judged not by our motives, not judged for our motives, which we didn’t carry out, our thoughts which did not express themselves in actions, our hopes, we are judged by the things that have been done through the body.

So though forgiven, we still face the scrutiny of our Lord directed toward our service as believers for him. In other words, just to make it real appropriate, if it’s possible for you to serve in the nursery and you didn’t serve in the nursery, when you could have served in the nursery, that question may be raised at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. I used that only as an example. We don’t want too many of you applying to serve in the nursery, [laughter] so that we cannot do it any better that we can without the proper ones. But even the little things, the little responsibilities, the little privileges that

we have had are up for scrutiny at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. This is certainly a solemn thing to think about.

Though forgiven, in what Hanley Mole has called an amnesty of immeasurable mercy -- isn’t that a marvelous expression, an amnesty of immeasurable mercy? We are forgiven. We do have a heavenly amnesty. Big word in the papers these days. We have it. Still we face the scrutiny of him who judges all men, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Howard Pryor and I used to attend Believers Chapel, it used to be a little church that used to be over on Fitzhugh Avenue in Dallas, from which Believers Chapel got its name because the people who met there moved, and they thought another name would be better. And so they abandoned the name. And so when the chapel was started we used the name because we liked the name, Believers Chapel. Mr. Pryor was a student in the theological seminary. And I was an instructor in the theological seminary. And Dr. Harold Nimms was in his residency at Baylor Hospital. And Mr. Dean, one of our elders, was a meteorologist for Braniff Airlines.

And we were there, and I don’t know if whether Howard remembers this or not, but there was a well-known evangelist by the name of Bruce Gilbert who came to the Chapel for some meetings. And on Sunday morning he spoke in the Sunday school hour, and I was present and I heard him describe a dream that he had had and it stuck with me through the years, but he said that he had dreamed just a few days previously or a few weeks previously that he had been at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. And he said that, as he was there in his dream at the judgment seat of Christ, the time came for him to be judged. And he said an angel came out from the side, it was like a platform. He said the angel came out from the side and the angels began to pile up his works, and he said you know it was a rather gigantic pile. And he said, when they were all piled up then an angel came out with a matchbox and struck a little match and put a match to it. [Laughter]

And he said if you’ve ever seen a haystack burn, you have a good impression of what I saw in my dream. And it burned for a while and it sank and it burned some more

and sank, burned some more and sank, and finally there was nothing there apparently. And an angel came out with a little dust pan and swept up, he said, a few jewels, gold, silver, precious stones, and that was all that was left. That impressed me. I still remember Mr. Gilbert telling us of his dream because it seems so true to life. We have these magnificent impressions of the things that we have done, but when we stand at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ under the scrutiny of the judge, well things may be quite a bit different.

Now, he goes on to say, and we are going to receive according to what we have done whether good or bad. That word “bad” is a word that really means worthless. As a matter of fact, it’s a word that’s somewhat related to our English word foul. In other words, the things that we receive at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ are not evil, bad in that sense. There is a Greek word that means that. *Kakos* means bad in the sense of evil often. This word *phaulos* is a word that means bad in the sense of worthless. Very much like my present golf game. It’s not really evil, though occasionally I do get off a wicked slice, but it’s worthless as far as entering any competition and expecting to win anything. That’s the kind of things that Paul is talking about. He saying simply that those things that do not please the Lord are things for which we will receive no reward. They are worthless, and we will not receive a reward for them.

Well, our time is up. I need to finish. You’ll notice how the apostle always connects doctrine and the duties that we have. We see it here. Reminds me of the woman who said to a pastor once, “You would have preached a marvelous sermon except for all those therefores at the end.” Well, we have some therefores here in our context, and we have one that specifically comes before us, we have by this amnesty of immeasurable grace been brought to the knowledge of the Lord, but at the same time we look forward to a time when we stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and receive the things that have been done through the body, humbly we shall appear there no doubt. But thankfully also when we remember that the one who presides at the

scrutiny of my judgment is also the one who loved me and gave himself for me. What a comfort. What a comfort to realize that as I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, I stand before the one who has loved me enough to give himself for me. I know he will not be harsh. He will be fair, and I will receive precisely what I should receive.

So, as Paul, remember that today is the day of responsibility and opportunity. Let’s make our ambition to be well pleasing to him. There are three magnificent phrases provide something of a key to the enjoyment of the blessings. Paul says in verse 18, we look at the things which are not seen. That’s our concentration. We know we have a body eternal in the heavens, and we have as our ambition or as the Authorized Version renders this we labor that we may be well pleasing to him. May that be true of each of us.

If you are here today and you’ve never believed in Christ, of course, you do not have the privilege of standing at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. Your ultimate judgment is the judgment of the great white throne at which the lost shall appear. And so come to Christ, believe in him, trust in him, and the blood that was shed that you may have the assurance of everlasting life, the assurance that when death comes you pass immediately into the presence of the Lord or perhaps the glorious privilege of being clothed upon, and then in the judgment of your works the marvelous experience of standing before one who loved you and gave himself for you. Come and believe in Christ. Acknowledge your sin to him. Acknowledge his saving work. Receive that salvation as a free gift offered to you by him who loved you and gave himself for you. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful and thankful for the word of God, and we thank Thee for these solemn portions of it that remind us of our responsibilities and remind us of our privileges as well. O God, by Thy grace, enable us to be well pleasing to Thee.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“The Saint’s Tribunal” by S. Lewis Johnson

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