

Truth Remains

Various Scriptures

BI: “Hammer away, ye hostile hands; your hammer breaks; God's anvil stands.”

Introduction:

This morning we are privileged to have the Truth Remains Exhibit with us. What a magnificent collection of priceless First Edition Bibles. And if you were unable to make it yesterday to see and actually touch those volumes and hear Logan Carr explain the history of the English Bible as only she can, then I want to strongly encourage you to make your way down the hall after the service and see it. It will probably be a once in a lifetime experience.

It seems appropriate this morning for me to take this opportunity to talk about the Bible, so this morning we are going to set our study of the Book of John aside so we can step back and think about the treasure that each one of you hold in your hands.

I. The Dramatic History of the Scriptures:

1. When we think about God’s revealed word to mankind we have to go all the way back to the garden of Eden to see where it began. As we have seen so many times before, when man was created God made him absolutely perfect. There was no corruption in him, no flaw in mind, body, or character and no sin. He was perfect. But that didn’t mean he was autonomous. That is, his physical, mental, and spiritual perfection did not preclude him from the need for God’s word. There were important things that he didn’t know that God had to reveal to Him.
2. We find God’s first revelation to man in Gen. 1:28, where we read, “God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” So we see that the first thing God reveals to man was man’s role on the planet. He was to be God’s coregent. He was to fill the earth with people who would bear God’s image and he was to rule over all the creatures God had made. This was God’s first direct communication with man. In theological terms we call this Revelation. Revelation is when God reveals necessary truth to man. In this case it was the revelation of man’s purpose. It was a purpose that Adam would not have deduced on his own. God had to tell him.
3. But there was another revelation that God gave which man would not have deduced on his own; namely, the danger of sin. In Gen. 2:16 God speaks to man again. This time He commands him saying, “From every tree in the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it you will surely die.”

4. This was a really important revelation, and God meant it for man's good. His plan for man was to bless him by giving him productive work and a reason for living and pleasure, joy, and contentment with his wife and children and grand-children. But Sin was bound to ruin all of that, so God, because of His love for man, gave him an important revelation for his protection and wellbeing. Here, all the way back in the garden of Eden God was already teaching that "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."
5. As you know, however, the man and his wife disobeyed God's command. Deceived by the trickery of Satan, they ate of the forbidden fruit and plunged mankind into sin. But this was not the end of their relationship with God. Yes, He would discipline them and put them out of the garden; and yes, God would curse the ground because of their sin, but He was not finished with man. In fact, instead of abandoning man to the dictates of his own sinful heart, God began pouring out revelation upon revelation for man's good.
6. At first, His words to man were given orally and they were passed down from parents to children by word of mouth. But when Moses came on the scene an important change took place. When God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai He didn't simply leave him to remember what had been revealed. Rather, God committed His word to written form so not a single word of His revelation would be lost. In fact, God wrote His law with His own finger upon tablets of stone.
7. From that time on, much of God's revelation came to mankind in written form, but not always directly from the mouth of God. First, the Holy Spirit moved Moses to write the book of Genesis and then the story of the Exodus. Then came God's revelation about how to worship Him in Leviticus, and more of His holy law in Numbers and Deuteronomy. This process is known as Inspiration. Through the prophets and then through the apostles (and a few others) God gave His word to man by means of the Holy Spirit.
 - A. The apostle Peter speaks of this when in 2 Pet. 1, he writes, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."
 - B. And Paul makes it even more explicit when writing to Timothy he said (2 Tim. 3:16), "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."
 - C. The word "Inspired" means "God breathed." It is a fascinating word that means that God actually breathed into men the very words that He wanted them to write down.
 - D. And by the way, this is the only plausible explanation for how this book, which was written over a space of nearly 1400 years, by different men in various lands, from Italy in the west to Mesopotamia and possibly Persia in the east. The

writers themselves were... not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles, but belonging to the most diverse walks of life,¹ and yet the finished product comes together in perfect unity of theme, purpose and message. I tell you, it's almost as if it was not really the product of many minds, but of only One. And indeed it is, for it comes to us from the very mind of God.

8. The importance of the fact that God gave us His word in written form, frankly, cannot be over-estimated. By having it written down God ensured a much more accurate preservation of His word than would have been possible if it had only been passed down orally. Also, written words provided opportunity for repeated inspection and for careful study. It also makes God's word available to more people so that anyone could memorize and meditate upon divinely inspired truth. But God's revelation didn't stop with the Pentateuch.
9. After Moses, God raised up other prophets – many more. As the book of Hebrews says, “God spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways” (Heb. 1:1). And as God gave further revelation the HS moved these men to write it down so everyone could benefit from what God had revealed. Nevertheless, not everyone was receptive to hearing God's word. In fact, many hated the word of God and did everything in their power to silence it and be rid of it forever.
10. It would seem at one point in the OT that Satan's conspiracy to rid the world of God's written word was almost successful. After Israel had entered the Promised Land and many wicked kings had come and gone, the written word of God was lost. In fact, it seems that by the time we come to the second book of Kings (chap. 22), the “Book of the Law” as it was called, had NOT been seen or read in some years. Can you imagine? Young Josiah was now 26 years old and though He was the king of Judah he had never laid eyes on a copy of God's word – let alone read it. But one day as the priests were cleaning out the storerooms of the temple under Josiah's orders, Hilkiah the high priest found the only known copy of God's word.
11. Hilkiah brought it to the king and read it, and as young king Josiah heard the word of the Lord he tore his robes because he realized how long his people had been living in rebellion against God and didn't even know it! The result was a great revival in the land of Judah. And God blessed them beyond what they could have imagined.
12. This has always been the purpose of God's revelation. From the very beginning and even after sin entered the world it was God's purpose to bless those whom He had created. His word was all about how to live in blessed fellowship with God and one another. God frequently said things like (Jer. 29:11), “For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.” But sinful men don't naturally desire to live under God's rule. In fact, left to Himself man will only hate God's word.

¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, (1999) Thomas Nelson, (7)

13. Over and over in the O.T. we read of how the people hated, imprisoned, and even killed the prophets of the Lord. Jesus grieved over this as He approached Jerusalem one day exclaiming (Mat. 23:37), “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!” Who was He referring to?
- A. Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20)
 - B. Uriah (Jer. 26:23)
 - C. Jezebel would have killed Elijah if she could have arrested him. Jeremiah got thrown into a pit and left for dead. Daniel was cast into the lion’s den.
 - D. Moreover in the NT the religious leaders stoned Stephen. Herod killed James. Tradition tells us the Romans beheaded Paul, crucified Peter up-side-down, and eventually executed all of the other apostles with the possible exception of John.
14. Even though it is the answer to every question and every need of the human soul the sinful human race has always rebelled against God’s word. The only exceptions to that are those who, by God’s grace, have humbly bowed before the Lord and received His revelation for the infinite treasure and life-imparting truth that it is. This has been the testimony throughout all of redemptive history. And though sinful men hated the word of the Lord, God went to great lengths to secure its preservation.
15. During the 400 years between the Old and New testaments, Israel, concerned that disregarding God’s word in the future might provoke God to exile them into another Babylonian-like captivity, began the painstaking process of copying God’s Word. And they established very strict rules for the scribes to follow to ensure that every copy would be practically perfect. Let me share with you some of these rules. One historical record reveals:
- A synagogue roll [scroll] must be written on the skins of clean animals (2) prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew. (3) These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. (4) Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. (5) The length of each column must not extend over less than 48 or more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. (6) The whole copy must be first lined; and if three words be written without a line, it is worthless. (7) The ink should be black, neither red, green nor any other color, and be prepared according to a definite recipe. (8) An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate. (9) No word or letter, not even a yod [smallest letter of the Heb. Alphabet], must be written from memory the scribe not having looked at the codex before him... (10) Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; (11) between every new parashah, or section, the breadth of nine consonants; (12) between every book, three lines. (13) The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line...(14) Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress; (15)

wash his whole body, (16) not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, (17) and should a king address him while writing that name, he must take no notice of him. 35/89, 54/241. (from Intro to Biblical Counseling notes (TMC) Dr. Ernie Baker).

16. What's the point? The point is that by God's providential care, the Scriptures were meticulously copied according to very strict and exacting parameters to ensure their accuracy to the original autographs. And though in the centuries that followed men would question the plausibility of our modern copies of the Scriptures being accurate to the originals, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (beginning in 1946) put all such concerns to rest. God has preserved His word.
17. But preserving the word of God in the original language of Hebrew was not enough. God was not interested in His Book being His message to the Jews only. The gospel was given to redeem a people from every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue. Consequently, some three hundred years before Jesus came on the scene 72 Jewish scholars living in Alexandria, Egypt got together and translated the OT Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. The significance of this translation cannot be overstated. And the fact that the translation took place in Alexandria hints at why.
18. You see, Alexandria was a city which Alexander the Great named after himself. And who was Alexander the Great? Alexander the Great was one of history's most successful conquerors. And whenever he conquered a nation he also instituted the culture and language of his homeland; namely, Grease. In fact, by the time Alexander died, he had conquered so many nations that the common language of the Mediterranean world became Greek. So you see it was for good reason that these Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. It was the language of the world. And so it became the language of both the Old and New Testament.
19. But this was just the beginning of Bible translation! As Warfield writes:

Even the lingua franca of the civilized world did not suffice the Bible. It was the world, not [just] the civilized world, which was "the field" in which the seed of the Kingdom was sown... [So] the gospel penetrated through ever stratum and spread outward from land to land... We can observe its progress toward this result from the earliest years of gospel proclamation. Wherever the gospel went, there the "book" was found; not as an exotic treasure, however precious, but as leaven buried in the very substance of humanity and working through the whole lump. Wherever it went, it went as the people's book; energizing at the bases of the people's life and lifting the whole mass upward into new intellectual, ethical, and spiritual vitality.²
20. So we see from history that the word of God began to spread far and wide. In the west it became a Latin book where the Roman Empire left its mark. In the east it became

² John E. Meeter (editor), *B.B. Warfield: Selected Shorter Writings*, (2005) P&R Publishing, (5).

a Syriac book which brought God's word to Egypt, Malabar, and China. In the south it became a Coptic book. And in the north, thanks to men like Martin Luther, it became a German book, and then an Armenian book, and a Slavic book. But most significantly for us, it became an English book. And as you know, it was a book for which many men and women gladly gave their lives.

21. Modern English translation of the Bible began with William Tyndale (1494-1536) whom Leland Ryken refers to as "a linguist genius whose expertise in multiple languages dazzled the scholarly world of his day."³ In his time owning a copy of the Bible had been made illegal by the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, they burned every Bible they could discover among the people. And then they burned the people who owned them. Nevertheless, William Tyndale set out to translate the word of God into English. Because of the danger of such work in his day he was forced to perform his translation work on the Continent and then smuggle copies of his N.T. to England in bales of cotton and hay so that common people like you and me could, for the very first time, read the very word of God in their own language.
22. One day when a Catholic sympathizer said in Tyndale's presence "we are better off without God's law than the Pope's," Tyndale famously replied, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than the Pope." Eventually, Tyndale was betrayed to the authorities by a traitorous friend and put in jail where he languished in horrific conditions for 500 days. He was convicted of heresy after an unfair trial and condemned to death. Then, on Oct. 6, 1556, as John Fox reports, being "Brought forth to the place of execution, he was tied to the stake, strangled by the hangman, and afterwards consumed with fire... Crying at the stake with a fervent zeal, and a loud voice [he said] "Lord! Open the king of England's eyes!"⁴
23. I think it is safe to say God answered his prayer. But every Tyndale Himself could never imagine how his little NT would change the world. (show the Tyndale NT)
24. Notwithstanding Tyndale's death, the recent invention of printing press was a great boon in making Tyndale's translation of the NT flourish in England. And as it did the blood of the Martyrs, under the reign of Catholic Queen Mary, began to flow in earnest.
25. After the death of Tyndale, other faithful scholars took up his mantle. Miles Coverdale, who had worked as Tyndale's assistant, published the first complete Bible in English called the Coverdale Bible in 1535. After that John Rogers (also a friend of Tyndale) produced the Matthew's Bible (1537). Like Tyndale He too was burned at the stake. After that an edict of the King Henry VIII charged the clergy of England to

³ Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation*, (2002), Crossway Books, (48).

⁴ W.M. Byron Forbush (editor), *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, (1926), Universal Book and Bible House, Philadelphia, Pa., (184)

produce what became known as The Great Bible because of its large size (1539). After this came the Geneva Bible (1560) which was the Bible of the Reformers. It was also the Bible used by Shakespear and carried to America by the Pilgrims on the Mayflower. The great appeal of this Bible was its study notes. This was the original “Study Bible.” After this came Bishop’s Bible (1568) and then the most well-known version of the English Bible, The King James Version (1611).⁵

26. This week as I was studying for this message I picked up my grandfather’s copy of Fox’s Book of Martyrs and read the stories of many men and women who chose to lose their lives rather than betray the Lord of the book they so loved.
- A. Lady Jane Gray (also known as the Nine Day Queen) was of the first to go. Because of her refusal to recant her belief in the biblical gospel, she was beheaded.
 - B. John Rogers who helped Tyndale with his translation was offered a certificate of pardon if he would recant, but he utterly refused it and was burned at the stake along with Mr. John Hooper, Bishop of Worcester and Gloucester.
 - C. Later a Bishop Ridley and Bishop Hugh Latimer were likewise accused of heresy for preaching the Bible. When they arrived together for their execution “Mr Ridley embraced Latimer fervently, and bid him: “Be of good heart brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame, or else strengthen us to abide it.”⁶ Then they knelt down at the stake and prayed together. One of the brothers came and mercifully tied a bag of gun power around each of their necks. Then, when the fire was set under them old Latimer was heard to say, “Be of good cheer, Ridley; and play the man. We shall this day by God’s grace, light such a candle in England, as I trust, will never be put out!”⁷
27. I don’t know what that does to your heart, but stories like this affect me deeply. These men loved the word of God and did not count their lives as precious when they were counseled to recant or die. And you may be asking, Why? What is so wonderful about the word of God that these men were willing to die for it? We have seen something of the Dramatic History of the Bible. Now let’s briefly consider...

II. The Incalculable Worth of the Scriptures

1. These men and women counted the Scriptures more precious than life for many reasons. First and foremost of all, they loved the Bible because it is the revelation of God in Christ.

⁵ Adapted from Leland Ryken, (48-50).

⁶ Forbush, (237)

⁷ Ibid.

- A. Nothing else in the world could captive their hearts like the revelation of Jesus Christ. And the Bible is the only place we can find it. How would mankind ever learn that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16)?
- B. How would we ever learn that though “we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6)? This is not something that man could deduce on his own. There had to be revelation, and God gave it to us in the Bible.

2. Second, when the Bible brought them into relationship with God in Christ it also became for them the treasure chest of ultimate truth. In John 17:17 Jesus said it best with the simple words, “Thy word is truth.” Not, thy word “contains” but “Thy word is truth. The Bible is the standard, the rule, the measuring stick against which all truth claims must be measured. It’s is the divine, spiritual, moral, intellectual compass for life. How can you navigate life without it?

3. Third, these brothers and sisters loved the Bible because it created for them the community of brothers and sisters whose love for one another was something the world knew nothing of. Such was their love that they were willing lived together, worship together, suffer persecution together, and even die in the flames while encouraging each other to the end. Only Christ could do that. Only the Holy Spirit could accomplish that. And He did it through the written word of God. (BTW: This was the same kind of community enjoyed by the Pilgrims who left the persecution in England together so they could worship freely in a new land known as America).

4. These men and women loved the bible for 10,000 reasons. And perhaps the best text that summarize it is Psalm 19:7-11...

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;

The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

⁸The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

⁹The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;

The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

5. Job said (Job 23:12), “I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.” The men and women we have learned about this morning treasured God’s word more than life.

III. The Proper Response to the Scriptures?

1. How should we respond to such a gift as the Bible?

A. Paul would say (Col. 3:16), “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...”

B. The Psalmist would exhort you (Psa. 1), to “Meditate on it day and night so that you will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in its season, whose leaf does not wither and in whatever he does he prospers”

2. What should you do with the Bible? Read it, love it, eat it, drink it, meditate on it day and night, let it fill you. Let it rule you. Let it purify you. And let it plunge you into the bottomless ocean of the knowledge of God. And know this, that no matter what happens in this life; no matter what difficulties or tragedies happen in the world, in your marriage, in or in your personal life the word of God is always there for you. Psalm 119:89 says, “Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens” And Jesus said (Mat. 24:35), “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word will never pass away.”

3. As Martin Luther wrote: “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill, God’s truth abideth still; His kingdom is forever.”

4. In the late 15 and early 1600’s, the Catholic leaders of France were determined to eradicate all Protestant influences upon their country. Oceans of blood was shed in those years. Protestants in France were known as the Huguenots, and they died by the thousands. But they did not count their lives precious when faced with the choice to recant or die. They loved Christ. And because of that, they loved the Bible.

5. Years later in memory of those who died a monument was erected in their honor which read, “Hammer away, ye hostile hands; your hammer breaks; God’s anvil stands.”⁸

6. No matter what this world does to eradicate God’s word it will not be moved. As B.B. Warfield said, “The very wrath of man has come to praise him in this sphere too; and the Bible has emerged from these fires, as out of all others, without so much as the smell of smoke upon its garments.”⁹

⁸ Hans Finzel, *Unlocking the Scriptures: A Fresh New Look at Inductive Bible Study*, (1986), Victor Books, (15)

⁹ Warfield, Vol. 2, (13).

