



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 20:19-31

"Doubting Thomas, the Supreme Example of Faith"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're turning to John chapter 20 and verse 19 through verse 31. As you can see, this is the conclusion of the 20th chapter. And we have one more chapter in the exposition of this book. So in just a few weeks we will be through with the Gospel of John after I think about ninety messages on this book. Well, I must say after doing that many messages on the book my sense is that it probably would be better to have done one hundred and eighty instead of ninety. It's that great a book. But of course there are other considerations, and doing it in ninety is probably sufficient.

We're beginning reading with verse 19 and remember we're in this chapter of the resurrection and John has given us his testimony about how he came to faith. And then our Lord has appeared to Mary Magdalene who was at the empty tomb. And now is his appearance to the disciples, and then the special appearance to the disciples again in which Thomas is present. And finally, John tells us why he wrote his book. So let's begin at verse 19 and we will read through verse 31.

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto

them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the LORD. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the LORD. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. (You'll notice that twice John has made reference to the fact that the doors were shut when Jesus came in these resurrection appearances. Evidently that is designed to give us some indication of the spiritual nature of our Lord's body. We don't have a whole lot said in the Bible about the nature of the resurrection body. I think if you think about that you will understand why, because it would be something that we are not at the present time capable of understanding. So there are just intimations here and there of the nature of the resurrection body. Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians in ways in which the words tell us something about the body but not precisely what it was like. And so here the body of our Lord which apparently had been swiftly dematerialized and had passed through the folds which had been placed around his body for burial. And now he is able to move right through closed doors. That tells us something of the power of the resurrection body, and that is about all. It, of course, is something very wonderful. But nevertheless we are not able to understand yet. We are finite, and furthermore, not only are we finite, but we are still unsanctified. That is, we have not been brought to the place that we shall be brought to through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the coming of our Lord. Now when Jesus came into the midst of them he said to them, Peace be unto you. And he has some special words for Thomas and we read in verse 27): Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be

not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus (John adds) in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book (Ah, think what a lengthy series of messages it would have been had he put all of these signs in the book. Did I hear a hallelujah? [Laughter]): 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."

Incidentally, if you turn over to the very last verse of this book John wrote and said, "There are also many other things which Jesus did," the which if they should be written, every one I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. And let's bow together now in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we come to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This very one of whom John the Apostle writes in the chapters of his great gospel, or good news. We thank Thee for the fact that the signs were performed and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit down through the centuries many have come to a personal faith in him who brings eternal life. And we are grateful for the ministry that has come to us through the Holy Spirit. And we are grateful for the way in which we have been brought out of darkness into his marvelous light. And we recognize, Lord, of course, that should it have been left to us we should have perished in our sins. But we are grateful for the saving ministry of Christ and for the ministry of the Holy Spirit who today works mightily in the hearts of men to turn them to faith in him whom to know is life eternal. And we are grateful that we have by Thy grace come to know that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that in that knowledge we've come to possess life. We are truly blessed.

And Father, we are grateful for the promises of the word of God, which have accompanied him. And we thank Thee that throughout all of the days of our lives we know that he is with us in

the Spirit and we may depend upon him in the experiences of life. We pray for the whole body of Christ today many of whom do not have the privilege of the knowledge of the word of God that others have because they have limited access to the Scriptures or to the expositions of the word of God that we have, but who nevertheless form part of that body. And we are grateful for each one, and we pray Lord that today through the ministrations of our great God in heaven and through the agencies of the gifted men that Thou hast given, the church may be strengthened and edified and built up and that the purposes of God for this age may be accomplished. And we look forward to his coming again when he shall take us to himself.

We pray Thy blessing on the ministry and outreach of the church. And we pray Lord especially for Believers Chapel, its elders, and its deacons, and its members, and its friends. And we pray, Lord, for its ministries to the teachers, its publication ministry, its radio ministries, and the various other forms of ministry that are carried out through the Chapel. May, O God, we experience Thy blessing. Give us faithfulness. Give us submission to the will of God and to the word of God. May, Lord, we be an effective instrumentality in the purpose of the ages. We pray for our country, for our President. We pray for the sick, for the disturbed, for the weak, and for the helpless, and for the bereaving, and for others who have difficult problems to solve, we commit them all to Thee confident, Lord, that Thou wilt meet our needs. And we pray that Thou wilt be with us through the experiences of life on into the presence of the eternal God.

We give Thee thanks. And we pray that in the meetings as it progresses today and in the singing of the hymn, in the ministry of the word we may be strengthened and edified. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] One of the things that characterized the early church was their observance of the Lord's Supper every Sunday. That is a well documented fact from the early church writings. And it is, of course, the practice of Believers Chapel to observe the Lord's Supper in an open meeting each Sunday night. Another thing that characterized the early church, of course, was water baptism. And

in the early church frequently baptism was on the spur of belief. That is the conditions were such that it was possible for a person to come to faith and be immediately baptized. It's very difficult for us to do that in our society today. But we do seek to baptize as often and as soon as we can after individuals come to faith in Christ. We don't have a Jordan River flowing by the side of Believers Chapel that if a person comes to faith in Christ in our morning service we may go out immediately afterwards upon confession of faith and immediately baptize them in the water. In fact, on a day as cold as this, perhaps that's a very nice thing to think about.

But we do observe water baptism, and tonight as the concluding part of our evening service after the observance of the Lord's Supper we are going to baptize seven or eight who have professed their faith in Christ. And I say seven or eight because [one] of the interviews is a little bit up in the air at the present time, which is a necessary before baptism. As most of you know who have been here, we do interview all of those who have professed in Christ, to just as best as we are able as human beings to see that the testimonies are genuine testimonies of faith. So we may baptize eight tonight, I hope we do, but we will baptize at least seven who have professed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The ordinances were so important to our Lord that he laid stress upon them. And we too should find them an integral part of our Christian life and testimony. We invite you to come tonight for the Lord's Supper at 6:30. And then at the conclusion of that we shall observe the ordinance of water baptism.

But this morning we are turning to the Gospel of John chapter 20 verse 19 through verse 31, and our subject is "Doubting Thomas, the Supreme Example of Faith." The Gospel of John, as you learn from a careful study of it, is brought here to a beautiful planned end, it would seem. And it's a very triumphant planned end. Because it concludes, it would seem, in the great confession of Thomas, "My Lord and my God." It's remarkable how the Lord's appearances after his resurrection met various needs. Mary Magdalene, we know as one out of whom came seven devils, who

eventually as a Christian became one of those noted for her love for Jesus Christ. He ministered to her in his post resurrection appearance and met her needs.

Then there was Peter, one of the apostles who departed from our Lord. And in Peter's case more severely, because he denied our Lord before our Lord's death and resurrection. All the disciples or apostles forsook and fled. John, it seems, may have drifted back to the cross, and our Lord made reference to him in one of his final statements from the cross. But all of the apostles forsook him and fled, the Scriptures said. But Peter the backslidden one is dealt with very lovingly and mercifully following the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. One thinks also of the Emmaus disciples. They were the discouraged disciples. Of course there are different kinds of discouragement, but to my mind the greatest form of discouragement that a professing Christian could ever have is discouraging in or because of Jesus Christ himself. Think of it, discouraged because of Christ. They were discouraged because of Christ. They said on the Emmaus road, "We thought that it should have been who should have redeemed Israel. But now it appears that he is not what we thought him be."

There's hardly a Christian who has at one time or another not be disappointed in Jesus Christ. Of course the disappointment is our fault. We haven't seen him as we ought to see him. But we all pass through those experiences of why hasn't the Lord done something about my particular problem. It doesn't seem as if he has done anything. And so our Lord deals lovingly with the Emmaus disciples. And then he deals with defeated Thomas. Thomas who was so certain that the resurrection had not taken place that he said, "I will not believe unless I am able to see the print of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into his side, I'll not believe." Now, this is an apostle, mind you. And so our Lord is going to deal mercifully and gently with Thomas.

Well this is a magnificent section. We ought to divide it up into three or four messages, but we'll not do it for the sake of the audience. And I want to speak first of all for a few moments about the appearance to the disciples without Thomas. Now, the situation as I understand is identical with

the situation described in Luke chapter 24 verse 36 through verse 45. In other words, what we have is an appearance of our Lord to the apostles and evidently others also, because as John says in verse 19, "Then the same day at evening being the first day of the week where the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews." He does not say apostles but disciples. Now, of course disciple is a term that could apply to the apostles, but in the light of the general context of Luke 24 and this which I assume is the same, we probably are to understand this not only of the apostles but of other as well.

He says, "The doors were shut" to let us know something about the power of the resurrection body. It is corporeal enough to reveal the wounds of the cross, but immaterial enough to pass through the doors. As Paul will say in 1 Corinthians 15, "The body is raised in power." And here is a body in which our Lord was in at this time that was a body characterized by power.

When Jesus came he greeted them with the salutation, "Peace be unto you." That itself is a condescension and a ministry to individuals who have been disappointing in their adherence to the Lord. He might well have said, "Shame be to you," for they had forsaken him and they had fled. But he says, "Peace be unto you." And the repetition of it throughout the context here would seem to indicate that he wants to encourage them by reminding them of the fact that even in their faithlessness they have the peace of God available for them. I think of Paul's statement in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 7 where he speaks about the peace of God that passes all understanding, that garrisons our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. So "Peace be unto you."

"And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side." And we read, "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the LORD." Now, Howard Prier said this morning that he enjoyed the message over the radio. And again, I listened to the message over the radio, and I enjoyed it too. I enjoyed the text, that magnificent text, "I give unto them eternal life and shall never perish." Who could not read that for his life and enjoy it? And I know that Mr. Prier heard that message previously, because he told me after it in one of his rare observations, "That was a good

message." [Laughter] And so this morning I'm not surprised that he said that he enjoyed the message.

Well, if you remember back when we were expounding John chapter 12 I commented upon a story which is characteristic of the highlands of Scotland. All Scottish preachers know about this, and since you know I love Scotland, you have heard this story before. But there are some in the audience who weren't here back many months ago when we were in the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John, where remember the Greeks came and they said to Philip, "We want to see Jesus." The Authorized Version renders it, "We would see Jesus." And I told you the story of the Scottish preacher, he was a young preacher, he had just graduated from theological seminary. He was filled with the things that he had learned in seminary, introduction to the New Testament and the Old Testament, the document and hypotheses, theories of the origin of the gospels, and tradition criticism and things like this. He knew Greek and Hebrew and he knew the fact that in the exegesis of the word of God there were different opinions on the interpretation of almost every text in the Bible. If you read enough you will find that to be true.

And so as he preached in his ministry, he concentrated on the more technical side of things. And the audience was a well instructed Scottish audience. You know, they used to say about Scottish people, I don't think it's true now, that every Scot is a theologian, even if he's not religious. So in this case they were well instructed but he was just a bit over their heads. And so one day he entered into the pulpit and there was a little message on the top of the pulpit Bible. And the words of Scripture, and this came from the elders who had a little talk about it, and they put simply on his Bible, "We would see Jesus." Well, he was greatly convicted over it, and he began in his ministry to seek to rectify that. So he began to speak from the text of Scripture in a more useful and fruitful way. And after some time he went into the pulpit and there was a message again. He must have looked at the message as a whole with a bit of trepidation but as he went over and read it, it said, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord."

Now that of course is the statement that we read here in verse 20, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." And of course the lesson of it is simply this, that the secret of joy is fellowship with the risen Christ. There is no greater joy that anyone can possibly have than fellowship with the risen Christ. And do you know my dear Christian friend that this is an experience that you may have constantly, fellowship with the risen Christ. Nothing could be more wonderful than that. And that is the experience of all who simply recognize his living presence and live their lives in the light of his living presence. I don't think anything could be more wonderful in the midst of our business, whatever it may be, to realize that we are doing business, oh yes with the public, but we're doing business with the Lord at the same time. And you who are housewives or career people you do your work, you live your life with the availability as a believer of fellowship with the risen Christ. That's magnificent to think about, more magnificent to experience.

Now having said peace be unto them, Jesus says, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." So he is going to give them a commission. Now I want you to notice the way in which he gives this commission for he says, "As my Father has sent me, even so send I you." Now since this is something that is addressed to all of the disciples, not only the apostles but the others who may have been there as well, it's very revealing with regard to our servanthood and our service of the Lord. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." That raises the question, how did the Father send the Son? And what was he sent to do?

Well, of course we know how the Father sent the Son. He came as the incarnate Son of God to carry out the ministry of the suffering servant of Jehovah; to become the saving mediator of the people of God. And that he did. But his ministry was the ministry of the revelation of the Father. As we read in John 1:18, "No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son who in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." And then as he said to Phillip, "Phillip have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." So the Lord Jesus came to reveal the Father.

Now he said, "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you." To put it in other words, the Lord Jesus came to confront men with the revelation of God the Father. That's what he did. He confronted men with the Father God in heaven. Then he said, "As the Father sent me, so have I sent you." Now, our ministry of course is to reveal to men and confront men with the revelation of God, not simply as the Father God but as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father God and the Father who has a Son, Jesus Christ, who has accomplished a redeeming work. That's why Paul, when he preached to the Corinthians, said, "I determine not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and this one crucified." So it is our duty to confront men with the crucified Messiah. That is our duty individually. That's our duty in our daily life. That's our duty in our business, in our pleasure, in our relationship with the men of this earth, to confront them with Jesus Christ.

George Whitfield used to like to speak, as we saw last week, about confronting men all of the time. That should be our responsibility. So "as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Listen to what Paul says in one of his greatest chapters, 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 20. And he is talking about his ministry and he said, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." So through the ministry of the saints of God it is God who is beseeching men, beseeching men through us the apostle says. In other words, Christ continues his work in us.

Now, of course if we look at ourselves we are inclined to say at this moment, "But how is it possible for this to succeed?" I can understand how Jesus Christ succeeded, because he was the eternal Son, but how can I succeed? Well, he continues and he says, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." It is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that this is to be done. This is a puzzling statement to some, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." Does not the Holy Spirit come on the day of Pentecost, and is it not that at that moment that we are all baptized into the body of Christ? Well yes, that's correct. What then could this mean? "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." Well he had just given them this commission, and the coming of the Holy Spirit is prophesied in the Old Testament as taking place a certain number of days after the Feast of First Fruits. The Feast of Pentecost is part of the

redemptive program of God. But what are the apostles to do and the disciples to do who are believers between the day of his resurrection and the time of the coming of the spirit on the day of Pentecost? Well they have to carry out their ministry in a limited form, for he has given them this commission. And so "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" is it seems to me, an enduement of power temporarily until the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And I do believe that they received the Holy Spirit not as a permanent indwelling presence, for that will begin on the day of Pentecost, as he has said elsewhere in this gospel. But it was a temporary enduement with power until that day.

Now further, or I should say just a word about this, because you know this is really the secret of Christian success in the work of the Lord. It is for lack of this, that is a relationship of the Holy Spirit that so much Christian work comes to nothing in the end. It's like the priests of Baal who sought to call upon their God. And they built their little place for sacrifice, and then they piled the wood on top, and nothing happened, and they were busy, and they began to cry out, and they prayed, and they cut themselves, and then they ran around in frenzies. I think a lot of that is done in evangelicalism today. You go into some of the meetings and it's just a frenzy. It's a frenzy of fleshliness, and the result is that nothing happens. Oh, it is said that something is happening, but next year as you look back nothing really happened. It was just an experience.

Well, it was like this, and finally sovereignly Elijah arranged his little sacrifice and furthermore to make sure that there was no question about it just being an evangelical frenzy, remember he dug a little trench and poured water in it around and got everything as wet as possible. And then the fire from God came from heaven, and everything was licked up in the fire of God. Well the fire of God in Christian work is the work of the Holy Spirit. Now, the work of the Holy Spirit may not be in sensational outward evidences of so-called miraculous things. Often it's a very quiet work just as Elijah discovered, it was a voice that was inaudible to others, but a mighty working of God. So the Holy Spirit is given to the eleven in order that the work of God may be done. I would say, this is my own opinion, that one of the reasons that the evangelical church is so busy

today and often accomplishing so little is that occasionally we forget that the secret of fruitfulness is the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of God. And much of our work is just plowing the sands. And so often we labor for vanity and spend our strength for nothing.

What advantage is it to have a great manufacturing plant if we have no contact with electrical power? What use is it to have a magnificent modern instrument like a computer and the electricity is off. So in the Christian church the person who is responsible for the effective work of the Lord is the Holy Spirit who is at the direction of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Father. So we must never forget that.

Now then, our Lord adds after saying, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit," Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." A large profession Christian church in the 13th century, during the reign of Pope Innocent III at the Fourth Council of Lateran pronounced that the doctrine of oracular confession was something taught in the Bible, and that as a result of apostolic succession, those who were in the succession of the Apostle Peter, who was the First Bishop of Rome, have the authority to forgive sins. Sometimes this text is given as support for that doctrine. One could see how that might be thought to be the basis of it. Listen to the words, I'm reading from the Authorized Version, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Now of course, I would suggest to you that even I were to accept this reading, and different manuscripts have different reading. Even if I were to accept this reading I could not help but have doubt that that was what was taught here, for the simple reason that the Bible says only God forgives sins. When the paralytic was brought in the presence of the Lord Jesus and he said to this individual who was brought for he saw manifestation of faith, "Your sins are forgiven you." The men about, the Jewish leaders said, "Only God forgives sins." That was right. And so our Lord said we'll just engage in a little test here, because it's obvious that God is not going to work in behalf of a false prophet. He said, "Which is easier? Is it easier to say your sins are forgiven? Or is it easier to say that little pallet that you're on there, take up your pallet and begin to walk."

Well it's obvious that it's easier to say, "Thy sins are forgiven." I could say that. I could say to you, "Your sins are forgiven you." That's very simple; you just have to know how to pronounce the words. I might even be able to say it in Latin and Greek, make it more authoritative if you'd like that. But that's easy, easy to say. Ah, but to say to a paralytic, take up that pallet and walk off, that's another matter. Now you see the reason our Lord posed that little test is because obviously a holy God will not honor an unholy false prophet by a miracle in a case like that. So if that happens that is evidence that his words do have the authority of God behind them. So he said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And this man who was unable to walk, walked. There's a lot of theology in that. We are unable to believe, too, but we do believe. You see, the Bible doesn't teach that we are unable to believe. The Bible teaches that we are unable to believe apart from divine enablement. That's what the Bible teaches. So anyway, he took up his pallet and he walked off. That's evidence that only God forgives sins. But it's also evident that our Lord is God.

Now only God forgives sins, so the idea that a man can say, "Whosoever sins ye remit," would be contrary to the teaching of the word of God, the analogy of faith. Furthermore, the apostles never forgave sins. Well, they had experiences of people being forgiven. There was Simon Magus who came to the Apostle Peter once, and mind you this is the so-called Bishop of Rome himself. And so Simon Magus wanted this authority that the others had, the power of the Holy Spirit, he saw that was really something. If you could have that, then they would really call him the great one of Samaria. They already thought he was the great one of Samaria. But if he could have that, that would be great.

So he just inquired around how much it would cost to have it, because he was the evangelical prophet of the day, and he had lots of money in the bank. And so Peter, of course, was unimpressed by the faith, the professed faith of Simon Magus. And so he said, "Your money perishes with you, because you have thought the gift of God may be purchased with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wicked, and pray to me if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." Well, of course, that isn't

what Peter said. He, the Bishop of Rome so-called said, "Pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." In other words, when the apostles came on the scene, if this meant "Whatever sins the apostles remit will be remitted," Peter forgot about this text. But he said that we should look to God for the forgiveness of sins. So the idea that this text refers to the apostles and disciples as having the power to forgive sins is contrary to Scripture. We don't have time to look at a number of other passages, but we don't have any instance of any man ever forgiving sins.

What was the authority that the apostles had? And what is the authority that a Christian has? Well he authority to point out the terms and to declare the conditions for the remission of sins. If you were to come to me and say to me, "What must I do to have my sins forgiven?" I certainly would not say, "Pray to me and I will forgive you your sins." What I would tell you is simply this, that the Scriptures tell us that we are sinners before God, and we need the forgiveness of sins. And evidently you sense that need. And then the Scriptures say that Jesus Christ has died for sins, has rendered an atonement to God that is sufficient for the sins of men. And the Scriptures say that if you will stop trusting on the other things that you are trusting in, your church, your good works, your education, your culture, or whatever it may be, and rest your eternal salvation upon what Christ had done in the merits of his death, then you may be assured of the forgiveness of sins. I have the right and the privilege to express to you the conditions, the terms for the forgiveness of sins. And that is the responsibility of believers. So that particular task is a task that the whole church engages in. And that's why Paul speaks of the church as the pillar and ground of the truth. It is the responsibility of the church to guard and protect the revelation of God and set out the truth as it has been revealed.

But you say, "What about this text? It says, 'Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.'" Now there are some manuscripts in the Greek text that read, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted to them." The textual critics, I think rightly, have pointed out that the preferable text has not the present tense in the word translated remit, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." In the expression "they are remitted unto them," the preferable text is not the present

tense, but the perfect tense. The Greek verb is the verb *aphiti*, which is an ancient ionic, Arcadian perfect.

Now that particular text is probably the genuine text and that is what you will find in most of the editions of the Greek New Testament today. And then at the conclusion they are retained, that too is a perfect tense in all of the manuscripts. So what this text really says is this, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they have been remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they have been retained." In other words, the real forgiveness of sins and the real binding of sins upon individuals is a previous forgiveness or a previous binding. And the apostles are authorized only to express the conditions and terms. "Whosoever sins ye remit, they have been remitted unto them." So if an individual comes, and he has come to faith in Christ, you are privileged to say, "Your sins are forgiven, because you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and your sins have been forgiven. So I can say to you your sins are forgiven." But I do not confer forgiveness; I only recognize what God has done. And the terms and conditions of it are set down in the word of God. I don't understand how anyone reading the Bible can have question about that.

Well, I want to say just a word about the appearance to Thomas. Our time is very nearly up. Thomas appears three times in this gospel. He appears in the 11th chapter, and there he has some affection for the Lord. And he said that when Jesus goes to Jerusalem, and even though they had been trying to put him to death there, he said, "Let's all go with him in order that we may die with him." You can see he has a genuine affection for the Lord Jesus Christ. In the 14th chapter he exhibits his caution. He's a man who always managed to keep well within his knowledge. Like a lot of students I've had in theological seminary, who will say after they've made a 95 on an exam, "I think I've passed." Have you ever had friends like that? You thought, "Well finally I'm going to beat him in the exam because I did more than pass, I had a good paper. And he usually beats me." And all he said was, "I think I passed." And then you come up with your 90 and you're very proud of it, and he made a 95. He was a Thomas-kind of fellow, pessimistically talking but there was a lot more

there. Thomas said he didn't know the way. Jesus said, explaining what he already knew, "Thomas I'm the way. You know I'm the way. You've believed in me," as he says in the next chapter.

And then of course he appears here, cautious, very cautious. Here almost as an obtuse pessimist. He accepts the blackest view of everything. Jesus was placed in the grave. I'll not believe unless I can actually put my hands in his side. Someone called him "loyal but dull." Well, he was loyal but I don't think he was dull. I think he was the kind of man that some of us are. And he reminds me of the farmer who was watching when Robert Fulton's Clermont, the first commercially built steamboat in the United States. He didn't invent the steamboat, but he responsible for the first one that was commercially produced, and thus came to be known as the Father of the Steamboat. And on the Hudson River, as they were getting ready for the steamboat to demonstrate that it could go, there was an old farmer standing on the side who said, "They'll never start her." And then as the boat began to move off he said, "They'll never stop her." [Laughter] Thomas was, I think, that kind of person. He was very pessimistic, and so he says, "Except I can do this I will not believe."

Well I won't have time to talk about the incident. It's obvious that Thomas illustrates the mercy of our Lord toward the weaker brethren. Doubters, have you ever doubted things in the word of God? You think doubt is something that brings down the condemnation of God and thus everything is closed up, and there's no hope if you doubt? Well Jesus deals very mercifully and tenderly with Thomas who doubts. So our Lord deals with the doubtful as well. Be not faithless, but believe. And when Thomas sees him, he falls down and says, "My Lord and my God." He was convinced by the sight of our Lord and by the omniscience of our Lord who said, "Thomas, come on, get your hand. Put your hand in my side." And he realized that Jesus knew what he had said before. And so convinced of this, he rises. Think of it, doubting Thomas rises to the highest confession of faith that is found in the whole of the New Testament. Isn't it contradictory? Doubting Thomas is great believing Thomas, "My Lord and my God," you cannot say more about Jesus Christ than that. "My Lord and my God."

I say to you in the audience that really is the expression of what saving faith is. To say to the Lord Jesus Christ from the bottom of hearts meaning it, "My Lord and my God." Now, incidentally no one can call Jesus Lord, Paul will later say, except by the Holy Spirit. And so the one whom they have received for enduement of power is working, obviously, during this period of time before he comes on the day of Pentecost. Because Thomas expresses this highest form of faith, "My Lord and my God."

And Jesus gives them the last of his beatitudes while he was here on the earth. Later in the Book of Revelation we'll have one more. He says, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." And Peter will speak about that, of course, in his own book later on.

Now, it's at this point that in effect John says 'Thomas' experience and 'Thomas' confession is what I've written my book to prove, that Christ can do this for men. He can bring them through a faithful pondering in consideration of the signs that I have presented, he can bring them to a confession that he is the Christ, the son of the living God, and in that confession have life. Do you have it? Is this your experience? Tonight we will baptize about seven who have made profession. Yes, that is their profession of faith and the Holy Spirit is still working in 1984.

As you go back over the seven signs in the Gospel of John of course, you will see all of the different aspects of our Lord as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. And in faith in him men have life. The resurrection is the climactic sign, as we know. You know, if I may close with this, when we look at the New Testament we really have a very, very small book. Take the gospels for example; I happen to be reading three volumes now. These three volumes are on one particular subject. There are over twenty-one hundred pages in these three volumes. And in these three volumes of over twenty-one hundred pages, unfortunately, about half of those pages are in small print. So it really is about over three thousand pages of writing. And it's only on one subject. When write biographies today what do they do? Do they pen a little pamphlet? Very rarely. I saw a pamphlet on the life of John Murray, a great evangelical theologian. But when they write a biography of Robert E. Lee what does Douglas Southall Freeman write? Four giant volumes, four or five

hundred pages each volume. It's a daunting task to look at it on your shelves much less read them.

[Laughter]

Now if you were to put by the side of Douglas Southall Freeman's four volumes the gospel records, the four gospels, well they would measure up just about like that. As one man said, "They are a pen and ink drawing of the sun." But they were propaganda documents. They were designed to present aspects of our Lord's life and ministry that would bring men to conviction and decision. We don't read the gospels correctly if we have not come to conviction and conversion.

If you're here this morning and you've never believed in Christ, we remind you that he has offered the atoning sacrifice. He has been raised from the dead. And through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, through his disciples, he is presenting his message to all men everywhere. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Rest in him. Like doubting Thomas, fall down upon the knees of your heart and say to him, as we close in the benediction, "My Lord and my God." May God in his marvelous grace enable you to do that.

[Prayer] Father, if there are some here who have never believed in Christ, O give them no rest or peace until they rest in him. And in the merits of the blood that was shed. And for those of us who know him, may Lord we remember our responsibilities. May we enjoy the daily fellowship with the risen Christ, and then in the power of the Holy Spirit seek to bring others too, to the knowledge of him. May our lives reflect him. Deliver us from cowardice and weakness and doubt and...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]