

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 14 May 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Not One Jot Nor Tittle

Matthew 5:18

When we flip on the radio or telly, we often hear presidents, Taoiseachs, senators, T.D.'s, governors, and other public officials giving speeches; and when we do, we usually assume that what we are hearing are the words of a "ghost writer." Perhaps that president or senator did jot down the *basic* ideas that he wanted to get across; but more than likely, someone else wrote the speech for him. There are, however, some leaders who are conscientious enough to write *all* their speeches, word-for-word; and usually, their speeches are well-remembered. For example, generations of schoolchildren in my home country have had to memorise President Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," which he delivered at a battlefield in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on 19 November 1863. (To this day, I can still quote every word of it.) Lincoln had the weight of a bitter civil war upon his shoulders; and he knew that *every word* that he uttered before the nation needed to be crafted just right, so as to convey the justice and rightness of the Union cause, as well as the need to offer reconciliation and charity to the southern states. The fate of a nation was hanging upon every word that came from his mouth, and from his pen; and he accepted that awesome responsibility. He would not allow others to contribute, nor to edit or abridge, what he had written. Every word was truly his own.

Now, what if a king, president, Taoiseach, or even the CEO of a big corporation, were to write a speech or mandate word-for-word, and order it to be printed exactly as he had written it—only to find out later that people under his authority had deliberately *deleted*, or changed, not only *a few* of his words, but a whopping 7% of his words? What if he further found out that these people had even changed many of the numbers that he had mentioned in his speech, because they didn't think that those numbers added up, or made sense? Would he be cool with that? Would he say, "Well, it's all right. After all, it's the *overall message* that counts, not the precise words"? Would he say, "Well, everyone believes that *I* wrote the original autograph of this speech; so it's not important that *every* one of my words be preserved"? Of course he wouldn't be o.k. with that! There would be firings at best, and possibly indictments and prison sentences for fraud.

We all understand that if a person's words have not all been preserved, they are doubtful. What good is it to say, "I believe that so-and-so wrote this thing," if you are not sure that all the words are really his, and that they haven't been corrupted? So it is with God's words. Time and time again, God has promised to preserve *all* His words; and in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, upon His own authority, confirmed this promise. If we did not have this absolute assurance of the preservation of *all* God's words, what ground would we have to stand upon? It would be shaky, at best. But thank God, such is *not* the case! Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, has promised that *none* of His words will ever pass away; and as we look at the pages of history, we can see, and observe, that our Saviour *has* kept His promise.

Over the next several weeks, we will be focusing on **Matthew 5:18**. It is my prayer that as we study this verse, and as we delve into history to see how God has preserved His Word, your confidence in God's Word will be strengthened as it never has been before. The title of this message is ***Not One Jot Nor Tittle***.

Read Matthew 5:18.

I. Christ's promise to us: to preserve every jot and tittle

In our last two messages from **Matthew 5:17**, we saw that Christ came not to destroy the Law of Moses, but to fulfil it. He fulfilled the Law by keeping it perfectly; by disentangling the Law from the false teachings of men; by fulfilling the Law's types and prophecies of the Messiah; by taking the curse of the Law upon Himself; by turning servants into sons; and by establishing a New Covenant. With all this in mind, we now come to **verse 18**. In this verse, Jesus is telling us that there are still more things to be fulfilled. His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension back to Heaven were the very next things on the "fulfilment" list. All these things had been prophesied in the Law of Moses; and very soon, they were all fulfilled. Christ's return to earth in glory, and His glorious 1,000-year Kingdom, were prophesied by the Old Testament prophets; and these are yet to be fulfilled. The destruction of the heaven and earth, and the creation of a new heaven and new earth, are *also* yet to be fulfilled. Yet, until all these events are fulfilled, Jesus promises that not one jot or tittle of the Law (in other words, "the Scriptures") will pass away.

Now, what does "*one jot or tittle*" mean? Well, the word "*jot*" is the transliterated form of the Greek word *iota*; and *iota* is the transliterated form of the Hebrew word *yod*. And what is a *yod*? *Yod* is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet (the equivalent of our letter "y"). Jesus is saying that until that future day when this sin-cursed universe is destroyed by fire, not even the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet will pass away!

My friends, that is a powerful testimony to the preservation of God's Word! Yet, there's more. You see, *yod* is the smallest *letter* of the Hebrew alphabet; but there is an even smaller symbol than *yod*. In the Hebrew Scriptures, there are tiny lines and dots *underneath* the letters. These are the *vowels*. And what is the smallest vowel? It is a small, single dot, called the *chireq* (which makes the short "i" sound in English). Here in **Matthew 5:18**, this word *chireq* is carried over into Greek as *charia*; and in English, it is translated as "tittle" (meaning a very small dot). Do you see what Jesus is saying, then? He's saying that not even the smallest *vowel* (not even one single dot) will pass away from the Scripture until *everything* in the Scriptures is completely fulfilled!

This verse is extremely important, for two reasons. For one thing, it proves that Hebrew vowels *did* exist from the time when God gave the Law to Moses. In the last two hundred years, most Bible seminaries have taught their preacher boys that the Hebrew vowel system was invented by the rabbis in the 800's A.D. However, Jesus said differently. According to Jesus, that single dot—the vowel *chireq*—existed from the time God gave the Law to Moses!

How important is this truth? It's extremely important! Consonants without vowels can form *any number* of different words. All you have to do is plug in a different dot or line under the letters, and you have a completely different word! If God had not given the *vowels* to Moses and the prophets, we could not be sure of many Hebrew words; and thus, the meaning of many verses would be uncertain. Lest you think that couldn't happen, I'm here to tell you that it happens all the time! Liberal and New Evangelical scholars are *constantly* questioning the words of the Old Testament. They "revocalise" the vowels (in other words, plug in *different* vowels), thus forming new words, so that they don't have to believe something that sounds unreasonable to them. Since they deny that God gave the vowels by divine inspiration, they feel free to manipulate the text like puddy! They undermine the foundation of Scripture; and as the result, the faith of many people is shipwrecked. Many people read the commentaries of the "Bible scholars," who tell them that "this word *could actually* be this word, if we just plug in this different vowel"; and they are left wondering how reliable their Bible really is.

My friends, don't trust the "experts" who tell you that the vowels were invented more than 2,000 years after the time of Moses. Believe what Jesus is telling you here in **Matthew 5:18!** Not only does Jesus assure us that those little jots and tittles in the Old Testament *were* originally written by the prophets, but He assures us that *not one of them* will "***pass from the law.***" In other words, not one will ever be lost!

Now, make no mistake about it: in the course of the last 2,000 years, wicked men *have* made corrupt copies of Scripture; *but the true text has never been destroyed!* God has enabled His people (and even lost people who have a respect for the authority of the Scriptures), to preserve His words perfectly. Brethren, we can cling to this promise!

With this in mind, let's see what David had to say about the preservation of Scripture.

Read Psalm 12:6-7.

In this passage, we are told that God "keeps" His words forever. This word "keep" is translated from the verb *shamar*, which means "to guard or protect." Clearly, God is promising to *preserve* his words for time and eternity. His words are so pure, that they are like silver that has gone through the purifying process seven times, so that there is absolutely no dross or alloy (in other words, no intermingling or corruption of man's words). Now, in contrast, what does *man* say about God's words? Well, for the last century and a half, most "Bible scholars" have been telling us that we do *not* have the complete, uncorrupted Word of God. Even "conservative" scholars tell us that the *original autographs* (the original documents that the authors of Scripture wrote) *were* inspired by God; yet, they deny that God's words have been *perfectly preserved* since then. In fact, they say that this is not a problem, since "the overall message" is still intact, and the "basic doctrines" of Scripture have not been affected by these corruptions. Unfortunately, many godly, sincere believers have accepted this as fact, because a trusted pastor or Christian leader has told them so: and thus, they unwittingly read from versions of the Bible that are missing *thousands* of God's words. As we will see in the next couple sermons, most modern versions of the Bible have been translated from a few handfuls of corrupted Greek texts, which were produced by a heretic named Origen back in the 300's; and thus, most modern Bibles, which are translated from these texts, are missing thousands of God's words. Yet, we are told that this is not a problem, because "God never promised to keep *all* His words." In fact, we are told that it is "cultish" to believe that *all* God's words have been preserved. They call it "bibliolatry."

Brethren, when the scholars say things such as this—when they come along and tell you that God never promised to keep *all* the words of Scripture—don't fall for it! Remember what King David said. By inspiration of the Spirit, David said that God's words are "***pure***" words, without *any* dross or alloy. David said, "***Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.***" God has solemnly promised to keep His *all His words*.

Folks, I'm belabouring this point, because there are many Bible scholars out there who will tell you differently. In fact, they even try to explain away the plain meaning of **Psalm 12:6-7**. They say that the pronoun "***them***" in **verse 7** doesn't refer to God's "***words***," but rather to the "***poor***" and "***needy***," which David mentioned in **verse 5**. (**Read verses 5-7 again.**)

According to most modern theologians, "God isn't promising to keep His *words*; He's promising to keep the 'poor and needy.'" Now, on the surface, this argument may sound reasonable. After all, the pronoun "them" is masculine, and the noun *amorphoth* ("***words***") is feminine. Normally, pronouns are supposed to be the same gender as the noun to which they

are referring. "Therefore," the scholars say, "the pronoun **'them'** must refer back to the words **'poor'** and **'needy,'** which *are* masculine words." However, there is one huge problem with this argument. The problem is that a pronoun must refer to the *closest noun* to it; and "**words**" is, obviously, the closest noun! You see, the gender of a noun and its pronoun *can* sometimes be different, if the author is trying to make a point. (And David *is* making a point!) David's point is that God is a *masculine* God; and therefore, God's words are also "masculine," since they are an extension of *who He is*. David does this exact same thing in **Psalm 119:111**. In this verse David says, "**Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.**" In this verse, "**testimonies**" is feminine, but the pronoun "**they**" is masculine. Yet, there is absolutely no doubt that the masculine word "**they**" refers to the feminine word "**testimonies.**" By divine inspiration, David "broke" a grammar rule in order to make a point: and His point is that God's words are "**an heritage for ever.**" God's words will *not* pass away!

Christian, you can bank on God's promises! God has preserved *all* His words; and He used men to do it. Were these men capable of human error? Under normal circumstances, yes. However, we are *not* talking about ordinary circumstances. The all-powerful Author of this Book enabled these otherwise fallible men not only to *write down* His words perfectly, but to *preserve* His words perfectly. **Psalm 119:89** says, "**For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.**" In **Matthew 24:35** Jesus said, "**Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.**" (By the way, you'll notice that Jesus calls God's words "**my**" words. This shows that Jesus is God!) **Psalm 138:2** says, "**Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.**" Think of that! If God magnify His word *even more* than He magnifies His holy name, do you think He's going to let His word be corrupted and lost? Not on your life! **Revelation 22:18-19** says, "**For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.**" God didn't promise that *no one would attempt* to corrupt His Word: but He *did* promise exceptionally severe punishment for those who *do* intentionally corrupt His words. In contrast, God promises *blessing* upon Christians who faithfully "**keep**" and guard His word. **Revelation 3:8** says, "**I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.**"

Christian, we are heading into dark times. Persecution is coming our way; and when persecution finally comes to us in full force, God's Word will also begin to be confiscated and destroyed. We need to be prepared to guard Christ's word, even if it should cost us our lives—just as our brethren in many parts of the world are doing at this very hour. By the way, we need to "keep" God's words not only by preserving His words on paper, but by *obeying* them. What good is it to have God's Word in our *hands*, yet not regard it in our *hearts*? Are you *obeying* every command that Christ has given you in His Word?

II. Our response to Christ: to receive every jot and tittle

Christ has promised that until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle of His Word will be lost. His words are not merely preserved in *Heaven*; they are preserved down here on *earth*, as well. Now, why is this so important? Because we *desperately need* every one of God's words! Jesus said, "**It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.**" Think of that! Our very spiritual life depends upon the availability of God's words! By the way, the verb "**is written**" is in the Perfect

Indicative Passive Greek tense. This means that “it was written in the past, *and it is still written.*” If we did not have the assurance that all God’s words are *still* written, we would be in trouble. Why? Because one day we will be *judged* according to every one of God’s words!

Read John 12:47-48.

If we didn’t *have* all God’s words available to us, we would not be prepared for the judgment, would we? How could we even be confident of the *way of salvation* if God had not preserved all His words? For example, how could we be absolutely sure that God is a Trinity, and that we *must believe this* truth about Him, if God had not preserved the crystal-clear statement about the Trinity in **1 John 5:7**? Or how could we be absolutely sure that we must *personally believe* on Christ in order to be baptised if God had not preserved the words of **Acts 8:37**, which says, “*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*”? Yes, there are many other verses which support these teachings; but if these key verses had not been preserved, these doctrines would definitely be weakened. How could God expect us to “live” by His every word, and how can He “judge” us by His every word, if He did not *preserve* every word?

God has done *His* part. He has preserved His words. How, then, must we respond to Him? *By receiving His words!* Let’s look at some Scriptures which talk about this.

Read John 17:6-8.

Not only do we have the responsibility to “*keep*” God’s words: we have the responsibility to “*receive*” them. To “receive” means “to embrace without question or reservation.” As Christ’s followers, we should never treat His words with doubt or scepticism. We must receive *all* His words, and live by them.

By the way, there are two Greek words for “word.” One of them is the word *logon*. *Logon* has the idea of “a body of words.” It could even be translated as “message.” However, here in **verse 8**, Jesus used the word *remata*, which specifically means “words” (plural). Why is that important? Because it means that Christ has not given us merely the overall *message* of Scripture, but the *individual words*. It means that we should receive the *specific words* of Scripture; and we should allow these words to *transform* every area of our lives.

Brethren, why are we saved? We’re saved because there was a day, in each of our lives, when we received the Gospel message. When we received Christ’s words by faith, we entered into a relationship with Him. We believed that Jesus Christ came out from the Father, and that the Father sent Him into the world. We believed that Christ died for our sins, in our place, as our Substitute. We stopped trusting in our own worthless good works, and put our trust in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We received the Bible’s words about the Person of Christ, and salvation. Now that we are saved, we must continue to receive God’s words, and apply them to *every* area in our lives—even when His words challenge us to do hard things. We dare not balk at any of God’s words: instead, we must receive them with childlike faith. Let’s look at some other passage that talk about “receiving” God’s words.

Read Acts 2:41 / 8:14 / 11:1 / 17:10-11.

On the Day of Pentecost, three thousand people “*received*” God’s words, and were saved. In Samaria, the people “*received*” God’s words, and were saved. In Caesarea, the house of Cornelius “*received*” God’s words, and were saved. In Berea, the people not only “*received*” God’s words and were saved, but continued to “*search*” God’s Word daily. Are you noticing

a trend here? You might call it “the Received Bible movement.” This is the attitude that *every* Christian should *continue* to have toward God’s Word *after* he is saved.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:12-13.

In this passage, Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of how they had “*received*” the Word of God when he first came and preached the Gospel to them. This word implies taking something that has been offered to you, without condition. It means to accept someone’s terms fully. The Thessalonians regarded the words that Paul preached to them as *God’s* words; and therefore, they repented of their sin, and believed on Christ.

Now, if these new Christians were able to recognise Paul’s *orally* given words as divinely inspired, how much more did they receive the *written Word of God*, as they began to learn it and study it? This is how God’s children should think. *They receive God’s words*. They believe not only that God has *given* men His very words, but also that He has *preserved* His words for all generations. Let’s see what Solomon said about God’s words.

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-11.

What are the “*upright words*” and “*words of truth*” of which Solomon is speaking? He’s talking about the words of Scripture. How do I know this? Because he says that these words are like “*nails*” that are fastened by the “*masters of assemblies*.” A “securely fastened nail” is a Hebrew figure of speech which denotes strength and stability--something upon which one may hang heavy vessels, and depend that they will not fall. For example, in **Zechariah 10:4** it was prophesied that out of the tribe of Judah there would come forth “*the corner*,” and “*the nail*.” The word “*corner*” refers to the cornerstone of a building. This is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Cornerstone. He is also called “*the nail*.” Christ is like a “nail fastened in a sure place,” because not one of His words will ever fail or fall.

With this in mind, look at what Solomon says about the *source* of these “*upright words*.” He says that these “*upright words*” are “*given by one shepherd*.” Who is this “one Shepherd”? It’s the Lord Jesus Christ! He is the “*shepherd, the stone of Israel*” who proceeded forth from “*the mighty God of Jacob*.” He is the “*Shepherd of Israel*,” who leads “*Joseph like a flock*.” Though about 40 different men wrote the words of Scripture in their own distinctive styles, Christ, the Son of God, is the One who silently gave them the exact words to write. Not even the smallest portion of Scripture is the mere opinion of the human author. These “*holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*.”

My friend, are *you* hanging all your hope and trust upon the sure “*nail*” of Scripture? Are you allowing the “*words of the wise*” (the words of Scripture) to be like “*goads*,” prodding you on in the direction God desires you to go in life? Are you listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd? If you would hear His voice, then you must “*receive*” all His words.

Read John 10:1-5, 22-29.

The Roman Catholic Church often makes the claim that they “gave us” the Bible. However, this argument is false. The canon of Scripture was agreed upon by Christians everywhere, long before the Council of Nicaea was held, and long before any “official” pronouncements about the canon were made by the Catholic Church.

We know, from historical records, that *all* the books of the New Testament were accepted by all Christians everywhere, not long after the death of the Apostle John. For a little while, books such as **2 Peter** and **Jude** were questioned by some Christians; but it wasn't long before all 27 books of the New Testament were received by Christians everywhere. In contrast, non-scriptural books such as *The Shepherd of Hermas* were *rejected* as Scripture. The following quote from the Muratorian Canon (a letter that was written by a Christian man sometime around 150 A.D.), shows that *The Shepherd of Hermas* was never considered to be Scripture:

“Hermas wrote *The Shepherd* most recently in our time, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the chair of the church of the city of Rome; and therefore, it ought indeed to be read. *But*, it cannot be read publicly to the people in church—neither among the Prophets....nor among the Apostles—for *it is after their time.*”

Did you notice *why* this man did not regard *The Shepherd of Hermas* as Scripture? He said that it was not Scripture because it was written “after” the time of the Apostles! He realised that *after* the book of **Revelation** was written by John, *no more Scripture was given!*

How were Christians everywhere able to tell which books were Scripture, and which were *not* Scripture? It's simple. God's people know their Saviour's voice! Jesus says, “**My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.**” Don't let the Catholic Church intimidate you into thinking that they “gave us the Bible.” Also, don't let the *Da Vinci Code* crowd tell you that heretical books such as *The Gospel of Thomas* or *The Epistle of Judas* would have been included in Scripture if only the Catholic Church hadn't condemned them at the Council of Nicaea. *True* Christians condemned these books long before the Catholic Church ever did!

Now, the same that is true for the *books* of the Bible is also true for the individual *words*, *phrases*, and *sentences* of the Bible! Take **Acts 8:37**, for example. In the Alexandrian text, the Vaticanus text, and a couple dozen other texts from the fourth century, this entire verse is left out. How, then, can we know that this verse was really written by Luke, and that it is Scripture? Well, for one thing, there are a whopping 5,500 copies of the book of **Acts**, from the first century to the 13th century, which *contain* this verse. (We call this family of manuscripts the “the Majority Text.”) In contrast, there are only about 40 copies of the New Testament (from around 200-400 A.D.) which leave this verse out. Obviously, God's people *accepted* this verse as Scripture, and copied the texts that *included* it; but they rejected the texts that *omitted* it. However, the fact that the “majority” of Christians accepted this verse as Scripture is not the final determining factor. As God's people, we must accept this verse by *faith*. Through the Spirit of God, we recognise our Saviour's voice; and we receive His words.

Conclusion: As we continue to study **Matthew 5:18** over the next couple weeks, you will learn that there are two streams of Greek New Testament text—the “Received Text” (which our KJV is based upon), and the “Critical Text.” The Received Text has been preserved, while the Critical Text has been corrupted. A jaw-dropping *seven percent* of God's words in the New Testament have been left out of the Critical Text! That is why, as a church, we do not use versions of the Bible which are based upon it. Yet, how do we know whether this massive volume of words have been *omitted* from the Critical Text, or whether it has been *added* to the Received Text? As we will see, the hard evidence from history shows us that the words have been *omitted* from the Critical Text by men who had an agenda to alter God's words. However, as we look at all the evidence, we must realise that this isn't merely a “science.” It isn't just a matter of lining up all the texts, and seeing which ones have the “majority” support from the textual evidence. It's a matter of *faith*. God's sheep hear His voice! We *must* strain our ear to listen to Jesus' voice. It is my prayer that every believer in this room will receive *all* God's words, as they have been preserved in the Received Text. It is also my prayer that you will *heed and obey* Christ's words in your daily life.

As we close this morning, I would also ask this extremely important question: “Are you one of Christ’s sheep?” You don’t become Christ’s sheep simply by being born into a Christian family; nor can you be made a sheep by being sprinkled with water, nor by being dipped in water, nor by going to church, nor by trying to be a “good person.” To become part of Christ’s fold, you must repent of your sin in your heart, and believe that what Jesus did for you on the cross is all that you need to be saved. If you have not done this, I urge you to do so today!