

The Sermon on the Mount
What Your View of Scripture Says About You (Part 3)

Matthew 5:17-20

March 11, 2012

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Well, I invite you to turn with me again to Matthew 5. We're studying Jesus' own view of the scripture. There was an article that I first read in November of 2004 in *Christianity Today*. In this article, they introduced a man who, at the time, was not so well known. He was and is the pastor of an emerging church. His name is Rob Bell, and his wife Kristen. He pastors a huge community in Grand Rapids called Mars Hill. In that article in 2004 in *Christianity Today* the author of that article, after having interviewed them and learned of where they were theologically, writes this: "The Bells found themselves increasingly uncomfortable with church. Kristen says life in the church had become so small. It had worked for me for a long time, then it stopped working." The author goes on to say "the Bells started questioning their assumptions about the Bible itself, discovering the Bible as a human product as Rob puts it, rather than the product of divine fiat. The Bible is still the center for us, Rob says, but it's a different kind of center. We want to embrace mystery rather than conquer it. I grew up thinking that we'd figured out the Bible, Kristen says, and we knew what it means. Now I have no idea what most of it means, and yet I feel like life is big again—like life used to be black and white, and now it's in color" In other words, understanding the Bible and what it means is like black and white, and dull, and boring. But not understanding it and having it all be complete mystery to you—that's living color.

Why do they say that? Here's the key. They discovered "the Bible as a human product, Rob says, rather than the product of divine fiat." In other words, it came from men and not from God. From the poisoned fountain of Bell's low view of scripture has come, since that time, a steady stream of poisoned waters. He has come to question almost everything we hold dear. He has questioned that Jesus died as a substitute in the place of sinners. He has questioned the sinfulness of homosexuality, the reality of hell, the exclusiveness of the gospel. In fact, in a recent book entitled *Love Wins* which you might have heard about, Bell exposes the reality that he is, in essence, a universalist. No need for hell because everybody's going to be in. Love will win. God's love will win and everybody will be with Him. Does he believe that that's what the Bible consistently teaches? That's the wrong question. To Bell, you don't need to ask that question. It's irrelevant because the Bible is a fallible human product that, in the end, doesn't really matter. You can't know it. You don't need to try to know it. You don't need to understand it.

We are learning from the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus' view of the scripture was entirely different. Jesus held a view that was diametrically opposed to every low view of scripture. In fact, Jesus' own view of the scriptures could not have been any higher. And you and I believe what we believe about the Bible because of Jesus Christ, and because of what He believed about the Bible. We believe the Old Testament to be God's inspired inerrant word because Jesus affirmed it to be so. We believe the New Testament to be what Jesus himself wanted to express, because He handpicked and pre-authenticated those who would write it. And He told them, (you remember in the upper room discourse) that the Spirit would bring to their minds everything He had taught them. So our ultimate authority, then, is Jesus Christ. And in reality, that's the point Jesus is making as he opens the body of His message, that we call the Sermon on the Mount.

Look at it again in Matthew 5:17. Jesus has already, in the beatitudes, explained what citizens of His kingdom are like. This is who we are. This is how we respond in life, and because of that, verses 10-12, this is how we're treated. We're often persecuted in various ways, insulted, spoken evil of. But in spite of all of that, verses 13-16, we have a powerful influence in the world, because God has made it to be so. And that influence comes primarily because of who we are and what we do in response to who we are.

Now, that brings us to verse 17 and to the body of the message.

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus tells us here that a true subject of His spiritual kingdom will always have a right relationship to the scripture. You can identify a Christian always, by how he responds to the Bible. Now, Jesus identifies here in this passage three responses to scripture that should characterize every genuine believer. In verse 17 He tells us that we need to understand Jesus' relationship to the scripture. Verse 18 we must believe Jesus' view of the scripture. And in verses 19 to 20 we must accept Jesus' diagnosis with the scripture; we'll look at that, Lord willing, next week. That is, you are either the least in the kingdom of heaven, you are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, or you are not in the kingdom of heaven at all. All of that is determined by your response to the scripture.

Now a couple of weeks ago we looked at the first response in verse 17, and it is: understand Jesus' relationship to the scripture. In the first century, the 39 books that we call the Old Testament—those were considered to be the inspired scriptures. They were referred to by the label Jesus uses here—the Law or the Prophets. That was the entire content of what we call the Old Testament. We know that for certain. And Jesus adds His own voice here, and He unequivocally says that the content that is in the 39 books of our Old Testament today (that same content) He identifies as God's very words to us.

Specifically, verse 17 makes two points about how we're to think about that Old Testament scripture, and His relationship to it. First of all, Jesus did not come to abolish the Old Testament. Jesus told His disciples, don't you for a moment believe the common misperception that I have come to tear down either in My life or in My teaching, the authority of the Old Testament. So, what was His relationship to the Old Testament? Well, in the second half of verse 17 He explains it. He came to fulfill the Old Testament. We talked about this. He came to fulfill it, really, in three different ways. He came to fulfill it by bringing out its complete meaning. By teaching us what God really meant, instead of what the Rabbis were teaching in many cases which wasn't what God meant at all. Secondly he fulfilled it by bringing obedience to it, by perfectly obeying it in His life. And then, thirdly, He fulfilled the Old Testament by bringing its complete message to fruition in His own person. He is the person to whom the entire Old Testament pointed. So Jesus explained the Old Testament in His teaching, He obeyed the Old Testament in His life, and He embodied the Old Testament in His person. He fulfilled it.

Now, last week, we started to consider a second response that all who truly belong to Jesus' kingdom should have toward the scripture. Not only must we understand Jesus' relationship to the Old Testament scripture, but secondly, we must believe Jesus' view of the scripture. We must, as His followers, as His disciples, believe about the scripture what He believed. And He tells us in the magnificent verse, verse 18

“For truly, I say to you, (for amen, I am saying to you. Jesus is saying here is reality as I know it to be. Listen carefully. He introduces it with that statement of weight and veritas—for truly I say to you Heaven and earth) until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the law until all is accomplished.”

We learned that in the New Testament, the word Law as Jesus uses here often refers to the entire Old Testament scripture. That's how Jesus is using it in verse 18. Just as He spoke of the entire Old Testament in verse 17 as the Law and the Prophets, another title that was often used for the entire Old Testament. So Jesus here affirms in the strongest possible terms His confidence in the scripture—the only scripture they had at the time—what we call the Old Testament, the same content that is in the 39 books of what we call the Old Testament.

And specifically, He affirms His confidence in several unchanging attributes of the scripture. Last time we looked at a couple of these. Let me just briefly remind you. The first attribute Jesus identifies of the scripture is its permanent authority. Until Heaven and earth pass away. That's a proverbial kind of saying. It means never, not going to happen. Jesus says it's far easier for the universe as we know it to go out of existence than for the smallest little stroke of a letter of God's word to fail. It's more enduring than the universe itself. If you remember what that little stroke looked like—the little pen stroke that distinguishes one letter from another in Hebrew, Jesus says the entire universe could go out of existence before one of those little strokes in the Old Testament will fail. It's permanent. It's unchanging. It's unwavering. It is eternal. It has eternal authority. It is forever relevant, and forever authoritative.

Secondly, Jesus expressed His confidence in this verse in its verbal inspiration. Not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law. Inspiration, that simply means that scripture is the product of the breath of God. God breathed it out as He spoke it. But, God is not only the source of the thoughts of the scripture, but He's also the source of the very words themselves. That's what we mean by the word verbal. It's breathed out by God, that's inspiration. Even down to the words, that's verbal. But Jesus goes even farther. Notice in verse 18, He says that the Old Testament scriptures were breathed out by God not only in their individual words, but even down to the smallest individual letters, the little yod in Hebrew, that looks a lot like our apostrophe in English. Even down to that smallest letter. And the smallest strokes that distinguish one letter from another. Picture our capital O in English and our capital Q. All that distinguishes them is that tiny little penstroke at the bottom right hand corner of the Q. There are letters and strokes like that in Hebrew. And Jesus is saying that not one of those little distinguishing strokes that marks out one letter from another will pass away until all is fulfilled.

Another unchanging attribute that Jesus ascribes to the scripture is its plenary inspiration. Verbal means the words. Plenary means all. It's all breathed out by God. Notice verse 18. Not the smallest letter or stroke, not one of them, shall pass from the Law until what? All is accomplished. Not only the individual parts are breathed out by God, but it's all, collectively breathed out by God, in its entirety.

Now, that's where we left off last week, and where I want us to pick up today, because in this amazing verse, verse 18, Jesus affirms two more attributes of the scripture. When it came to the scripture, Jesus not only believed in its eternal authority and in its verbal inspiration, and in its plenary inspiration, but also its complete inerrancy. Look again at verse 18. "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the law, (*what?*) until all is accomplished" That is a statement of the truthfulness and certainty and trustworthiness of all of the scripture, down to its very letter and stroke. That is what theologians call inerrancy.

Now let me define inerrancy for you. Actually, this is not my definition. This is the definition by Paul Feinberg. Here's what he writes. "When all the facts become known they will demonstrate that the Bible, in its original autographs (that means the actual documents Moses wrote on, the prophets wrote on) and correctly interpreted, is entirely true and never false in all it affirms." Let me read that again. "When all the facts become known they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted, is entirely true and never false in all it affirms" That includes, when we say all, we mean everything that's in scripture. That includes the doctrine of scripture—how a man should be saved. Man's nature before God as a sinner. The character of God. How things will end, in eschatology. Everything the scripture affirms in its doctrine. But also everything that the scripture affirms in its ethics. The sinfulness of homosexuality. The sinfulness of adultery. The sinfulness of lust. The sinfulness of pride. How we should love God with our whole heart and love others as ourselves. The ethics of scripture, the doctrine, the ethics. But also, inerrancy affirms that the scripture is without error and is speaking the entire truth, whatever it speaks of. That means, when the scripture touches on social sciences, it's true and never in error. When the scripture speaks of the physical sciences, it's true and never in error when properly interpreted. When it speaks of the life sciences, the same thing is true. So, that's what Jesus is affirming.

Now, before we look at Matthew 5 I want to back up a moment and look at the bigger picture of this. There are two lines of argument for Biblical inerrancy. One of those lines is the historical argument, the other is the biblical argument.

Let's look first at the historical argument for inerrancy. What do I mean by the historical argument? I mean that when you look at church history, you will find that the church has spoken with one voice on this issue. Let me read for you a quote from Gregg Allison in his book *Historical Theology*. Basically, he is recounting what the church has believed about various doctrines through the time of the church. Here's what he writes. "The church has historically acknowledged that scripture in its original manuscripts and properly interpreted is completely true and without any error in everything it affirms, whether that has to do with doctrine, moral conduct, or matters of history, cosmology, geography, and the like. Over time, the church has expressed this conviction by applying a number of terms to the Bible, such as truthful, inerrant, and infallible. No matter what term you use, the church from its outset was united in its belief that the word of God is true and contains no error."

Listen to this. "The first significant challenge to this belief did not arise until the 17th century." Just a couple of hundred years ago. Now, Allison quotes from a number of the church fathers to support his point, but this has historically been what the church has believed. Let me give you one example—Clement of Rome. He writes "You have searched the scriptures which are true. You know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them" Irenaeus writes "the scriptures are indeed perfect". Now when the early church fathers spoke of the infallibility of

scripture they were really saying two different things. First of all, they were saying that what scripture affirms corresponds with reality. Whatever the scripture says is true, is true. It corresponds to reality. Listen to Tertullian. “The statements of holy scripture will never be discordant with truth.” Augustine was even clearer. Listen to Augustine. “I have learned to ascribe to those books which are of canonical rank (those books that are a part of the canon—we’ve talked about that) and only to them, such reverence and honor that I firmly believe that no single error is found in any one of them.”

In addition to believing that the scripture, whatever it said, corresponded with reality, they also believed that when the scripture spoke, it didn’t contradict itself. Again, listen to several of the early church fathers. Irenaeus writes “all scripture which has been given to us by God shall be found by us perfectly consistent.” Justin Martyr, who was probably disciplined by the apostle John writes “I am entirely convinced that no scripture contradicts another.” Athanasius: “It is the opinion of some that the scriptures do not agree, or the God who gave them is false. But there is no disagreement at all. Far from it. Neither can the Father who is truth, lie, for it is impossible that God should lie.” Fast forward to the reformation. This was, again the one voice of the reformers. Let me give you one example from the pen of Martin Luther. He writes “everyone indeed knows that at times the fathers have erred as men.” The early church fathers weren’t always right “Therefore, I am ready to trust them only when they prove their opinions from scripture.” And then he adds “which has never erred.” The Westminster Confession. The summary of the doctrine the Puritan divines believed, calls the scripture “the only infallible rule of faith and practice”. It speaks of “the entire perfection of scripture and the consent of all of the parts” Folks, understand this. Until the last several hundred years, no one in church history seriously questioned the inerrancy of scripture. The question is why? Why didn’t they? How did all the great minds of church history come to understand this great truth? Well, that brings us to the biblical argument, because this is clearly taught in scripture.

Let’s look at the biblical argument. Really, it’s twofold. It comes from the claim scripture makes for itself and from the statements our Lord makes. Let’s look at the claims the scripture makes for itself. Turn back with me to Deuteronomy 13. These two passages in Deuteronomy are absolutely crucial to understand. When God first spoke, He spoke through Moses. Moses wrote the first five books of our Old Testament, the Law as it’s often called, the Pentateuch. Nobody doubted that God was speaking to Moses. If you were part of the two million Jews that came out of Egypt and you gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, you watched Moses go up. You saw the cloud descend on the mountain. You heard the thunder, you saw the lightning, you felt the earthquakes. You heard this trumpet grow louder and louder and louder till you couldn’t hear yourself think, and then suddenly the trumpet stops and the voice of God comes out of the cloud and recites the ten commandments to them. And Moses goes up, and the cloud’s still there. God’s still there. He comes down, He gives them the law. No one doubted the reality of what was going on. Moses was God’s spokesman.

But after Moses' death, how would they know who God's spokesman was?--the authentic messenger of God? Well, Moses, in his writings gives two criteria for identifying a true prophet. One of them is here in Deuteronomy 13. Look at verse 1.

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives a sign or a wonder, *(so here's a guy who says I speak for God, and he's able to do something miraculous. Don't miss that. He can do a miracle)* and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you *(but here's his message. He claims to be a prophet, he does something that's miraculous and that comes true, but here's his message.)* 'Let us go after other Gods (whom you've not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. *(watch verse 4)* You shall follow the Lord your God and fear him; *(how?)* you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, *(in His word he's revealed to you through me, Moses says. Verse 5)* that prophet or dreamer of dreams *(that has given you that message)* shall be put to death, because he's counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God *(here it is again)* commanded you to walk.

You see what Moses is saying? He's saying, you want to know if a prophet is the real thing or not? Ask yourself, not how great he is, not what he can do. You know, if Benny Hinn could actually raise people from the dead, it wouldn't matter. Because the prophet has to speak in accordance with previous revelation. And if he doesn't, he's not a true prophet. There's the first criterion.

Now, go over to chapter 18 with that in mind. Here's the other. Actually, both of them are put in this passage. Deuteronomy 18:20.

But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, *(now notice, there are two different things going on here. You've got a prophet, in one case, a prophet who says 'I'm speaking for the true God, and in another case a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods')* that prophet shall die.

Now, you say, wait a minute. Okay, I get it. If he's speaking in the name of Baal, that's pretty clear. But what if he's speaking in the name of the true God? How do I know? Verse 21

You may say in your heart, how will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

He's not a real prophet. If he's wrong how many times? Just once. God says he doesn't speak for Me. You hear what God is saying through Moses? The mark of a true prophet with a truly divine message is total truthfulness without a hint of error or falsehood. If there's any error, if there's any falsehood, then he doesn't speak for God.

The rest of the Old Testament makes that same point. 2 Samuel 7:28, speaking of God says, "now O Lord, you are God and your words are truth" When you speak, God, it's truth.

Psalms 12:6. "The words of the Lord are pure words:" There's no impurity in them. There's no error. There's no deceit. They're perfectly pure. Why? They're like 'silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.' There's no impurities. There's nothing but the purest of truth. Look at Psalm 119:160. "the sum of Your word is truth" In other words, all of it together is truth. There's no error in it. Together it's truth. But then he adds this: "And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting" The sum of it's true, and every single one is true. There's no wiggle room there, folks.

You come to the New Testament. The same message in 2 Timothy 2:15. Paul is talking about making sure you're careful with the word if you're called to teach it. And he tells Timothy, you need to be a diligent workman, accurately handling the Bible. But what does he call the Bible-- the word of truth. That's what it is. In 2 Timothy 3:16 all the scripture is the breath of God. It's breathed out by God. If it's breathed out by God, and if every word, every letter, every stroke that distinguishes one letter from another is breathed out by God, then guess what, folks. There can be no what in it?--no error. Because God never deceives and He never lies. Numbers 23:19. "God is not a man, that He should lie," Hebrews 6:18 "it is impossible for God to lie."

So the scripture claims to be the inspired, breathed out, inerrant word of God in everything it affirms. But we also see this from the statements of our Lord. Now, I'm going to come to Matthew 5, but let me give you a couple of others before we get there. You remember Matthew 4, the temptation? In the temptation, Satan comes and tempts Jesus in three different ways. We studied that together, but how does Jesus respond to the temptation, to each of the three temptations? What does He do? He quotes from the Old Testament. Specifically, He quotes from Deuteronomy, all three times. In context, Jesus responds to the temptation with the meaning of scripture. But in one of those cases, the first, Matthew 4:4, listen to what He quotes. He quotes from Deuteronomy and He affirms what Moses wrote to be true. Listen to what Moses wrote and our Lord quotes: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on (*what?*) every

(*what?*) word that comes out of the mouth of God. Every word of that book that you hold in your hand was breathed out of the mouth of God, and we are to rely on, depend on, find our strength and sustenance on that word more than even our necessary food.

Turn over to John 10. Remarkable statement Jesus makes. John 10:30. You remember this claim He makes to deity. “I and the Father are one” We are completely equal. You’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father. The Jews got it. Verse 31, they picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus said, “I’ve shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these are you stoning me? The Jews said, not for good works but for blasphemy, and because You, being a man make yourself out to be God. Now watch verse 34

“Jesus answered them, Has it not been written in your Law (*now notice a couple of things. First of all He goes to the scripture. Secondly He refers to the Old Testament as Law. He quotes from Psalm 82, but He calls it the Law, and here’s what He quotes from Psalm 82*) I SAID YOU ARE GODS? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, You are blaspheming, because I said, I am the Son of God?”

Now what’s going on here? Jesus is quoting a Psalm where the judges of Israel are called gods—not in the sense of deity, but in the sense of the authority they’d been given by God. And Jesus says, if it was okay for the Psalmist to refer to the judges of Israel as gods, how much more appropriate is it for Me who is the Son of God to be called that? But notice what He says as He’s demonstrating all this. Go back to verse 35, the parentheses, very important parenthesis. He says “He called them gods to whom the word of God came, (and the scripture cannot be broken)” Now, what’s amazing about this text is, Jesus is basing his argument on two Hebrew words. The word for judges and the word for gods. And he says, down to those very words, the scripture cannot be broken. The word He uses for broken here, same word He used back Matthew 5:17—abolished. It can’t be annulled. It can’t be repealed. It can’t be abolished. It can’t be withstood. Down to its words it’s going to stand. John 17:17, our Lord says in his high priestly prayer to the Father, “your word is truth”

Now, Jesus affirmed all of that, but I want you to go back now to Matthew 5. Let’s look at what He says here. Matthew 5:18. “Truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law (*watch this*) until all is accomplished” Here, Jesus says it is easier for the universe as we know it to be completely destroyed than for the smallest Hebrew letter, even the smallest stroke added to a letter to pass away until all is—notice what He says at the end of verse 18—is *accomplished*. Now that’s a different Greek word than the word *fulfilled* in verse 17. This word literally means to happen or to come to pass. All is going to come to pass or to happen. Jesus is saying it’s easier for the universe to be destroyed

than for anything that's written in scripture to fail to happen, down to the smallest letter, down to the smallest stroke that distinguishes one letter from another. The whole universe could more easily disappear than for one of those things to fail to happen if God said it's going to happen. Jesus is here affirming the utter trustworthiness, truthfulness, and certainty of the scripture. He is affirming its inerrancy, because He's saying that of the letters and the strokes.

So the question is, when did Christians begin to doubt the inerrancy and infallibility of scripture? It eventually came with the birth of liberalism—the birth of human reason sitting in judgment on the scripture. And it has continued to come in waves since then. In fact, I want to encourage you to read a book called *The Battle For the Bible* written by Harold Lindsell. It was a book written back in the mid 70s. It describes how the battle over inerrancy was waged in the church at that time. At that time, a group of evangelical leaders created what was called the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. And they essentially answered all the questions about the inerrancy of the scripture. And for a period of time, no one with any voice was denying the inerrancy of scripture. But tragically, the issue has risen again, and I believe, over the next 10 to 20 years, this will be the biggest issue that will be fought in the church. They are even talking, by the way, of reviving the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. Just as an example, let me give you a local example. Recently, within the last year or so, a professor stood up in a seminary class in an evangelical seminary right here in our own city and told his evangelical students that if they were going to try to defend the traditional doctrine of inerrancy as I've explained it to you, they should be prepared to be disappointed. And he responded to an email, followed up on that question, making it very clear what his views were. He is the one who is out of step, both with historic Christian thought, and with the clear statements of our Lord. In fact, if that man had said that under a previous administration at that seminary, he would have been fired, but not in today's climate.

Today there's a climate to just keep giving it up. Do you understand, as we sit here today that evangelicals have largely given up Genesis 1 and 2, and a literal 6 day creation? It is hard to find a Christian college—Christian college—that believes in a literal 6 day creation. They've given up the store. And now, right now, the battle is raging over whether or not Adam was actually a real person, a historical person. This is being discussed in evangelical colleges and seminaries. Where does it end? You start on that slope, where do you stop? Who determines that if Adam wasn't a real person, that Jesus was raised from the dead. If any of it is false, then none of it can be trusted, because we don't have the capacity to sort it out. And that's why God gave us a completely trustworthy scripture in every detail. You can have confidence in the scriptures you hold. Jesus didn't have any of those questions. We have it on the authority of our Lord Himself. He believed in its eternal authority, in its verbal and plenary inspiration, and in its complete inerrancy.

Now, there's one final attribute of scripture Jesus identifies in His comments here. Its careful preservation. Now this is not absolutely promised here, but it's implied in what He says. Because notice Jesus isn't talking about the truth of the scripture. He's talking about the letters and words of the scripture. He's talking about the written scripture. And He says neither the smallest letter nor the smallest stroke shall pass away. He is implying that God had preserved His word and will preserve His word in written form. Remember, when Jesus was alive, they no longer had the original autographs. The actual scroll on which Moses wrote and on which the prophets wrote, they no longer had. All they had were copies that were ultimately made from those originals through generations. And yet, He consistently referred to those copies as the scripture. In fact, the Bible from which Jesus most frequently quoted was the Septuagint, a Greek translation made from those Hebrew copies. In other words, Jesus was arguing that the scripture has been preserved. He's implying that in what He says. So when we look at the thousands of manuscripts of the Old Testament and New Testament that have been preserved to our day, we can have confidence that in that body of manuscripts the scripture as God gave it to us has not been lost. You understand, I think, that our English Bibles were translated from ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. For example, there are more than 5000 surviving manuscripts of the New Testament. Compare that to the number of manuscripts that we have of other ancient documents. Remember now, 5000 New Testament manuscripts. There are less than 20 each of most of the ancient Greek and Roman writers.

It's also remarkable how close the events are to the writing. For example, you look at other ancient documents, you find that there is a large gap of time between when the events happened and the surviving manuscripts that we have. The earliest manuscript that we have of the classic Greek and Roman works were copied 700 to 1400 years after the originals were written. 700 to 1400 years after the originals. When you look at the New Testament, I've seen them, we have the Rylands papyrus, which is part of John's gospel that dates to 25 years after it was written. And we have complete manuscripts of the New Testament that were copied only 150 years after the events they describe. It's incredible how it's been preserved. I had the chance when I was in Jerusalem to see the Isaiah scroll that was discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls. It was written, they tell us, between 100 and 200 years before Christ. Experts have compared the text of that scroll that was buried in a hillside 100 to 200 years before Christ, or shortly thereafter (and it's been stuck away) They compared that to the Hebrew text on which your Bible and the Old Testament had been translated and they discovered there was very little difference. For example, in chapter one of Isaiah, comparing the Isaiah Scroll to the first chapter of Isaiah, the Hebrew text that your Bible was translated from, there were only 20 minor differences in spelling and things like that. Only one word was different, and it didn't affect the meaning of the text.

The bottom line is this, folks, by every standard used with ancient documents, the evidence for the reliability of our Bible is overwhelming. If scholars didn't hate what the Bible said, they would never question its reliability and authenticity. That's part of the point Jesus is making in

Matthew 5. You know, Jesus often challenged the Jews of His time about upsetting the meaning of scripture, but He never once said to them, your text of scripture is corrupted. You're using the wrong Bible. Instead, He quoted from both the Hebrew and Greek they used, and He called the content He quoted, the word of God. It's preserved remarkably. In fact, I love what Peter says in 1 Peter 1. He says—he quotes from Isaiah, all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord what?—endures forever. And then he says, and that was the word which is preached to you. That's what we're talking about. It's that very enduring word that God talked about.

So those are the attributes Jesus believed to be true of the scripture. And if you're a follower of His, those are the attributes you must believe as well. Is He your teacher, or is He not. If He's your teacher, then you will embrace the same view of scripture that He himself embraced. How does that affect us? If, like Jesus, you and I have a true high view of scripture, we will treat the scripture the way He did. Here's how He treated it.

Number one. He read it and expected others to read it. Luke 24:27 “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the scriptures.” He read all the scriptures. He knew all the scriptures. He explained them. Mark 12:10, He says to His enemies “Have you not even read this scripture:” Folks, if we're going to take Jesus' high view of scripture, we're going to read it as well. We're going to be in it as well.

Number two. He memorized it, and used it against temptation. In His temptation, three times He said “it is (*what?*) written”—and He quoted Deuteronomy. That's how we're to respond as well. He responded with the meaning of the text and not merely a mantra.

Number three. He believed it could be understood, and therefore He studied it and He rebuked others for not studying it and not understanding it. What that means, folks, is you need to work at understanding it. You need to study it. Listen to Luke 2:46. You remember when He was 12 and He was in the temple? His parents came back after three days and found Him. What was He doing? Listen to this “ (*He was*) in the midst of the teachers, (*there in the temple*) both listening to them and asking them questions.” What was He doing? He was studying the scriptures. He was trying to learn and understand as He was growing in His knowledge, humanly speaking, what He needed to know about the scriptures. And we do as well. We can understand the scripture. Jesus says in John 17:8, “the words which you gave them I have given to them” Talking to the Father. They received those words, they understood those words, and they believed those words. That's how we're to respond.

Number four He obeyed it, and He expected us to as well. John 15:10. “I have kept My Father's commandments.” “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love.” Luke 8, you remember they came to Jesus and said your mother and brothers are outside, and He pointed to

the followers around Him and He said, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it” Listen. You’re related to Jesus if you hear His word and you do it.

And finally, He taught it as the focus of His ministry, and He demanded that people place themselves under His authority. Read Mark 1. You will discover that the thrust of Jesus’ ministry was not primarily the miracles. It was teaching the word of God. In fact, when they wanted more miracles, what did He do? He said, no I’ve got to leave here, because I’ve got to go to other cities and teach and preach because that is what I came to do. He caused people to sit under the authority of the word of God. And we’re to sit under that authority as well. It comes down to this, folks. What did Jesus say about Himself in John 14:6? As we’ve looked at His view of scripture, what did He say about Himself? John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.” Jesus says, everything I am, everything I say, everything I do is absolutely objectively true, and everything else is false. I am truth in a person, Jesus says. And in Matthew 5 Jesus tells us, I have absolute confidence in the scripture, and so should you.

Let’s pray together. Our Father, we thank You for our study together this morning. Thank You for our Lord—for His amazing mind, for His amazing teaching. Lord, we’ve not done justice to what He taught in this passage, but I pray that You would use it as we reflect on it and meditate on it and think about it. Lord, help us as His followers to hold the same view of scripture that He did. And Father, help us to see that when we don’t, that too is evidence of our true condition. Father, may we embrace Your word with our whole hearts, and may we practically respond to it even as our Lord did. We pray it to His glory and in His name. Amen.