

Sermon Transcript from January 3rd, 2016
The Problem with the Bible
Pastor Dave Lomas, Reality San Francisco

Epistles aren't Today, we are starting what we as a church are calling "The Year of Biblical Literacy," and it started a couple of days ago with January 1 reading out of Genesis. And you probably are following along and reading that at home. So, it contains all these different layers. If you go to realitysf.com/bible, all that's there. All of our sermons will be populated there. All our lectures will be there as well. So, we encourage you to go there and read along. The whole premise of this year is to learn the Bible by actually reading the Bible and not just hearing about it, though you will hear a lot about it as well.

So, we are starting that today. If you have a Bible, turn to John 5 and Matthew 28. The Scriptures will not be on the screen. You will have to look in a Bible to know it's actually there. He's not just reading things randomly. It's there. Matthew 28 and John 5. John 5:39 and Matthew 28:16.

Okay. Whenever we do a big series or start a big series, I like to start with some prefatory comments, maybe even a disclaimer or two. So, let me start with some of those. These are just prefatory. This is not the sermon. These are just some comments I want to make. The best way to get the most out of this year, the Year of Biblical Literacy, is to dive in. Do what we have set up for our church this year. Do the whole year. The whole thing. It will be a commitment. It will be a huge commitment and it will probably take something like 20 minutes a day and then sermons and then lectures and all of this stuff. It will take a long time.

But, commitment is what it means to be a follower of Jesus. If you're not a follower of Jesus, this book right here is the best selling book of all time, year and year over year. This book is banned in places all over the world and smuggled into places at the peril of those who have the Bible. So, why wouldn't you at least read it for yourself to see what all the hype is about?

So, if you are not a follower of Jesus, go with us through this year. Read it with us. At the end, you might just walk away. But at least give it a chance. There are four layers that we're going to be going through this next year. The first one is you reading the Bible for yourself and, as we've been saying, we've partnered with The Bible Project to do some videos. Bible Project has placed some videos on their website to help us see the overview of the book before we read the book.

Also, be a regular part of community groups A lot of you – most of you – are signed up for a community group. So, now be a regular part of that group. Don't go to group, though – listen. Do not go to group to debate people. Do not go to community group to show off all of your Bible knowledge. People won't like you if you do that. Go to humbly discuss and learn how to obey the Scriptures together. And keep this in mind, to quote the Bible: start with a plank in your own eye before you take the splinter out of somebody else's eye. Jesus said that. You'll get there. Eventually.

Also, listen and engage with the sermons. If you're traveling, try to get the podcast. Also, be part of the lectures and ask good questions from the lectures. The people that we have coming to lecture are very smart people with PhDs. So, they can handle your questions. I cannot. But, they can. That's why we're bringing them in.

The first lecture is on January 18th: The Making of the Bible. PhD in Hebrew, Tim Mackie will be here. And he's going to be talking about the canonization of the Bible. This is so important to understand how we got our Bible. He's lecturing on the making of the Bible. So, most of us think, "Well, it's just a human book compiled together by people wrestling for power in the first century." And, he'll talk about that. It's not true. Spoiler alert. Sorry.

Lastly – actually, not lastly. I have a few more. The Bible is a huge subject with all these sub-subjects attached to it. So, there's so much to say that I will not say today in this small little intro. I won't even say it in the next three weeks in this series on authority and the Bible. I'm hoping that we have a whole year to say these things about the Bible. But, even then after a year, we might not have said enough.

So, if today I don't say something that you think I should have said, hang on. Either I'll get to it or what you think I should have said is not really a thing and you probably shouldn't think it anymore. So, one of those two things are going to happen. That was kind of a joke.

Almost lastly, there's some of you that are very new to the faith and you're very skeptical

when it comes to the Bible. Just a little skeptical. I mean, you might start to have faith in Jesus and you might be cool with Jesus, but the Bible to you, as a whole, has a lot of problems. I understand that. My hope is that this is a place and that this is a year where we can have questions about the Bible and some trite answer is not necessary. But, we try to discover the answers as we actually read through the Bible together.

One of the best answers to your questions this year – and we've tried to teach the community group leaders to say this as well – is "let's keep reading."

Let's keep reading. You might get to the middle of Judges and say, "This book is horrible." Keep reading. Keep reading. We're going to find that, as we keep reading, the story unfolds.

One of my mentors has said, "Churches need an atmosphere where questions and queries about the truthfulness are encouraged and to take the questions of the Bible seriously, believing that Christianity thrives under honest investigation."

We believe that Christianity thrives under honest investigation.

The last thing I'll say is that I and our other leaders and pastors will be up front and would love to dialogue if you have a question at the end of today. We have all been studying this together and we find it best to dialogue about questions when it comes to the Scripture. If you email me, chances are I will not email you back because I don't like typing, for one, and I'm horrible at it. So, you ask one sentence and I'm supposed to give you a giant book, and it won't happen.

Also, Facebook is the worst place on the planet to debate the Bible. Okay. That's all I have to say. Not Facebook headquarters. Like, online. You know what I'm saying. If you work there you're like, "Wait, what?"

My only disclaimer today, before we get started – I told you it was a lot. I'll ask some questions around the Bible today that I will not answer. So, if this unsettles you, let it unsettle you, and keep reading and keep opening your heart and your mind to Jesus through the Scriptures as we journey together.

So, today, I want to turn to our text, John 5 and Matthew 28, and I want to talk about the problem with the Bible. The problem with the Bible. John 5. Let's start there.

John 5:39-40. Jesus is speaking: **"You study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."**

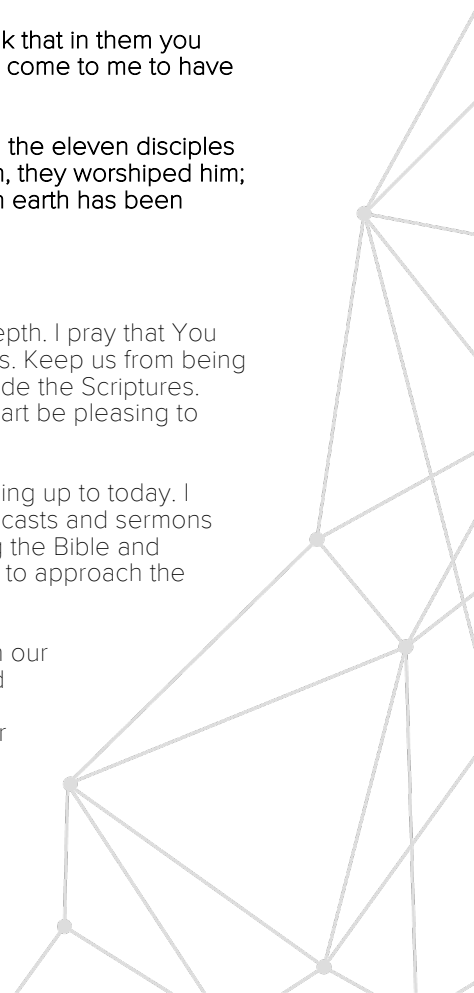
Matthew 28:16-18. Jesus, again, speaking. This is after the resurrection of Jesus: **"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"**

Let's pray.

God, I stand before this church with the Bible open and feel like I'm really out of my depth. I pray that You would lead us by Your Spirit, that You would show us Jesus. Holy Spirit, show us Jesus. Keep us from being a bunch of know-it-alls this year. Make us humble people that find the life of Jesus inside the Scriptures. And may the words of my mouth and the testimony, Lord, and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to You, God, as I testify of Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

First, I guess I'll say this. This is the cornerstone of what we've been talking about leading up to today. I believe that we are becoming illiterate when it comes to the Bible. I think we love podcasts and sermons and some devotional thoughts about the bible, which is all fine in context. But, reading the Bible and knowing it's story and how this collection of 66 different writings fits together and how to approach the Bible is becoming a lost art.

Why is Biblical literacy so low? Why is it so low? Why is Biblical literacy, all across even our country, so low today? Well, I think some of it has to do with the fact that we don't read anymore. We don't read that much anymore. We don't read books, anyways. We read threads and blogs and posts. But many of us have a hard time getting lost in a book or getting lost in a story unless J.J. Abrams has some part of it or something like that.



I read an article in our newspaper. Our physical, actual newspaper. But, this article did appear on medium.com first. But, it was in the newspaper when I read it. And this guy was reflecting on why we don't read anymore. It was an essay as he was reflecting on why he only read four books this last year. He says he only read four books this last year because he's finding it harder and harder to concentrate on words, because they turn into sentences and then paragraphs and then chapters.

He says this:

"Most nights last year, I got to bed with a book and started reading. One word after the next, a sentence, two sentences, maybe three, and then I needed a little something else. Something to tide me over. Something to scratch that little itch at the back of my mind. Just a quick look at email on my iPhone, to write and erase a response to a funny tweet from William Gibson and to find and follow a link to a really good article in The New Yorker. Then email again just to be sure. Then I'd read another sentence. That's four sentences. It takes a long time to read a book at four sentences per day, and it's exhausting. I was usually asleep halfway through sentence number five. A lot of us know how this feels being distracted all the time and addicted to distraction."

This is kind of where the essay ends up. He says, "I'm addicted to digital distraction and I want to change." There's a reason why it was put at the end of last year or just a couple of days ago because he says, "My New Year's resolution is I want to start reading books again."

And why books? He says this, the quote's on the screen:

"Books, in a way that is different than visual art, music, the radio or even love, force us to walk through another's thoughts, one word at a time over hours and days. We share our minds for that time with the writers. There is slowness, a forced reflection required by the medium that is unique. Books recreate someone else's thoughts inside our own minds, and maybe it is this one-to-one mapping of someone else's words on their own, without external stimuli, that give books their power. Books force us to let someone else's thoughts inhabit our minds completely."

If this is true, I can't think of a better book or a collection of books for a follower of Jesus to read than the Bible. To allow the thoughts of God, mediated by the authors He moved to write, to inhabit our minds completely. To let this do its work daily on us, word by word, until the Scriptures shape our imaginations as followers of God. To allow the Bible to inhabit our minds completely.

Now, that all sounds probably really good, but there are a lot of hurdles to overcome. See, Biblical literacy is also low in large part due to our own consumerism. As consumers, we believe the shortest route to improvement is through new products. We go, "I will improve by buying something." So, we buy Bibles, we just don't read Bibles. We all, maybe, have bought a Bible. We sold all those Bibles that we had. Every single week people would walk up and people would walk away with stacks of them. Why do you need five Bibles? I have no idea. But, people walked away with stacks of them and they were sold out every single week. We buy them, but will we read them?

Like I said earlier, the Bible is the best selling book year over year. Something like 25 million Bibles are sold every year. But, the Bible remains the best selling book that's never read. I would guess that many of you in here, especially if you're under the age of 30, have not read the Bible cover to cover. I say under 30 because there was way more of an emphasis on Bible reading in older generations. And, even older generations loved the Bible. Many of your parents probably have a Bible they've had for 40 years and they've read through it like 38 times and have color-coded highlights and tabs everywhere.

But, for most of us, that's not true. And I understand why. We have a lot of questions, especially modern questions, that surround the Bible. Questions that can even cause us to take issue with the Bible. I mean, this book is pretty bloody. There are some people who can read the book of Joshua, if you've ever read that book, and you can read the book of Joshua and go, "God, look what happens when you trust in God. God scatters your enemies and God brings you the victory."

And you've probably read Joshua, and maybe you've read Joshua and thought that. You're like, "Look at how God comes through to Joshua and how He destroys their enemies and brings them victory and brings them into the land of promise."

But, some of us will read the book of Joshua and think, "How is this not God-commanded genocide and ethnic cleansing? How is it that God commands the death of

women and children? How is that in the sacred Bible? Not to mention the rape and the murder and the incest and the deceit that's found in the people of God in the Bible, and especially in the Old Testament"

There's this one story – you're going to come upon it soon in Genesis. I won't tell you what chapter. I just want it to hit you like it's supposed to. There's this one story about a woman who dresses up like a prostitute to sleep with her father-in-law because the father-in-law promised her a husband because her husband had died. But, he hasn't provided a husband yet and she really wants to have kids. So, she dresses up like a prostitute and him, thinking that she was a prostitute, sleeps with her. And then she becomes pregnant. And then he hears, "Hey, you know your daughter-in-law is pregnant?"

He's like, "What? That's sin. Kill her by burning her."

And then she reveals, "Oh, guess what? Guess whose baby I'm pregnant with? Yours."

And then he goes, "Ah. You got me."

Not joking. He's like, "You're more righteous than I am. Don't kill her. I'm not going to sleep with her anymore."

In the next chapter – and his name is Judah – you're probably like, "Wait, I think I know that name. Jesus is from the lion of the tribe of Judah."

Yes. Same guy. That guy. I honestly, every single time I read this story, I'm thinking, "People shouldn't read the Old Testament. This thing is crazy."

And then there's this whole thing around what does the Bible even mean? We just finished our "Advent" series and, during our series, we had Ruthie Kim and Julie Barrios teach. Both from our church. Both involved in important leadership and pastoral care in our church and they did just an incredible job teaching. Soon after they taught, we received a couple of comments and emails. And they were all very well intentioned. Very very honest and kind questions that basically said, "Why did you have a woman teach? It says in 1 Timothy that a woman should not be allowed to teach."

It actually does say that. 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul says, **"I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet."**

That's very hard to read, I admit. It's very hard to read in public. It's a hard text. But the question is: what do you take that to mean? Does that mean do not teach on a Sunday during a sermon? And that's typically what we take that to mean. But it doesn't say that. It says "to teach" and there's no qualifier. It says just "to teach." So, the question is this: have you ever learned anything or have been taught anything by a woman? And it doesn't say that women are only allowed to teach other women. It says, "Women can't teach." Period.

But, no one takes it to mean that. So, what do you take it to mean and who is it up to to decide what that means?

Or take another example: Paul commands multiple times in his letters to greet one another with a holy kiss. And we all say, "Well, that's not what it means. We don't kiss each other. It means greet each other with a holy side-hug is what it means. That's what we're supposed to do."

I'm like, "Well, why do you interpret it that way?"

You would say, "Well, it's culturally conditioned. The kiss doesn't mean the same thing anymore. At least not here."

Okay, what about murder? Well, you shall not murder. That's self evident. Yes. Of course. But, most Christians would say, "You shall not murder unless it's killing in self-defense or defending something you love. Therefore, it's no longer murder, it's just killing."

But then I would say something like, "Well, Jesus said to turn the other cheek."

And then you would probably say something like, "Well, Jesus said to buy a sword."

And then I would say, "Well, Jesus also said later on to put away the sword because

that's not how the Kingdom of God is to come into the world."

But then you would say, "Oh. But doesn't Jesus, at the end of the Bible, isn't He sitting on a white horse and wearing a robe dipped in blood and carrying a sword?"

And then I would say, "Well, the blood is His own blood and the sword is not in His hand, it's in His mouth and it's all symbolic."

And then you would say, "Why are you allowed to say it's symbolic and how do you know when the Bible's being symbolic and how do you know when the passage is culturally conditioned and how do you know when to obey something in the Bible?"

And then I would say, "This is the problem with the Bible."

And this is the problem with the Bible. The Bible is hard. I want to say this because I don't think people say this enough. The Bible is a hard book to understand a lot of the time. And we should just admit that. This is a very hard book to understand. It doesn't take a PhD, but it does take skill and intelligence to interpret the Bible wisely. The Bible has been used for the greatest good and some of the greatest evil our world has ever seen.

Mark Twain once said that in the Bible you could find both the poison and the cure. The Bible, historically, is poison that has started wars, allowed for sexism, slavery, genocide of the Native American people, for example. It's a poison that drove a lot of that. But, it's also the cure. It's a cure for wars. People giving their lives in non-violence to war-torn countries. The empowering of women and minorities. It's been the motivation to end slavery.

So, why do we keep reading the Bible and why not just move on from it? Why not just keep Jesus, choose some encouraging words for the pastor to speak on every Sunday morning, sing some good songs and be done with this big, old, intimidating book? And who wraps books in leather nowadays anyways? It's intimidating. It's wrapped in leather. The pages are thin. It's just a weird book. Why do we read it? And why are we going, as a whole church, and reading the whole book this year? Why?

Here's why: the reason why we do not move on from the Bible and we keep reading the Bible is because we are followers of Jesus. Jesus was obsessed with the Bible. Jesus more than likely had the Bible, the Old Testament – what we would call the Old Testament – memorized. He would quote from it, He would teach from it, He would argue about how best to interpret it and therefore to live into the Scriptures. He would pray the Bible. His whole way of living and seeing the world was shaped by the Bible. And, as it says on the screen, because we are followers of Jesus, it is our aim and goal to have the same kind of relationship with the Bible that Jesus had.

Jesus loved the Scriptures. Turn to Matthew 4 with me. Matthew 4. I want to show you how Jesus relates to the Bible and how He sees His whole life through the Scriptures. Matthew 4. This is a very popular account of Jesus' temptation. Wilderness temptation. And, after the inauguration of Jesus' ministry, He was baptized, He began His ministry around the age of 30. It says that the Spirit of God led Him to the Wilderness where He fasted and He prayed. And this is where He meets the tempter. This is where He meets Satan or the devil.

The great thing about this story is that we have met the tempter before in the Bible. This is the wonderful thing about the Bible: it is seriously a story that's knit together from start to finish. Though it gets crazy in the middle and it gets crazy even at the end, it is a single story.

We meet the tempter in Genesis 3 and he was depicted as a snake and he was tempting Adam and Eve. And, in that origin story in Genesis 3, the first thing the snake did was to question the authority of God's work. So, the snake goes to Adam and Eve and says, "Did God really say? Did God really say that?"

It's interesting because, to fight temptation now when Jesus meets the serpent again or when the serpent is introduced again, tempting like he was in Genesis 3, the way that Jesus fights temptation is He only quotes God's Word. He only says, "It is written." And this is almost like a slap in the face in Genesis 3 where the snake first says, "Did God really say?" And then Jesus just says, "It is written. It is written. It is written."

But, in Genesis 3, this is how the fall of humanity started. With those fateful words. "Did

God really say?"

So, Jesus meets this same tempter, the devil, knowing that Jesus was hungry, He was fasting. It says that He was hungry. Then Satan comes to Him and says this:

"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written.'"

So, Jesus then uses the Scriptures. Jesus was saturated, His mind was saturated with the Bible. He says this. He quotes Deuteronomy:

"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Jesus quotes the Scriptures to the tempter. So, now what happens is, you know, two can play at that game. So, Satan tries the same thing.

"Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written.'"

Same thing. Jesus is like, "It's written. I'm not going to do that."

He's like, "Oh, you want to play that game? Okay. It is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

Satan is quoting Psalm 91. Now, Jesus knows the Scriptures and He knows Psalm 91 – and this is interesting – and He knows it doesn't mean that. This is key because, what Jesus is doing here is like, "Yes. You can quote the Scriptures to me, but that doesn't mean it means that. It doesn't mean that."

This has huge implications on who Jesus is as an interpreter of Scripture, as a teacher, a Rabbi, of the Scriptures and how we often quote Scriptures, sometimes to our own peril.

So Jesus says back to him, "It is also written." So, He quotes another Scripture back to him. He doesn't say, "No, that's not what the Scripture means."

He's like, **"It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"**

So, what Jesus does here is he uses a passage from Deuteronomy 6 as if to say, "There is a tone that Deuteronomy hits in Scripture that allows you to see Psalm 91 in a certain way and you're not taking Psalm 91 at what it's supposed to mean, because you have this Scripture right here that says you can't put the Lord your God to the test."

This is very interesting. Lastly, the devil tries to get Jesus to worship him, which is almost comical. The last one he's like, "Okay. Will you just worship me? Just get to the point."

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All of this I will give you,' he said, 'if you... bow down and worship me?'"

I just think that's funny. It's like he just jumps to the end and is like, "I just want you to worship me. Will you just worship me?"

"And Jesus says, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written:'" – there it is again – "'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

So, three times Jesus is tempted, three times He uses the authority of Scripture to fight. Now, keep in mind that Jesus had the resources of Heaven available to Him. So, when He's up against the tempter, when He's up against the Satan, the snake, the serpent, the devil, when He's up against them He had the resources of Heaven to fight with Him. Later on, in the book of Matthew in chapter 26, when He's just about to go to the cross and He's arrested, Peter pulls out a sword and Jesus tells him to put away the sword.

Jesus says to him, "Don't you know that I can call on the Father and He will send a

legion of angels to help me right now? But, if I did that, how would I fulfill the Scriptures?"

See how He ties it all back to that? Jesus lives the Scriptures out. He's saturated with them. The reason why He doesn't want Peter to pull his sword out is because of the Scriptures and how will they be fulfilled? So, Jesus does, when He's up against Satan, He does have the resources of Heaven available to Him, but He doesn't use that. He uses the Scriptures. Three times He was tempted; three times He said, "It is written. It is written. It is written."

Now, I also believe that each time Jesus uses the Scriptures to fight against temptation, He also reveals a different aspect of His commitment to the Bible. I think what's also going on in the temptation narrative is Jesus is also showing His commitment to the Scriptures. Now first, the first temptation shows that God's Word is sufficient. But, answering temptation the way that Jesus is, what He's showing is that God's Word is sufficient. The devil literally tempted Him with bread for His starving flesh. Yes, Satan actually uses carbs to tempt Jesus. Like, he still uses carbs. I think that's one of his oldest tricks in the book.

While we're on that note, I hate it when restaurants make you ask for free bread. Like, bring me the free – No. I want it. "We're not going to give it to you unless you say it. Say you want the carbs."

I'm like, "Fine. I'll say it."

So, Jesus is tempted by bread. He's hungry. He's starving. Literally, He's been fasting 40 days and 40 nights. But, Jesus answers this and this is what it shows: that God's Word is enough. That God's Word is enough. That the bread that was offered from the devil wouldn't fully satisfy Him. It wouldn't satisfy Him. Jesus is saying to the tempter, "God's Word's enough for me. God's Word satisfies me."

Jesus is saying that you can eat this book and it will satisfy your longings. It will even satisfy your flesh. There's a place in Mark's Gospel where a group of people call the Sadducees come up to Jesus with a hypothetical question around marriage and the resurrection. And it's a complicated kind of question. They're asking, you know, if someone has married and the widow dies and they marry a brother – that was the custom in that day – and he dies and she marries a brother and then he dies, in the resurrection, whose husband will she have? Because she's married like five of them.

And Jesus answers like this: He says, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scripture nor the power of God?"

When they're debating marriage, resurrection, life, the meaning of life, these huge questions, Jesus is like, "You know why you're in error? Because you don't know the Scriptures. You haven't gone to the Scripture as sufficient for you. You haven't gone to the Scriptures as enough for you and you don't know the power of God."

When Jesus says you don't know the Bible or the power of God, you're sad. That's just a bummer. And I wonder how many times in our lives when we've been in error our hearts are less than full, our souls are lean. It's because, like the Sadducees, we do not know the Scriptures. We do not know the power of God.

It might be because you even haven't read the Bible or maybe because you're driven by your experience or even our intelligence. We, like the Sadducees, pick and choose which parts of the Bible we want to live under. There's so many ways that we see life distorted and eternity distorted and meaning distorted and sexuality distorted and relationships distorted because we don't know the Scriptures and we haven't experienced the power of God.

The Bible is enough. And Jesus would say the Scriptures are enough. I can live off of God's Word.

The second temptation shows that God's Word is coherent. There will be times when what you read in the Bible seems to contradict another part of the Bible. And so Satan quotes Psalm 91 and Jesus is like, "That's not what that means."

But Jesus doesn't say that Psalm 91 can't be trusted. He doesn't say, "Oh, no no no. Psalm 91 can't be trusted, because God won't really protect me." That's not what He's saying because Psalm 91 is talking about God protecting us. Jesus is saying we need to hold these two scriptures together and, as we hold these two scriptures together, yes, God protects us, but I'm not supposed to jump off a cliff to tempt Him. Hold them in tension and the scriptures can be held together because they are coherent; they are trustworthy.

In the very next chapter in Matthew 5, Jesus says that He has come to fulfill the Scriptures. He said, "I didn't come to abolish the law and the prophets," – which is a way of saying the Old Testament – "I have not come to remove one iota of the Bible. Not one iota will disappear until everything is accomplished."

Jesus has a very high view of the Bible.

The third temptation: Jesus shows that God's Word is authoritative. Jesus, when Satan says, "Will you worship me," says, "I'm not going to worship you. I'm going to worship God and serve Him only."

Jesus the God-man places Himself under the authority of Scripture. He says the Scriptures say, "Don't worship anything but God and serve only God." And that's exactly what Jesus intends to do. Now, we have to unpack this idea of authority here. Now, this is the issue when it comes to Bible interpretation. Authority. I'll touch on it here a bit, but it will be the ongoing conversation for the rest of our year.

Where does the Bible get its authority? How can this book tell me what to do? Here's the answer, and it's the simplest way I can put it and you should write this down somewhere: the Bible gets its authority from God. The Bible gets its authority from God.

Matthew 28:18. We read this earlier. **"All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me."**

It doesn't say, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to the Bible." It says, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me."

It's a pet peeve of mine when I go to a church's website and the church's statement of faith, the number one thing they believe in is "the Bible." Like, "Number one: we believe in the Bible."

I'm like, "No, you believe in God first and foremost."

The Bible gets its authority from God, not the other way around. And we, as followers of Jesus, trust in the Bible because we trust in Jesus, not the other way around. We trust in Jesus; therefore, we trust the Bible. Not the other way around. That's very very important.

One of the books that we're going to recommend – and we don't have it in this week, hopefully next week – is a book by Andrew Wilson, a British pastor. He wrote a small, short short little book called "Unbreakable." Not the "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt." This is a different one. Unbreakable. And it's great.

In it, he says this:

"Our trust in the Bible stems from our trust in Jesus Christ. I don't trust in Jesus because I trust the Bible. I trust the Bible because I trust in Jesus. I love Him, I've decided to follow Him. So, if He talks and acts as if the Bible is trustworthy, authoritative, good, helpful and powerful, I will too. Even if some of my questions remain unanswered or my answers remain unpopular."

That is so good. We trust the Scriptures because we trust in Jesus. So, how should we think about the Bible? We should think that the authority of Jesus is exercised through the Bible somehow. That the authority of Jesus – all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Christ our Lord and our Savior and our Teacher, and what He's done is He's exercised and mediated His authority in the church somehow through the Bible. And we shouldn't have a problem with that.

Authority is mediated through writing all the time in our society. It has been for centuries. When you get an email from your boss, you have a choice: to obey or not to obey it. Why? Because their authority is being mediated through their writing to you. Now, the hard part – and I admit this is the hard part, like I said earlier – is that most of the Bible is not as straightforward as some of the emails we get. Most of the Bible is narrative. Most of the Bible is story. We'll talk about this next week.

And so, the question is this. Two questions. The first one is this: how can a story be authoritative? How can I tell you a story and go, "That is an authoritative thing. Do it."

You're like, "What do I do? What do you mean? How do I 'do' the story?"

I read Judah and Tamar. What is that? How is that story authoritative?

And, here's another question: is the narrative of the Old Testament as authoritative today, after Jesus, as it was for the Jewish people before Jesus? That's a very important question. That's a question that the early church wrestles through. That's the question that you will see a lot of the New Testament writings wrestling through. Because, there are some things that you will read over the next year that we simply do not and should not do anymore. Not because they are out of date, but because of Jesus.

So, there's a sense in which we have to read backwards from Jesus back to the Old Testament. But, I'm getting ahead of myself because that's a whole different sermon. We'll deal with a lot of this in the coming weeks and there are really good answers to these questions, I promise.

So, this is where I want to close: John 5:39. Kind of where we started.

Jesus speaking to the Pharisees: **"You study the Scriptures diligently..."**

That's a noble thing, guys. This is what my prayer – this has been our prayer as a leadership team for our church, that we would study the Scriptures diligently. But, look at how they did it:

"...because you think that in them you have eternal life."

And then Jesus says, **"These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."**

All of this whole book is about Jesus. This whole thing. All of it points toward Christ. That we would have life in Jesus. All of it points towards His life, death and resurrection, His Kingdom coming into this world. All of it points forward to that. And they way I see it as one of your pastors here is we can make two errors this year that I want to avoid. Two errors.

The first error we can make is we can read this library of writings and, after every month, become more conceded with knowledge and puffed up with pride where we become cold-hearted Bible nerds. God, deliver us from becoming cold-hearted Bible nerds. Pharisees are what they're called in the New Testament. That's who Jesus is talking about here.

This book will not bring you eternal life. You cannot earn points with God by reading this book. Life is only found in Jesus. He is the center of the Scriptures. What this book is all about, the apostle Paul says that the things that are written in the Old Testament, some of them are a shadow, but the reality is Christ. Jesus is what we're supposed to see in the Scriptures. So, don't refuse to come to Jesus for life throughout this year. And may this year teach us to daily practice opening our minds and our hearts to Jesus every single day.

The other error that we can make: maybe you're here because of some apparent problem you had with the Bible or with the Church and the Bible and you have stopped reading it and you even stopped engaging with the Scriptures. You could be missing out on a relationship with God. Jesus thought the Scriptures were enough. The very thing that satisfied Him when His stomach was empty and His flesh was weak.

Through the Scriptures, He heard God speaking to Him. Through the Scriptures, God was mediating His authority in His life to Him. This is the life that we are called to live into and I would hate for you to miss out on a relationship with God because of some apparent problem or some sermon you heard five years ago about the Bible. See, I don't think the Bible says "look at me" as much as it says "look through me to see Jesus."

This is our prayer for this year. Let's pray.