



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 25: 1-26

“The Last of Abraham, First of Jacob”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading for this morning is found in Genesis Chapter 25 and so if you have your Bibles, turn with me there. I want to read the first 26 verses of this chapter. Genesis chapter 25 and beginning with verse 1,

“Now Abraham took another wife named whose name was Keturah. And she bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah. And Jokshan became the father of Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim and Letushim and Leummim. And the sons of Midian were Ephah and Ephher and Hanoch and Abida and Eldaah. All these were the sons of Keturah. Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac, but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward to the land of the east.” (You will notice that most of the sons of Abraham through Keturah became the ancestors of many of the Arabian tribes. Verse 7:

“And these are all the years of Abraham’s life that he lived, one hundred and seventy-five years. And Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life, and he was gathered to his people. Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar, the Hittite, facing Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried with Sarah, his wife. And it

came about after the death of Abraham that God blessed his son Isaac and Isaac lived by Beer-lahai-roi.

“Now these are the records of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar, the Egyptian, Sarah’s maid bore to Abraham.”

You will notice in the account here of the generations of Ishmael and then the generations of Isaac that the reference to Ishmael precedes the reference to Isaac and no doubt, it was for the purpose of recording the generations of the first born, but notice that the interest of the author is not in Ishmael, the firstborn, as one might expect according to ancient Near Eastern custom, but rather in Isaac for in Isaac shall the seed be called. So we have a brief mention of Ishmael and then a more lengthy treatment of the history of Isaac. Verse 13.

“And these are the sons, names of the sons of Ishmael by their names, in the order of their birth; Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam, Mishma, and Dumah, Massa, Hadad, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages, and by their camps, twelve princes according to their tribes. (Will you notice that particularly because that is the fulfillment of a prophecy made back in chapter 17 and verse 20. So it is specifically set forth here as being fulfilled. Ishmael does have twelve princes or twelve sons and in addition, he has become a great nation.)

“And these of the years of the life of Ishmael, one hundred and thirty-seven years, and he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people. And they settled from Havilah to Shur, which is east of Egypt as one goes toward Assyria. He settled in defiance of all his relatives.”

That last clause incidentally is very debated as far as the rendering is concerned and you probably will note some alternative renderings in versions that you have.

In the 19th verse, we come now to the generations of Isaac and this is the important thing for the scriptural author.

“Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son. “Abraham became the father of Isaac and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, the Syrian of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban, the Syrian, to be his wife. And Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren and the Lord answered him and Rebekah, his wife, conceived. But the children struggled together within her. And she said, ‘If it is so, why am I this way?’”

That’s a rather obscure sentence or interrogation. It has been thought to mean several different things. One, if I have conceived, then what is the reason for these unusual sensations. Some think the words mean if this is the kind of suffering that pregnancy begin, then why did I try to conceive a child? And still others think that she is asking why she even wishes to live.

“If it be so, why then am I this way. So she went to inquire of the Lord, and the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb; and two people shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other.’ (And then will you notice the last line of this prophecy for this is the line that the Apostle Paul cites in Romans chapter 9: “And the older shall serve the younger.”

Now you can see from this prophecy that it's a prophecy of the history of peoples as well as the prophecy of the relationship of one person to another. So the prophecy is both collective and singular. And that is important because there are some who when they read Romans Chapter 9 say well Paul is speaking about national election and not individual election and so therefore we should not think that it is true that God does elect some and pass by others. But the Apostle’s selection of

the passage that has to do with the individuals from this prophecy refutes that viewpoint. That viewpoint is refuted by other things as well because it's impossible to choose nations without choosing individuals in the first place. But that kind of argument is the kind of argument that people who don't think about the Bible might accept because it pleases their presuppositions. Verse 24.

“When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. Now the first came forth red all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. And afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau’s heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.”

The cause of Esau’s appearance has also been discussed by the rabbis and others. The rabbis thought that when Esau came forth, hairy almost like an animal, that this was a portent that he would be a violent man shedding blood, and then others have thought that it meant that he possessed an excessive sensual vigor and wildness, and still others have said it was in anticipation of the animal violence of his character or an indication of a passionate nature. Esau’s name means the ‘hairy one.’

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

F. B. Meyer, who has written a very helpful series of biographies of important Old Testament characters, has said no human name can vie with Abraham's for the widespread reverence which it has evoked amongst all races and throughout all time. He then goes on to speak about the pious Jew who thought that he would be sure to reside in the bosom of Abraham after death. The fact that a person could cite Abraham as an ancestor was regarded as a passport to heaven. The earliest Christians thought of Abraham as one of the truly great men of the word of God and the Medieval Church canonized Abraham among the Old Testament worthies by no official decree, but simply by common consent. We know that pious Mohammedans regard Abraham with the greatest of praise. In fact, put him next only to Mohammad the Prophet.

What is the secret of the widespread high regard for Abraham? Well it surely is not because he was the leader of a great spiritual movement that began in Ur of the Chaldees and found its way to the land of Palestine. It's not because he was a manly person who was able to enter into conflict and win battles on the battlefield nor was it because of some special intellectual vigor that he possessed, and it wasn't because he was a very wealthy man, which of course he did become. It was rather the remarkable nature of the spiritual life of Abraham and also, back of that, the remarkable choice that God had made when he selected Abraham and called him out from among his people to the land of Palestine.

The basis of the nobility of Abraham, according to Holy Scripture, lies in the faith that he possessed by the grace of God. It was the kind of faith that enabled him to allow Lot to make the choice of the finest piece of the land of the land of Palestine. It was the faith that enabled him to wait for 25 years for the fulfillment of the promise that had to do with Isaac, the son. It was the kind of faith that enabled him to live contentedly even though he lived in tents and dwelt as a sojourner in the midst of the land that God had given to him. And of course, the climax of the faith of Abraham was that faith that he exercised when obeying the command of God, he offered up Isaac on Mount Moriah.

One might wonder, it has been said when you read the life of Abraham, how the work of God would do after Abraham died. This is the kind of thinking that no doubt went through the Apostles' minds too when the Lord Jesus was crucified. How will this work go on? But as someone has said, “God buries his workmen and carries on his work.” There is no indispensable man in the work of the Lord. It is sometimes rather sad and humbling for us to realize that as individuals, but nevertheless it is true. There is no indispensable man in Believers Chapel either so far as that goes because God does bury his workmen and carry on his work. And He will always do that.

That brings us to Jacob for this chapter is the chapter that records the death of Abraham. Jacob has been called the son of Isaac who nearly drowned in seas of his own craft and cunning, at length emerges as a new man, a prince with God. We remember Jacob for three reasons probably. I

am speaking for myself. I don't know how you remember Jacob, but I remember him in this way. I remember him as the one from whom Israel obtained her name because the name Israel is the name of Jacob. Jacob, the supplanter, became Israel, the prince with God, and consequently, the nation Israel was given his name because he was the father of the Jewish people.

And I remember him too as Jacob, the man of like passions with us. The man to whom we can look and say now there is a man just as we are man, and there is a man who has to struggle with the same problems that we have to struggle with, and there is a man who at times appears to do no better than we, but in the end he emerges as a man who is very precious in the sight of God. He is a man who had hopes and expectations and he had trials and sorrows. All of the experiences of human life, it seems, Jacob had. And then at the end of his life, as the Holy Spirit brought him to a kind of maturity that was really remarkable considering his beginning, is the same Jacob who says that God who has been with me all the days of my life, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil. So I think of him as a man of like passions with us and I study him remembering that if God could do this with that crooked man, that supplanter, there is a possibility he can do something with me.

But most of all, I think of Jacob as an example of electing distinguishing grace. That's the thing that Paul makes of Jacob particularly in Romans chapter 9. He looks at Jacob and he says, now, here is a beautiful illustration of the means by which God works with men in electing sovereign distinguishing grace. He says, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.”

Now, that's remarkable because I think most of us, I am speaking for myself, most of us and reading the account if we did not know the end of the story, we would surely be attracted to Esau rather than Jacob. But we read, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.” It is Malachi who says that and he is just arguing from what we find here in Genesis chapter 25. Now there are people who have big problems with this. They say how could God hate Esau? Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated. But my dear friend, the bigger problem is how he could love Jacob and an even bigger problem than that is how he could love anyone of us. According to the word of God, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and it is a marvel of electing distinguishing grace

that he can love any of us. So when we read, ‘Jacob have I loved,’ that’s the thing that’s startling. Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated. I can understand that in spite of all of the winsomeness of the manliness of Esau. So I confess when I think of Jacob, I think of electing distinguishing grace.

Now I would like, if possible, to spend most of my time, I tried to do this in the first hour and didn’t succeed very well, but I would like to spend most of my time on the latter part of this section because that’s the section that the Apostle Paul refers to in Romans chapter 9 and as a matter of fact, that’s the section that Hosea has something to say about and it’s the section that Malachi has something to say about too. I gather from this that these two Old Testament prophets, Hosea and Malachi, regarded that section as the important section and then the Apostle Paul, the New Testament Apostle, evidently regarded that as the important section as well. But let me make a few comments concerning verses 1 through 11 in which we have the last days of Abraham.

Abraham is now finally to learn the truth of Paul’s statement in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 21, “for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” And so Abram will learn that it is gain to go to be with the fathers and to be with the Lord. And I think it is a striking testimony to the marvelous grace of God that Abraham dies gracefully. I know I pray that I may be able to die gracefully. Hannah More said, “No man ever repented of being a Christian on his deathbed.” The greatest preparation for death is Christian faith, and Abraham had faith. He had faith in the triune God. And as a result when the time came for him to die, he died at a ripe old age and satisfied with life.

Now, prefacing the remarks concerning Abraham's death and burial are some words concerning Keturah and Abraham. Keturah was on a level above the level of concubines, but nevertheless she was one of them. In 1 Chronicles chapter 1 and verse 32, it is said that she was a concubine and so consequently when we read here, now Abraham took another wife, we are to understand that in the sense of Keturah, as one of his concubines. Now because chapter 25 follows chapter 24, we are inclined to think that that followed the death of Sarah. But that is not necessarily so for in the Hebrew text, the particular state of the verb is a state in which that verb may be rendered not only as a past tense, but also as a pluperfect tense. And so we could just as easily render

this, “Now Abraham had taken another wife whose name was Keturah.” And then, in verse 6, we read, and to the sons of his concubines, and evidently Keturah is included among that. So it is possible that Keturah was one of his concubines, while Sarah was still living, but it must have been after, of course he was rejuvenated physically after the birth of Isaac and a number of children were born to Abraham and to Keturah, but the special place was reserved for Sarah.

These sons were sons who were ancestors of a number of the tribes of the land of Arabia. Now we read of Abraham's final will and testament in verses 5 and 6. “Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living.” So Abraham's final will and testament reveal that everything was left to Isaac and this too was a testimony to his faith for God had said, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” Isaac shall be the heir. Sarah had said that too. And so following the directive of God, he gave all of his property into the hand of Isaac, but before he died, he made a compassionate arrangement for the sons by Keturah and the other concubines.

This is a rather interesting thing because it does perhaps bear on the way in which we handle our own properties. We are inclined to fall into the pattern of the world about us and consequently, as we prepare for our death and make our wills, we usually signify that our properties shall be left to our children. Now there is something else that might enter into this. In the final analysis, our property is not our property, is it? It is a property that belongs to God. It is his property. It is not ours. And we as believers hold our but property in trust. It is something that belongs to God. We hold it in trust for the Lord. And that raises the question of whether, as Christian men and women, we should leave our properties to our unsaved children? That is something for you to think about. I don't pass it onto you as the principles of Believers Chapel. It's only a suggestion from one of the teachers that you consider it and think about it, and in fact, there is no telling there might even come some good from that as a practice and certainly good so far as the work of God is concerned.

Well, Abraham's pattern may be a pattern that is biblical. I couldn't help but think that we may have some activity for the lawyers. I don't like that, but lawyers are going to heaven. There is

one in the Bible who is going to heaven which is evidence that even lawyers can be saved. The death of Abraham is recorded in verses 7 and 8 and Moses' words are beautiful in their simplicity. Listen to what he says. “Abraham breathed his last. He gave up the ghost, and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life and he was gathered to his people.”

What a lovely thing it is to die that way! The Countess of Huntington who was very influential among the Wesleys in the days of the Westland revivals, said, “I have no hope but that which inspired the dying malefactor and now my work is done. I have nothing to do but go to my father.” What a beautiful way to die. Philipp Melanchthon, who died in the 16th Century, when several portions of Scripture had been read to him, he was asked by his son-in-law if he would have anything else, and his reply was in these emphatic words, “Nothing but heaven.” So Abraham died satisfied with life.

And Isaac and Ishmael unite in the burying of Abraham. Now Ishmael was excluded from the covenantal blessings in the sense that he was rejected for Isaac so far as the seed was concerned, but he was given distinctive blessings. It was said that Ishmael should have twelve princes and that he would become a great nation. So God did bless him. Furthermore, we shall read in a moment that Ishmael was gathered to his people as well, and it's entirely possible in the light of the statement in verse 17. “These are the years of the life of Ishmael 137 years and he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, but even though Ishmael was rejected as the one through whom the seed would come, but nevertheless he did have a definite faith in the Triune God and may well be numbered among those who are the saved. It is different with Esau as the New Testament makes plain.

The next section, verses 12 through 18, I have already commented upon and so I will just pass it by. It is the section in which the sons of Ishmael are sent forth. Ishmael is the oldest and so his genealogy is given first, but Isaac is the interest of Moses and so the greatest attention is paid to him. Ishmael was something of a loner. He always was something of a loner and later on, when he

has dealings with Jacob, we will see that he was something of a loner, but nevertheless his life ends with the statement “he was gathered to his people.”

Finally, now we come to that section that I want to try to lay a little stress upon and it is the section in which we have the births of Esau and Jacob. The history of Isaac begins with the birth of his sons according to Moses as he records it. And the birth and the marriage of Isaac are recorded in, verses 19 and 20 only for the sake of completeness. The story really begins with verse 21 and the prayer about Rebekah’s barrenness. “And Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren.” Now that’s an interesting thing. Why should he have to pray? After all, had not God confirmed the promises to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob? Was it not definite that Rebekah should have a child? Had not God promised and had He not confirmed his promise in the birth of Isaac himself that He would fulfill the covenant? Why pray when it has been predetermined that there should be a seed to come?

There are people who think that because God decrees that certain things come to pass, therefore there is no reason to pray. They think that because God has sovereignly, in distinguishing grace, elected some and passed by others, that therefore there is no need to pray, no need to witness, no need really to be concerned. Now those who think like that only show that they do not have the spirit of the word of God, because you see in the predetermination of God, it is predetermined that individuals shall be saved through prayer, through witnessing, and just as significantly as it is determined that the elect shall come, it is just as important, just as much determined so far as God is concerned that they come through prayer, that they come through witnessing. And so this is not something out of harmony with sovereign distinguishing grace.

Isaac prayed to the Lord and Rebekah too went to inquire of the Lord when she thought that something may be amiss. So Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren. And God answered him. And Rebekah, his wife, conceived because now the gift of Jacob is not only a gift of nature, but a gift of grace as well in answer to his prayer. You know this must have required quite a bit of patience. Twenty years after he married, he married at 40. Esau and Jacob

were born at age 60. So 20 years he waited. Ishmael, the rejected son, is having children constantly. He has 12 princes. I can see the letters coming. Ishmael's first child, we don't have any. Then number two. Then number three. Then number five. Then number eight. Number ten. And all the time Isaac is waiting. Rebekah is waiting. What patience that must have required! Finally Ishmael has twelve sons and Isaac doesn't have any, and yet, it is Isaac who has the promise.

I think of the story of the man who called up what he thought was the music shop, but he got unfortunately the plumber. And so he asked, “Do you have “Ten little toes and ten little fingers in Alabama?”” And the person who was the plumber said, “No, but I have a wife and 10 kids in Alabama.” And he said, “Is that a record?” He said, “No, but it's doing pretty good I think.”

All the time now Isaac is looking at Ishmael producing children and he has none, and finally in answer to prayer, Rebekah conceives. Now in verse 22 we read, “but the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If it is so, why then am I this way?” Evidently she thought that this violent internal commotion within her was an evil omen. She was puzzled and so consequently, she wanted to inquire about it. I wonder is it possible that this incidentally since there was a struggling going on within which evidently had some at least divine connotations, I wonder if this throws any light on the abortion question.

But she was puzzled over the struggling that was going on within her womb, and she went to the Lord about it and the Lord said, “Why Rebekah, I do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think, you've asked for one child, I am giving you two. Furthermore, I am giving you two nations. Two nations are in your womb; and two people shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other.”

That's what is meant in Malachi Chapter 1 when God says, “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated. Israel have I loved, Edom have I rejected. One people shall be stronger than the other.” But then he adds, contrary to Near Eastern custom, “And the elder shall serve the younger.” That's a surprising last clause and it's the one that the Apostle cites in Romans chapter 9 showing that he does

regard Jacob and Esau as illustrative of the election of one person and the rejection of another one person.

Well the birth is described in verse 25. Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment. The rabbi said that, as I mentioned it, this indicated that he would be a violent man shedding blood and so Esau came out with hypertrichosis, an excessive amount of hair. I said that for the medical men in the audience. You thought that I didn't know any technical terms. It was hypertrichosis. That's what Esau had, all over like a hairy garment, and his name is 'the hairy one.' But Jacob comes forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name is called Jacob, heel holder. Later on it is explained as supplanter in this very Book of Genesis. And so he is the supplanter. He comes forth that way. And the text says his name was called Jacob and Isaac was 60 years old when she gave birth to them.

What I would like to do, if I may, is turn to the commentaries on this great event for it is a great event. And let's look first at the Old Testament commentaries and then we will look at the New Testament commentary on the birth of Esau and the birth of Jacob, and see what the authors of Scripture make over this. I know there are people who think well the things that the Apostle Paul writes in the New Testament are things that are very difficult to understand.

Anyone who has ever read Romans chapter 9 has had one time or another stumbled over that hard predestinarian doctrine that the Apostle seems to be teaching in Romans chapter 9, but let me say to you that what Paul is doing in Romans chapter 9 is simply exegeting Genesis chapter 25 and passages like that. We are not to think that he thought these things up in his mind, but knowing the Scripture and pondering the Scripture, his exegesis of these things is given in those chapters in the Epistle to the Romans.

Now in the Old Testament, two other men exegete this passage as well. And the first one is Hosea the Prophet. So let's turn to Hosea chapter 12 and we will look at verses 2 and 3. Now Hosea, remember, is the prophet of unconditional love, and since he is the prophet of unconditional love, you would expect him to be familiar with this passage. In fact, let's put it the other way around.

Hosea became the prophet of unconditional love because he learned unconditional love from the study of the word of God. So desiring to exhort the Nation Israel, encourage them to not seek allowances with foreign powers, but to trust in God, he refers to Jacob and Hosea chapter 12, verses 2 and 3.

I know it's difficult to find one of these books on the Minor Prophets, we could declare a tea break or something like that, but anyway try to find it and listen now as I read beginning at verse 2 and I will read through verse 4. The Lord also has a dispute with Judah and will punish Jacob according to . . .

The Lord also has a dispute with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his maturity he contended with God. Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; he won and sought his favor. He found him at Bethel and there he spoke with us.

So the prophet looking back over the life of Jacob appeals to two incidents, one of which is this one. And he makes a point. One of his points seem to be just like Jacob was a person who longed to know God and longed to be in the center of God's will as expressed by his wrestling with the angel and his grasping of the heel of Esau in order that he might ultimately have the right of the firstborn, the birth right, so Israel should seek after the Lord and not seek after the foreign allowances in order to find protection from those that were troubling them.

But also the commentators and students of the prophecy of Hosea have made another point. It seems evident too that he appeals to the grace of God. One of the commentators writes, for Jacob did not by choice or design lay hold of the heel of his brother in his mother's womb, but it was an extraordinary thing. Infants don't think like that while they are still in the mother's womb. It was then God who guided the hand of the infant and by this sign, testified that his adoption as the promised one was by the grace of God. So here in Hosea, the prophet looking back at this incident, finds in it an illustration of the sovereign grace of God. He sees God working before Jacob is even born to indicate that his future is a future in which he is blessed by God contrary to Esau.

Well, let's turn over to the book of Malachi for the second Old Testament prophet's comment on that incident. Again remember this is for you men who are theological students, this is the use of the Old Testament by the Old Testament authors. Now Malachi begins with the oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. “I have loved you,” says the Lord, “but you say how hast thou loved us?”

Now the Lord answers his own question, “was not Esau, Jacob's brother” declares the Lord, “yet I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.” So in order to strengthen Israel's sense of the love of God, he appeals to their past history. He says just take a look at Jacob and take a look at Esau and take a look at the descendants of these two, Jacob's descendants, the Nation Israel; Esau's, the land of Edom. And you will see by the way in which Edom has been treated and the way in which Israel has been treated that Jacob I love, but Esau I have hated. And so the commentator Malachi finds in this an illustration of the sovereign electing love of God.

It was a love of Jacob that was prenatal before he was born. It was a love incidentally that was disciplinary. The fact that God chooses us and makes us His own does not mean that we are not exposed to discipline. As a matter of fact, the saints of God are those who are especially exposed to discipline for our Father is a kind of father who wants to bring us and determines to bring us to maturity, and consequently he is not like so many human fathers who don't care enough for their children to discipline them. He disciplines his children because he is bringing them to a certain stage of maturity. Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated. Just look at the history of the two and you will see how I have loved you the Lord says.

But now we turn to the final comprehensive commentary and that's in Romans chapter 9 and so will you turn there. Now the apostle in verse 11 of chapter 9 says, and notice now this is Paul's exegesis of Genesis Chapter 25, I am not finding anything in this, but that which Paul found in it. There is nothing wrong incidentally with inferring from Scripture. This is what the Apostle does. He infers from Scripture, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, certain facts. He says, “For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad.” So the choice of God

does not rest on anything that they do in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand.

In other words, his purpose is determined by his election, not because of works, but because of him who calls, it was said to her the older shall serve the younger just as it is written Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. Now it's plain Paul makes two points. Number one, the sovereignty of the choice of God, Jacob. Look at the eleventh verse again. “For though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand.” Sovereignty, the sovereignty of the choice or election of God -- you don't like that when you have not the spirit of our great triune God.

Notice the second thing, the particularity of that choice. It's not simply a choice of nations. It's a choice of nations and individuals. He says it was said to her the older shall serve the younger just as it is written Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated. And the fact that the apostle cites only that last line, ‘The elder shall serve the younger,’ is evidence that he wants to lay stress upon the particularity of the choice of God.

Now I have said this numbers of times in Believers Chapel, and I want you to understand that I realize that I am being repetitious, but I feel that it is necessary. I long to see you who sit in the audience, Sunday after Sunday, coming to understand the sovereign electing, distinguishing grace of God. And then of course, there are some of you who’ve wandered in here by accident today and it just maybe that you have never heard this. I’ll try to be simple.

There are only three alternatives. God elects the good. O, but all the Bible cries out against that. We are saved not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, and so even the Arminians and those who believe in the sovereign grace of God agree that it is not by works. Well the other alternative or the second is that he elects certain people according to the faith that he foresees that they will have and that faith that he foresees, that they will have is the product of their own free will.

Now aside from the fact that that elevates that “Old God,” *digon*, free will to the throne, it's wrong in a number of other ways. In the first place, foreknowledge in the Bible doesn't mean that. Foreknowledge in the Bible means to know intimately beforehand. You only have I known of all the nations on the earth. Now God knew all the nations, but he knew Israel in the special sense of election, and so he said, “You only have I known of all the nations on the earth.”

He means you only have I entered into the intimate relationship of election among the nations. That's Amos chapter 3 and verse 2. There are other places in which the same idea is expressed. In fact, if God had looked down through the years to see who would believe, he would have seen no one will believe. Well the Bible says, “They that are in the flesh cannot please God.” Not a single one. It says that men are blinded. It says the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God. And so if God were to look down through the years, he wouldn't see anybody believing. I wouldn't see you. It's you wallowing in your sin and unbelief. So the idea that God looked down through the years and saw who would believe is contrary to the teaching of the depravity of man. Faith is not the cause of our election. Faith is the product of our election. It is the effect of God's elective decree. No Arminian can consistently say God foreknew who would be saved and then preach God is trying to save every man. What a ridiculous thing? No Arminian can say God foreknew the lost and then say that it's not God's will that they be lost. Why did he create them then, but since he did create them, evidently it was His will that they be lost. No Arminian can consistently say that God foreknew; who would be saved and then teach that Christ was punished for the saving of every single man.

What human would make a useless and needless sacrifice like that? Knowing ahead of time, those who would respond, but then have the Son of God die for all, knowing that the death would be senseless and useless so far as that purpose is concerned. No Arminian can consistently say that God foreknew all things, yet teach that prayer is of any use. Should we pray for the salvation of those whom God knows are going to be damned? Think for a moment what you are saying when

you say things like this that God looked down through the years and saw who would believe and chose those who would believe of their own free will. Think.

I sometimes sit at my desk at home thinking of new ways I can try to persuade my Arminian friends to embrace the full gospel of the sovereign grace of God. About a month or two ago, I had jotted down a little something. If it's God's will for everybody to be saved as the Arminians teach, then when we pray for everybody, we would be praying in God's will. Would we not? Well of course we would. Then if He answers any prayer made according to His will, then all would be saved. Will they not? But all are not saved. Even my Arminian friends grant that. Therefore, it must not be His will that all be saved. Think about that.

Well the Bible teaches of course that God elects those whom He has purposed to save by faith in him. In the final analysis is the reason for our salvation in man and the decision of his free will or is the reason for our salvation in God. And I think deep down within the heart of even my Arminian friends, they will have to say, it must be in God. Do you know why I say that? Because when the time comes for the meeting to be over, he will go over and get down his Calvinistic friend and they will both pray to God, an evidence that in the final analysis, it's God that saves souls, not man. So he elects according to his sovereign will. He elects according to the divine choice and that choice is grounded in his good pleasure.

There is no way to explain why he chose me and why he passed by someone else. We would have chosen Esau and passed by Jacob. Some people want to pass by him still, and all of his descendants. But God looks at things differently. He looks at things sovereignly according to his good pleasure and we will find ultimately that there is a good reason for the things that God does.

Now I say all of this not in the spirit of argumentation, although as you can tell, I enjoy arguing [laughter]. I say this really because I long for you to understand the sovereign distinguishing grace of God because I think it will make you a better Christian. It will make you a more effective Christian. It will make you a more concerned Christian. It will make you a more loving Christian. And it will make you a more stable Christian.

It's a great thing to begin the Christian life by believing some good solid doctrine. There are people who are Christians for years and years and they have different ideas and almost every year, they have a new idea, but it's good to be solidly grounded in the truths of sovereign grace. Constant change of creed is sure loss. Mr. Spurgeon says that, “If a tree has to be taken up two or three times a year, you will not need to build a very large loft in which to store the apples.” One of the reasons for failure of Christians to make progress is because they cannot come to a settled conviction concerning the basic foundation, the knowledge of the grace of God in our salvation. And so they are constantly up in the air.

Oh, you will find that people don't like this doctrine. The apostle suffered for it. The prophet suffered for it. Down through the years, Christians have suffered for it because if anything is bitterly hated, it is the out and out gospel of the grace of God. Men just do not like to be told that their salvation depends only upon the free grace of a sovereign God. They don't like that. That they know, they sense as you have nothing within yourself with which to command yourself to God. We don't naturally like that. So there is raving and raging at the grace of God.

John Newton used to tell a rather whimsical story of a woman who said in order to prove the doctrine of election, “Ah, so the Lord must have loved me before I was born or else He wouldn't have seen anything in me to love afterwards,” and Spurgeon went onto say the same thing. He said, “I am sure He chose me before I was born or else He never would have chosen me afterwards, and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me for I never could find any reason in myself why You have looked upon me with special love.”

Then he went on to tell about how an Arminian brother came to him once and said that he had read through the Bible a score of times. Always doubt people who say that. “I have read through the Bible a score of times,” he said, “and I have never found the doctrine of election in it.” And furthermore, he said to Mr. Spurgeon, “I read through the Bible on my knees. And so that proves that it's not there at all.” Mr. Spurgeon said, he said to him, “I think you read the Bible in a very uncomfortable posture. [Laughter] And if you had read it in your easy chair, you would have

been more likely to understand what you read.” He said, “Pray by all means because of course to pray is wonderful, but it's a piece of superstition to think that you can get more out of the Bible by the posture in which you read it. And furthermore as to the reading the Bible through 20 times and never finding the doctrine of election, I wonder that you found anything at all, because evidently you galloped through it so fast that you hardly would have time to understand anything if you miss the doctrine of election and read through the Bible 20 times.”

When we are talking about the sovereign grace of God, what are we talking about really? We are talking simply about the fact that salvation is of the Lord. That's all. We are not talking about any special doctrine called Calvinism. Calvinism is just a nickname for the gospel. We are talking about the sovereign grace of God. We are talking about salvation is of the Lord. It's not of man's free will. It's not of man's good works. It's of the Lord and it's extended to helpless, hopeless sinners in sovereign grace and we do not preach the sovereign grace of God such as I have been talking about.

We are not really preaching the gospel of the grace of God. So, we see this so-called harsh predestinarian doctrine that the apostle proclaims is not a fabrication of Paul's versatile mind? It is what he found by exegeting the passages of the Old Testament. That's where he found it. He found it in Genesis 25. He saw that before Jacob and Esau were born, before they had time to do anything, God said, “The elder shall serve the younger.” It's obvious their salvation did not depend upon that which they would do. So he said, “It's not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.” That's his comment.

Now if you want to debate this, go debate Paul. And it's the same Paul who in the next chapter of Romans says, “Whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,” and that's what we preach. “Whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” I don't know the elect. I know this. The Bible says that there is provision made for sinners and whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. I know that God passes by some and elects some. My concern

is that He not pass by any of you and that you respond to the gospel message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, when you read the Bible, you find that there are two great rebellions in the history of the universe. There is the rebellion of the angels and there is the rebellion of man. Now when the angels rebelled, there were some good angels who were left and can you not imagine them saying, “Oh, I wish that God would do something about the lost angels. We had such good fellowship before they fell.” So perhaps when the Redeemer comes, he will go to the lost angels.

But the Scriptures tell us that the Redeemer, when he ultimately came, did not go to angels at all. He passed by angels. He took not on him with a view to helping them, angels, but he took on him the seat of Abraham. He passed by the angels, left them for the lake of fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels. In other words, there was distinguishing grace. He went to the second rebellion and to the lost man who had sinned in the Garden of Eden. Passing by the angels, does anybody object to that? Even my Arminian friends don't object to that. They don't see anything wrong about the angels being left in their sin. You see God does pass by. He does pass by lost beings. And he has come, through the Lord Jesus, to save the saints.

Don't be surprised that through the preaching of the gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ, on a human level, seeking to call men to faith in him. He is passing through our society, passing through our age, passing through our century, passing in the midst of us as we live our days out, and calling men to believe in him. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

If you are here in this audience this morning, the grace of God is extended to you. And whether you are elect or not, no one in this auditorium knows until the time comes that by the grace of God, you have recognized your sin and you have received the Lord Jesus as your personal savior. May God speak to your heart and as the Lord Jesus Christ's gospel goes forth in its distinguishing grace, may you respond. May the Holy Spirit convince you of your sin and of your guilt and of your condemnation of the ultimate judgment that faces those who reject Him. May you come. Come to Christ, believe in Him, lean on the cross of Christ, lean on the blood that was shed, renounce all trust

in any kind of endeavor, any kind of work, trust only in Christ and be saved. May God help you to come.

Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these wonderful words of magnificent sovereign electing, distinguishing grace. And we pray O God that if there are some in this audience who have not yet come to Christ, that they may recognize their perilous dangerous state and flee to the cross, the blood that was shed. May O God in their hearts, they simply say, 'I thank Thee Lord for the gift of Christ for sinners.' I am a sinner. I come to Him and I take as a free gift, everlasting life. May grace, mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.