



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 20:30-31

“The Word”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for today is from John chapter 20 verse 30 and 31, John chapter 20 verse 30 and 31. This is the first of a series of studies in the Gospel of John, and the proper place to begin I think is with this particular section. This brief paragraph explains why John wrote his gospel. We read in verse 30, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.” By the way later on in this gospel John says that there were many other things which the Lord Jesus did which if they should be written everyone I suppose that even the world itself couldn't contain the books that should be written.

Occasionally people think the gospels are intended to be lives of Christ, but if they are lives of Christ they're very slender volumes, not like the lives of men that we write. Douglas Southall Freeman wrote a life of Robert E. Lee, four large volumes. Put the gospels by the side of four large volumes by Mr. Freeman and they wouldn't make much so far as size is concerned. What we have in the gospels are gospels not biographies, not lives, but gospels. And so John says, “Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ,

the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” So what we have in the Gospel of John is a propaganda document. It is designed to bring people to decision concerning the Messiahship and Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ. May his purpose be accomplished.

When one thinks about the Gospel of John you cannot help but think about the great theme of this wonderful composition by the disciple of the Lord Jesus who was known in the early church as the theologian, and that great theme is the relationship between God and men. It's unfolded in two subordinate themes, the word of God and eternal life. When scholars speak of the Gospel of John they usually speak of the problem of the fourth gospel. Many things have been written about the problem of the fourth gospel: its provenance, its authorship, the great thoughts that lie back of the author and the source of them, the philosophy that guides the author as he constructs his book. All of these things have to do with the problem of the fourth gospel. It's origin in Judaism or its origin in Alexandrian thought, but one thing that one learns from the study of the response that the gospel has had among its readers is this, as Sir Edwyn Hoskins put it, and he was one of the great scholars of the Gospel of John, this book, the gospel, is the text book of the parish priest, and it's the inspiration of the straightforward layman.

Now that's a rather remarkable thing that the scholar should speak about the problem of the fourth gospel, discuss its authorship, discuss its background, discuss the background of its great ideas, discuss the language of the book, discuss other matters that have to do with the technical study of this gospel. But it's surely true that no critical treatment can be believed if it does not explain this fact that it is the textbook of the parish priest and the inspiration of the straight forward layman. No explanation of the Gospel of John could ever receive credence without acknowledging these things, and furthermore without acknowledging the fact that it

can only be understood by someone who has as Origen put it “leaned back on Jesus’ breast.” In fact Origen said back in the third century, “The gospels are the first fruits of all writings, and the Gospel of John is the first fruits of the gospels, and no one can receive its meaning who has not himself lain back on Jesus’ breast.”

One of the things that I like to do when I go to Scotland is to go down south of Edinburgh and see Walter Scott’s home again. Not because there are some things about the home that I want to see that I have not seen before because I have been there many times, but the country about is so pretty that I like to go down that part of the country and look again at the Tweed River and the other things that are nearby. And so I’ve, ever since I was a child been interested in Walter Scott, having read some of his literature as a child, and a man by the name of J. G. Lockhart wrote Scott’s biography among others. And he has an interesting incident in it, an anecdote in which he describes some of Walter Scott’s last hours. He said, “Mr. Scott expressed a wish that I should read to him, and when I asked from what book he said, ‘Do you have to ask? There is only one book.’ And so I chose,” Mr. Lockhart says, “The fourteenth chapter of St. John, and after listening with devotion he said, ‘Well that is a great comfort.’” That’s one of the striking things about the Gospel of John. In spite of the fact that the scholars speak about the problem of the fourth gospel, the simple Christian considers it great comfort in his dying hours. There is something about this book that one must understand if he is to truly understand the book.

Now the author of the gospel says that he was a person whom Jesus loved and also that he leaned upon the breast of the Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking figuratively that’s what we need to do if we are to understand this book. We must also lean upon his breast. We’ll never understand it if we do not understand it in the light of its contribution to our Christian experience. It’s a very simple book. I think that when we think about the Bible we think

about the Gospel of John as being one of the simplest of the books, and yet it's also true that it is one of the deepest and profoundest of books, strange but true anomaly that it should be deep and yet simple.

William Temple, one of the most recent Archbishop's of Canterbury, said, “It is the profoundest of all writings.” A. T. Robertson, the great Baptist scholar of the United States says, “It's the profoundest book in the world.” When I first became a Christian the man who led me to the Lord told me how I ought to read the Bible when I suggested to him what I should do now that I had become a Christian. He said, “Well Lewis, begin at the Gospel of John. Read through the New Testament from there, then come back and read Matthew, Mark and Luke because you will understand them much better if you've read the remainder of the New Testament, then go back to the Book of Genesis and read from Genesis through Malachi.” Well I didn't have any more sense than to do exactly what he said. That's exactly what I did. I opened up the Gospel of John. I read through that Gospel of John. I read on through the Book of Revelation. I came back and read Matthew, Mark and Luke, and then I began at Genesis and I read entirely through the Old Testament and put a little note when I finished Malachi. “I finished the first reading of the Bible.” That was back in the early 1940s a long time ago. I still think that's a good way to read the Bible, and I still think that beginning at the Gospel of John is just about a nice a place to begin as anywhere else.

As someone else put it, “It is a book in which a child can wade and an elephant can swim.” Now I know our audience is composed largely of elephants, but there are probably some children here. And for those of you who are children in the faith, why we'll try as we expound the Gospel of John to have some things that will be understandable by you as children, and for you elephants we'll try to have a few things for you also. Fortunately, this is

a book which if you just simply expound it, it will be useful and profitable for student of the Bible as well as for those who are beginning the study of the Bible itself.

Now when you think of the Gospel of John you ask yourself the question, since it is a gospel, “What is the place of John among the gospels and particularly its place in its presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ because that is what it is?” It’s a presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well let’s think of the four gospels for just a moment, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. By the way in the earliest collections of the manuscripts of the New Testament this was not necessarily the order. Furthermore it was not necessarily so that the earliest collections had all four gospels. What we have represented in the English Bible and also in other Bibles in the western world is a collection of the gospels in a certain order which is traceable back a number of centuries, but not all the way back for the gospels circulated as separate books for a considerable period of time. We know of the four-fold gospel as early as about the middle of the second century, but not before that. So, for a period of time the books circulated separately.

Sometimes people say how can you prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Well of course no one can prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ, prove it. In fact nothing in ancient history can be proved. In fact nothing can really be proved. But at any rate, often people say, “What’s the testimony for the resurrection of Christ? What’s the testimony for the existence of Christ?” Just the Bible. Well there are some testimonies to the existence of Christ and the Christian movement outside of the New Testament, not many, but there are some, but we should not forget that these documents circulated separately. They are individual testimonies, we read them now in the collection, but originally they were independent testimonies. John was an independent testimony. But now we generally see John as the fourth of gospels, the three synoptic gospels who look at our Lord’s ministry in a

certain way, and then the fourth gospel which has its own unique presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We cannot help but believe, most of us who are Christians, that there is manifested a providence of God in the order in which we find the books now. It's proper that Matthew, Mark and Luke should be together and also in the order in which they are and that John should be the fourth gospel, not simply because it was written last but because of its presentation of the picture of the Lord Jesus. Matthew is the first. Matthew presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the King. Now in you read that gospel you notice that right in the very first verse of the Gospel of Matthew, the evangelist says, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” “Son of David” is put before “Son of Abraham.” That suggests that his presentation of the Lord Jesus is his presentation of him as the King. Furthermore you'll remember that in the Gospel of Matthew there is a genealogy of the Lord Jesus. Not all of the gospels have genealogies. Luke has one. The others do not. Matthew's genealogy is a legal genealogy and a royal genealogy. It describes our Lord's right to the Davidic throne, and so he is presented as the King as Zachariah prophesied many hundreds of years before the Lord came, “Behold Thy King cometh to Thee meek and lowly riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass,” and that was fulfilled. And you remember over our Lord's his cross there was placed the superscription, “This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.” So, Matthew presents him as the King.

You also know I'm sure that in the early church the gospels were often pictured by the use of emblems. Now the emblem that was used to represent the Gospel of Matthew was the lion, and of course the reason the lion was chosen is because he's presented as King. He's the lion of the tribe of Judah and the lion is very suitable for the presentation of Lord Jesus as King. In the case of the Gospel of Mark we have a different viewpoint. Mark

presents our Lord as the servant, as the servant of Jehovah. The emblem that was most commonly used, although there is a mixture of them in the ancient figures in the churches and in the writings, the emblem that was most commonly used of Mark was the emblem of man. And so in this gospel the early church regarded our Lord Jesus as presented as the servant of God and as a man.

Now of course generally speaking today we think of the Gospel of Luke as being the gospel in which he is presented as a man, but the early church used the emblem of man to represent the Gospel of Mark. The characteristic word of the Gospel of Mark is the adverb *εὐθύς* [*euthys*], which in Greek means “immediately,” “forthwith,” “straightway.” As you read through the Gospel of Mark you’ll find that adverb over and over again. Mark’s giving a very rapid presentation of the Lord’s work. He deals with him as a servant who is about his Father’s business and anxious to carry it out.

Mark doesn't have a genealogy. That’s not surprising. Who cares about a servant’s genealogy? That’s unimportant. We’re interested in a King’s, and you’ll notice that Prince Charles now that he is married and he and his Princess are expecting you’ll always see in the accounts the new baby will be second in line to the throne after Charles. That’s important. A King’s genealogy is important, but a servant’s, if you hire a servant you don't say, “Would you give me your genealogy? Is your family a member of the DAR or the DAC or the Society of the Cincinnati or the Premier Society, the St. Cecilia Society of Charleston, South Carolina?” You don't ask about that. Who cares about a servant’s genealogy?

Luke, the third of the gospels, presents our Lord as a man, but in the early church the emblem most commonly used of Luke was the ox. And the ox was used because the ox was the animal of service and sacrifice, and when one looks at the picture of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Luke the early church felt that one could see there the service of the servant of God

and also a stress upon his sacrifice as sufficient for the sins of the world. Now of course it is important for our Lord as a man to have a genealogy, and so in the Gospel of Luke his genealogy is found because you see it is not only necessary that he be the Son of God that he be our redeemer, thus able to redeem us, but he also must be one of us. And so in the genealogy of the Gospel of Luke our Lord's ancestry is traced back to Adam, not to David and Abraham as in Matthew, but all the way back to Adam to show that he is one of us on the human side of his being.

Then the Gospel of John, in the Gospel of John the Lord Jesus is presented as the divine Son. Now Mark has something to say about this too. As a matter of fact the term Son of God occurs more frequently in Mark than in John. So there is a mixture of presentation of these ideas in the gospels, but preeminently John is the gospel that presents our Lord in his divine nature and divine personality. The eagle was the emblem of the Gospel of John. I wonder why the early church chose the eagle. Well we know the eagle flies high in the sky. The eagle is the only one that can look straight into the rays of the sun, and the early church felt that in the Gospel of John we had the most penetrating gaze into the mysteries of the eternal God. The early church called John “The Theologian.” That was their name for him, “The Theologian.” And of course the reason for that is that in this gospel we have the preeminent interpretation of the significance of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you surprised that there is no genealogy in the Gospel of John? I'm not. God can have no genealogy. God is an eternal being. It is very proper that no genealogy should be found in the Gospel of John for he is presented as the Son of God.

Micah says in one of his great prophecies, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” The Son

of God possessed of a human nature out of Bethlehem shall he come, but also of a divine nature and thus a divine personality whose goings forth, one time in history he came forth in Bethlehem, but he had been going forth from of old, from everlasting, all the theophanies of the Old Testament illustrating the goings forth of the eternal Son who took to himself an additional nature at Bethlehem and entered our human existence there.

In the Old Testament there is a figure of the Messiah that is very frequently used. It's the figure of the branch. I don't know whether you've ever studied that or not, but that's one of the figures that the Old Testament writers use to refer to the Messiah. It's striking I think that this term “the branch” is found in several places in the Old Testament, and in these places there is almost an attempt it seems to represent the four-fold picture of our Lord presented in the gospels.

For example, in the Book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah writes, “Behold the days come saith the Lord that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a King shall reign and prosper,” “a righteous branch,” “a king.” Why that suggests to us the Gospel of Matthew in the presentation that is given us of the Lord there, the royal King.

In Zachariah in the third chapter and verse 8, the prophet says in a Messianic passage, “Behold I will bring forth my servant, the branch,” “My servant, the branch,” Zachariah chapter 3 and verse 8. Now that suggests to us the Gospel of Mark in which the servant always busy about his task is presented. Then in the sixth chapter of the Book of Zachariah in the 12th verse we read, “And speak unto him saying, ‘Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts saying, ‘Behold the man whose name is the branch’.’” And he goes on to describe Messianic duties for him, “The man whose name is the branch,” suggestive of the Gospel of Luke.

And then back in Isaiah chapter 4 and verse 2 reference is again made to the figure of the branch to represent the Messiah and there Isaiah writes about, “The branch of Jehovah,”

suggestive of his divine origin, “The branch of Jehovah.” So the King, the servant, the servant of Jehovah carrying out the tasks of the Father, the man who is one of us and thus able to be our substitute, the divine Son who gives to his sacrifice infinite worth, thus a sacrifice sufficient for the sins of the world, magnificent picture of the Son of God, not simply to be admired but to be worshiped. That’s the purpose that John has in his presentation that we not only admire him, but that we come to worship him.

I think also it’s providential that the gospel is fourth in this sense. The synoptic gospels with their one eye view of the things emphasize the history of our Lord’s life, but John emphasizes the issue of the history. It isn’t enough to know the history of the life of Christ. John insists that there is an issue involved and that we must accept or reject the testimony that is given. The synoptics stress the events. John stresses the interpretation of the events, but let me qualify that in case there is some theological student that is lurking in the midst of the audience. Let me remind you and all of us that there can be no expression of anything without interpretation. There is no such thing as a bare fact. When we state what we call facts, we are giving interpretations to them.

Let me illustrate. William Temple in his comments on the Gospel of John has a very interesting little illustration, and so I’ll just use his. But he comments on the fact that the Gospel of John is an interpretation, but that does not mean that the interpretation is not a correct interpretation. He said, “If I say, ‘Charles Stewart was executed.’ That’s true, but that of course is not the whole truth. If I were to say, ‘King Charles the first was executed’ then I add something but I really say nothing more so far as the event is concerned, but I add something. If I say however, ‘King Charles the first was martyred,’ then I say something else, and that new term particularly is a term of interpretation but the interpretation of the statement is historically true.” So the Gospel of John is a gospel in which we have a great

stress upon interpretation but we have interpretation in all of the gospels. This is John the Apostle, the theologian’s, interpretation of the significance of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s his testimony in other words. If he were here with us, who wouldn’t want to have an apostle here with us? If he were here with us, what would he tell us? Why he’d tell us just what he has in his book. In fact in the 20th chapter when he discusses the resurrection he says, “This is how I came to faith. I saw, I saw those garments in the tomb. I saw and I believed.” It is his personal testimony. What we have in the Gospel of John then is the testimony of the theologian of the early church.

Why did he write it? Well he tells us why he wrote it, and there are other things that we can also gain from considering the question. He certainly had a didactic purpose, a teaching purpose. He wrote it as a supplement to the synoptic gospels. This actually is the earliest answer to the question why did John write his gospel? He wrote it to supplement the synoptics. Listen to what Clement of Alexandria, also writing in the third century said about this gospel. He was discussing the gospels, and he said, “Last of all John wrote.” And John perceived that the external facts, the τὰ σωματικά [*ta somatika*] to use the Greek expression that he uses, the external facts had already been made plain in the synoptic gospels, and so John was urged by his friends,” Clement said, “To write a gospel that would be a spiritual gospel, a πνευματικόν [*pneumatikon*] gospel, that is a gospel in which the external facts would be given his own interpretation.” And so what was implicit in the other gospels, Clement said, as made explicit in the Gospel of John. It is John’s attempt to give his interpretation of the significance of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a privilege it is for us to be able to open the Bible and read the testimony of one who was a companion of the Lord Jesus Christ and who after literally scores of years of great thought, ministry, testimony, discipleship should give us an account of what he thought of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now he also wrote this gospel to combat error. That’s not surprising. The early church and the later church is always concerned about error. If I were to preach the gospel and I never said anything about the errors that are so rampant in professing Christendom I would not be true to my calling. One of the things that the minister of the gospel must do is not only present the gospel positively but point out the errors that are rampant. In fact frequently people understand the truth by the demarcation of the line between truth and error. There was the teaching of Cerinthus for example, very similar to the teaching of the Ebionites. They believed that the Son of God had no existence prior to his birth. So, to the Ebionites the Lord Jesus Christ was just a man upon whom the spirit descended for a season, just a man like the rest of us, a unique man of course, but just a man like the rest of us.

There is an ancient tradition about John. He was in a public bath and Cerinthus came in and someone said Cerinthus is here. And he’s reported to have cried out, “Let’s flee lest the bath should fall in as long as Cerinthus that enemy of the truth is within. That doesn't sound apostolic to me but it’s an old, old tradition that has been repeated down through the years. There is the teaching of the Docetics, those who thought that the Lord Jesus Christ was really a divine being who only seemed to be a man, the opposite error. He really wasn't one of us. He was a divine being. He was here as a kind of a phantom for a while, a ghost, and men thought of him as real but he really was not real. That’s the meaning of the Greek word *δοκέω* [*dokeō*] in many of its occurrences, “to seem,” sometimes it means “to think.” But nevertheless “to seem,” so he was not really a man with a real human nature.

Well Ignatius, perhaps the earliest of the church fathers to write had to combat this false doctrine too. He wrote in his letter to the Trallians, “Be deaf therefore when anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ who was of the family of David and of Mary who was truly born,” uses the Greek adverb *ἀληθῶς* [*alēthōs*], “truly born,” both ate and drank, was

truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, who also was truly raised from the dead. Ignatius wrote that in the early part of the 2nd century, just after the Gospel of John was written. So they had to contend with error. The error on the one side, he was just a man. The error on the other side, he was not a man, but he was a divine being. And John has both of these errors in mind. He speaks about our Lord as truly a man and records the incident in which the soldiers pierced his side and forthwith there came out blood and water. Ghosts don't have blood and water. Phantoms don't have blood and water. But at the same time spoke of him in the strongest of words as the eternal son.

The great purpose that John has was evangelistic. He tells us this in chapter 20 verse 30 and 31. He says, “Many signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book.” So John knew of the things that Jesus had done and as he thought about writing his spiritual gospel he said, “I'm going to have to make a selection. Some signs are going to have to be non-elect and some signs are going to have to be elect. And so he elected some signs and other signs were non-elect and so they were passed by. And in the presentation of his gospel what we have are some significant signs that for John give a significant message. So he made his selection. In other words, I didn't try to write a life. I didn't try to write a biography. I am writing a gospel. And by the way there is no record of anybody ever writing a gospel, or ever trying to write a gospel until this time. It is an absolutely unique form of literature, a gospel.

Now he said he chose signs. That term is interesting, sign, σημεῖον [*sēmeion*]. Now a sign is not exactly the same thing as a symbol. A symbol is capriciously chosen. For example, the symbol of Canada is a maple leaf. We have maple leaves. Maple leaves are all over the United States. A maple leaf is not unique to Canada. That symbol was capriciously chosen. There is nothing specifically Canadian about a maple leaf, but that's the sign. Crimson Tide,

capriciously chosen, there is nothing that makes you think of the University of Alabama when you say Crimson Tide unless you're a football fan.

Now my daughter won't remember this and she was in the audience, but fifteen years ago, I know because I had a record of it made in my notes which I looked at, 1966 Gracie. You and I had a discussion about sign and symbol and Crimson Tide. And she expressed a little surprise at why that term is chosen to represent the football team of the University of Alabama. Well if you had seen the game yesterday afternoon, you would have understood why they are called the Crimson Tide as they rolled over Penn State, 31 to 16, 24 to 3 at the end of the first half. That was the best picture of Crimson Tide, but that expression of course is capriciously chosen. There is nothing about a Crimson Tide that is unique to the University of Alabama. A symbol however is something different. A symbol is, of course a term for a miracle but it has significance. It is really a reference to a way of speaking by the use of symbols, but there is something that is particularly appropriate, that is, there is a relationship between the sign and the significance of the event that is described as a sign.

Now John has chosen seven or eight of the signs, seven leading up to the resurrection of Lazarus, and one more perhaps in the twenty-first chapter that might be called a sign, but these signs were chosen by John and they were chosen for a particular reason. He says, “These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, in other words, these signs point to him as the Messiah of Israel and also the Son of God.” For light, they were chosen that you may have light on his Messiahship that he is the promised redeemer that the Old Testament has spoken about. He is the divine Son and this he is able to redeem, but he has also chosen these signs that you might have life. For he said, “Not only that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, but that in believing this you might have life through his name.”

Now isn't it striking that these two things are the things that the Apostle Peter said about the Lord Jesus at the Caesarea Philippi? Remember they were there at Caesarea Philippi and the Lord Jesus spoke to the disciples for he was getting ready to prepare them for the fact that he was going to be crucified. He said, “Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?” And they said, “Why some say that you are Jeremiah, some say that you are one of the prophets, some say John the Baptist.” Very striking isn't it? These are the impressions that people had of the Lord Jesus, in fact all of the prophets of the Old Testament in so far as they were true representatives of Jehovah, all of the characteristics that were of God in them found their ultimate fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, but no one was ever more of a weeping prophet than that Lord Jesus Christ when he looked out over the city of Jerusalem and wept over that city. John the Baptist, Elijah, the prophet of thunder and lightning, no one was ever more like that than the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of the streams, like all of the streams that flow into a massive river, like those that flow into the Niagara River and finally pour over the Niagara Falls and that great cataract of sound and water, the Lord Jesus Christ, all of the strains of the prophets meet in him. But then after hearing the various answers he said, “But who do you say that I am?” That always is an embarrassing question, isn't it? “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter receiving a revelation from God the Father said, “Thou art the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” So writing many years later, John with pen in hand said you know Peter was right. He said back there in Caesarea Philippi that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, and I think I'll construct my gospel around that. I'll choose some signs and these signs are designed to impress upon people, bring them to faith in the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, as Peter said at Caesarea Philippi. It's a propaganda document. It's designed forthrightly, plainly,

clearly, brazenly to bring men to faith in Christ. No need to apologize John said. That’s what I want to do.

Now the plan of writing is very simple. I’ll just run through this just to give you the overall picture before we begin to look at some of the details next week, the Lord willing. There are seven of these signs, the water turned into wine in which John lets us know that the Lord Jesus Christ has brought a new age. The law came by Moses. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The healing of the nobleman’s son in the fourth chapter stresses the fact that the means of salvation is faith. The healing of the impotent man stresses the fact that the savior has brought new power for life. The feeding of the 5,000, the fourth of the miracles or signs, preaches that the Lord Jesus Christ has provided a new food for men. The walking on the water stresses that he is as a savior a new guide for life for those who do not have life. The healing of the blind man, the sixth of the signs, stresses the fact that the savior gives us new enlightenment so that we understand the things of God. And the restoration of Lazarus, that’s the climatic miracle, and that miracle preaches that the Lord Jesus is the resurrection and provides new life, both new birth and resurrection all bound up in him.

New birth, who can explain the new birth? Who can explain the first birth? Explain to me the first birth, the physical birth and I will explain to you the new birth. We cannot explain the creation of the universe. We cannot explain a birth in the final analysis, even those who spend all of their time dealing with it as scientists and physicians cannot explain ultimately the source of life. And we cannot explain the new birth. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: (John said) so is every one born of the spirit.”

You cannot explain the truth that darting like a flash of lightening into the soul of that Oxford student resulted in his transformation, but there was George Whitefield. “O Lord,”

uttered Alexander Pope, “Make me a better man.” “It would be better,” said his spiritually minded page, “That you be made a new man.” That distinction lies in the whole doctrine of the new birth, and that was the secret that startled and captivated and dominated the life of George Whitefield. “Why Mr. Whitefield,” inquired a friend after he had become a preacher, “Why do you so often preach on ye must be born again?” “Because,” Mr. Whitefield said fixing his eyes upon his questioner, “You must be born again.” That’s why. So, John teaches us that life comes through Christ. It does not come through anyone else.

Moffett Gantry in one of his sermons entitled “The Pierced Hands,” repeats this story. “Not many months ago he said an Oxford shower in England there was a village in which an old saint was lying dying. For over eighty years she had been on a pilgrimage to Zion until her face had grown bright with heaven’s approaching glory. And there was an Anglo-Catholic priest, an Anglican priest in the Anglican church of England came to her because she was in his parish, and he was one of those priests who believed that you could find no access to the city of God unless the priest on earth unlocked the gate. He said, ‘Madam I’ve come to grant you absolution.’ She said, ‘What’s that?’ He said, ‘I’ve come to forgive your sins.’ She said, ‘May I have a look at your hands?’ And he put his hand over like this and she looked out at them and she said, ‘You are an imposter.’ He said, ‘An imposter, what do you mean?’ She said, ‘The one who has forgiven my sins has nail prints in his hands. You have none.’”

There is no forgiveness of sins except through the Lord Jesus Christ. Ninety-eight times approximately in the Gospel of John, John will say that new life comes by believing. Do you want to know what it means to believe? Well anyone who knows what is meant by faith in a promise knows what is meant by believing. Anyone who knows what is meant by faith in a remedy knows what is meant by believing. Anyone who knows what is meant by faith in a physician knows what is meant by faith in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Anyone who knows what is meant by faith in an advocate, faith in a friend knows what is meant by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We trust him. We don't trust the church. We don't trust our good works. We don't trust praying through. We don't trust any ordinances. We don't trust any experiences. We trust what Christ has done, objectively. The atoning work that the Lord Jesus has accomplished for sinners is the place upon which we lay our heads for time and for eternity.

Have you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? That's something that one cannot do, John will tell us later on, apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He will say, “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” Has the Father drawn you? Has the Father drawn you to Christ? Have you felt that urge deep down within to renounce sin and come to Christ, resting upon his saving work? May God speak to your heart. Come to Christ. A full and free forgiveness awaits those who give themselves to him. By Thy grace of God come to him, receive the forgiveness of sins; join the company of the saints who are truly on their way to the New Jerusalem.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to Thee for this magnificent presentation of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, gospel, Good News, how wonderful it is. And we ask, Lord, that if there should be someone in this audience who has not yet rested upon Christ for time and eternity that today may be the day. And now we ask that Thy presence may go with us as we part. O God, enable us by Thy grace to remember and to realize the solemnity of the issues that the great apostle brings before us, life and death. May the love of God, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us. For His name's sake, amen.

“The Word” by S. Lewis Johnson

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