The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 4 June 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 (Part 4)

Matthew 5:18

During my primary school years, there was a big event that took place in my school every spring, in the month of May. It was called the "Academic Talent Contest." The ATC was a day when students in classes 1 through 6 would perform and compete against each other in many different areas. There was poetry; preaching; drawing and painting; woodwork; science projects; creative writing; singing and instrumental music; spelling bees; and quiz teams. This contest was one of the highlights of our year.

Now, one of the categories that was highly encouraged was Scripture memorisation. Those who competed could quote whatever Scripture they wished (as long as no one had quoted it already); but they had to follow the rules. First, the student had to state the reference clearly, and allow the judges to look it up; then, he had to quote it perfectly. If he realised that he had begun to mess up, and he hadn't finished yet, he could ask for permission to start again; but he had only one more chance to say it. Of course, the kids always began with the shortest verses, such as **John 11:35** ("*Jesus wept*"), **1 Thessalonians 5:16** ("*Rejoice evermore*"), and **Luke 17:32** ("*Remember Lot's wife*"). As the easy verses got used up, they moved on to harder ones: and it was amazing to see how many Scriptures some of them had memorised.

Do you know what those Scripture memory contests were teaching us? Not only did they teach us to hide God's Word in our hearts, but they taught us that *every word* of Scripture is vital. If a word were left out or changed, it wasn't accepted. Our teachers didn't hold to this rule merely so that they could have a standard by which to judge: they held to this standard because they wanted to teach the students that *every word of God* is necessary. One day, *God* will judge us by every one of His words: therefore, *we* should be just as scrupulous about God's words as He is! **Proverbs 30:5** says, "*Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.*" The word "*pure*" is translated from the word *zeruphah*, which means "refined," in the sense of "all dross and alloy being removed from a metal." Brethren, either that statement means exactly what it says, or it doesn't. It's easy to say, "We believe that the words of God are inspired and without error, *as contained in the original autographs.*" (*Most* churches these days make such a statement.) However, if God have not *perfectly preserved* His words since they were first written down, how could we possibly say that "*every word of God is pure*"? God's words must *still be accessible* to us, as they were originally written: otherwise, how could we be confident that God's words really are "pure," and that our God really is a "*shield*" to us? The promise would be shaky, a best!

This morning, we are continuing our series on **Matthew 5:18.** We are pausing on this verse for a couple more weeks, because we need to understand that in order to *fulfil the righteousness* of the Law, Christ also had to *preserve every word* of the Law. This message is entitled **Not One Jot Nor Tittle (Part 4).**

I. The availability of the Received Text (pp. 1-3)

Read Deuteronomy 29:9 / 30:8-14.

Read Romans 10:4-10.

In **Deuteronomy 29:9**, the LORD promised Israel that He would bless them if they would keep "the words of this covenant." In **Deuteronomy 30**, He says the same thing, except that He commands them to keep His "commandments" and "statutes." "Commandments" and "statutes" are another way of saying "words." The word devarim ("words") does not refer to the "general idea," or "the basic concept," or "the overall message"; it refers to specific words.

With this in mind, look at what the LORD promises. He promises blessing upon their land, and upon the works of their hands, on one condition—that they turn unto the LORD their God with all their "heart," and with all their "soul." He's talking about salvation. They first had to receive salvation, by turning their hearts to the LORD; and as they turned their hearts to the LORD, they were surrendering themselves to hearken to His voice, and to keep His commandments and statutes. (This is called "repentance.") It's just like what Paul said in Ephesians 2. Paul says that we're not saved by good works: but we are saved "unto good works." When you come to Christ to receive His gift of salvation, you are doing so with a heart of surrender, and with the commitment to obey Him, and serve Him from now on.

Yet, how can we believe His words, and keep them, if they be not available to us? Many lost people refuse to come to Christ because they make the excuse that "The Scriptures are corrupted: therefore, even if there be a God, how can He expect me to believe on Him?" Folks, I have had *many* such conversations with lost people (especially with atheists and Muslims). They say, "How can you expect me to believe on Jesus, when there are so many corrupt and conflicting texts of the New Testament?" However, this is a not a valid excuse, because God promised that His commandment "is not hidden from" us, "neither is it far off." If 7% of the New Testament had been corrupted, lost, or buried in a desert ruin somewhere, never to be found, lost people *might* have a legitimate reason to reject Christ. However, such is not the case. God's words aren't available only up in Heaven, so that we must send someone up to Heaven to fetch them for us: nor are they in some inaccessible place here on earth. God promises that His words will remain available here on earth, so that we might take them into our "mouth," and into our "heart." As Paul said, we don't have to bring Christ down from Heaven, or send someone down into the deep, to bring Him up from the dead, so that we can believe on Him. Why not? Because all Christ's words are available to us; and His words still testify that He is risen again, and seated on the right hand of God. Christ's words are available; and we can take them into our mouth and heart, confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus, and *believe* in our heart that God has raised Him from the dead, and be saved!

In last week's message, we learned about how God kept His Word available in the original languages, even in the darkest days of the Middle Ages. I also told you about a Dutchman named **Desiderius Erasmus.** As you'll remember, Erasmus was a brilliant scholar who lived in the 1500's; and although he was Catholic, he rocked the Catholic world by exposing the ignorance, superstition, and immorality of the clergy. Though he never actually broke from Rome, he became *de facto* Protestant in his beliefs, and was even accused of being an Anabaptist; and he published his beliefs! However, his most important life's work, by far, was that he compiled ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, and used them to print the New Testament into Greek, *in its entirety*, in 1516! This publication shook the world!

In our modern day, scholars who favour the Critical Text often criticise and sneer at Erasmus; but intellectually speaking, these people couldn't hold a candle to him! The king of England, the Emperor of Germany, and the kings of Spain and France, offered Erasmus whatever position in their realms that he might want. Even the pope offered him a position as cardinal. However, he declined all these positions, because he refused to be compromised.

Now, one of the accusations that people still make against Erasmus is that he had only 10 ancient manuscripts before him when he compiled his Greek Testament. "Furthermore," they say, "these 10 manuscripts were from the 11th, 12th, 13th, and 15th centuries. How could he possibly make an accurate reproduction of the New Testament with so few manuscripts, and from such relatively recent sources?" However, what most people fail to realise is that Erasmus examined *several hundred* ancient manuscripts during his travels throughout Europe; and he copied them down, and examined them scrupulously! As he examined these texts, he sometimes found spurious ones, which followed the readings of the Latin Vulgate, or of the Vaticanus manuscript—both of which were based on the readings of Origen. (By the way, Erasmus *was* aware of the Vaticanus manuscript; and he *rejected* it, because he knew that it was corrupt!) Altogether, about 90 to 95% of the texts that Erasmus examined agreed with each other to the "T"; and scarcely 5% followed the spurious readings of Origen.

What's the point, then? The point is that it doesn't matter if Erasmus had had *ten* texts, or *one hundred* Greek texts before him, because they almost all agreed with each other (and the few that *were* corrupt were easy to spot and set aside). **Herman Hoskier,** who spent 30 years collating about 200 ancient manuscripts, made this observation: "I may state that if Erasmus had striven to find a text on the *largest number* of existing MSS in the world of one type, he could not have succeeded better." Brethren, *that* is quite a statement as to the accuracy of the Received Text!

Now, over the years, there were other Greek texts that were produced for print. A man named **Stephanus (or Stephens)** made several editions of the Greek Testament, the latest being in 1550. However, there was no difference between Stephen's Text and Erasmus's text: they were identical. The same was true of the **Beza's Text**, which was printed in 1598. (This was the one that the King James translators had before them.) There was also the **Elzevir**

Brothers' Text, which came out in 1624. (It was this edition that was named *Textus Receptus*.) Though there were differences in spelling between some of these men's editions, on account of hasty printing errors, they were ironed out in later editions. However, the fact is that *all these texts agree*; and they are still available in print to this day. *All* the men who compiled these Greek texts believed, with all their heart and soul, that what they held in their hands was *God's inspired and preserved Word*.

It is Erasmus's Greek text upon which Martin Luther, and all the Reformers, based their translations of the New Testament into the languages of Europe. It was during this time of the Protestant Reformation (in the early 1500's) that God raised up a man to translate the Bible into English from Erasmus's pure Greek text. As you may remember, the Latin Vulgate was based, to an extent, on the corrupted readings of Origen; and it was the Latin Vulgate that Wycliffe had to work with when he translated the Bible in the late 1300's. However, God now used a man named **William Tyndale** to produce an English translation of the New Testament *directly from the Greek Received Text*, in the year 1526. Tyndale was a godly man, who left the Catholic Church and became a true follower of Christ, during his studies at Oxford; and in time, his beliefs moved from Protestant to *Baptist*. In his book, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, it is clear that Tyndale had come to embrace *Baptist* baptism!

As to his abilities, Tyndale could not have been more capable. He knew Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, and French so well, that one would think that each of these languages were his native tongue; and he employed all this knowledge to produce an excellent translation of the New Testament, as well as a good portion of the Old Testament, before he died! For years, he had to run all over Germany and Belgium for refuge, while working on his English translation. King Henry VIII of England was constantly hunting for Tyndale, to bring him to trial for the "heresy" of translating the Bible into a English. Though Henry broke off from the Catholic Church to form his own English state church, it was only because the pope wouldn't approve of his divorce to his wife Katherine. In his heart, he always loved the mystical doctrines of Romanism; and he hated Tyndale for daring to produce that "Protestant" New Testament in English! (He especially hated him for opposing his annulment to Katherine.)

Well, in 1536, while Tyndale was in Antwerp, Belgium, an agent of Henry VIII's, who had pretended to be his friend, betrayed him to the authorities; and he was arrested. On 6 October 1536, he was strangled to death, and then his body was burned at the stake. However, just before he died, he cried out, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes!" Well, guess what? God answered that prayer! Henry VIII—the depraved, sensual man who had hated and hounded Tyndale—allowed Tyndale's English Bible to be published, and placed in every cathedral in England, in 1539. Most likely, Henry didn't realise that this English Bible was the product of his old enemy, Tyndale. (His secretary of state, Cromwell, was the one who spearheaded the idea). At any rate, he commissioned it to be published everywhere, under the name "The Great Bible." This "Great Bible" was Tyndale's work in the New Testament, and in the Old Testament from Genesis to 2 Chronicles. The rest of the Old Testament was translated in 1537 by a friend of Tyndale's named John Rogers, who went by the pen name Thomas Matthew. Years later, Rogers was burned at the stake for his faith in Christ.

Over the next century after Tyndale, several excellent English translations were made, including the Great Bible (which was Matthew's Bible) in 1539; the Geneva Bible, in 1560; and the Bishop's Bible in 1569. However, *all* these Bibles were translated from the **Received Text**, which had been received by Christians since the first century, and which all the Protestant Reformers had received. They were also based upon Tyndale's English translation.

Now, this brings us to our **King James Bible**, which was first published in 1611. Like all the Bibles that had been produced since 1526, the King James Bible was based on Tyndale's English phraseology in about 83% of the New Testament, and in 75% of the Old Testament! But why was it produced in the first place? Well, contrary to what many people think, the King James Version was *not* King James' idea. It was *not* made for any political motivation. It was a Puritan leader named **John Reynolds** (a one-time Catholic who was converted to Christ) who first suggested to King James, in 1604, that a new and excellent translation of the Bible be made, which would truly belong to the entire realm of England. John Reynolds made this request on behalf of a *thousand pastors* (about one-tenth of the clergy in England), from Presbyterians, to Anglicans, to Baptists, to Puritans. King James approved of it; but he never made an official mandate to produce it. Nor were any of the translators *paid* for the seven years of labour that they put into it! The KJV literally was a labour of love!

Well, Bishop Bancroft and the Dean of Westminster met with the professors of Greek and Hebrew at Cambridge University; and 54 men were chosen for the translation committee. Now, you must understand something: there has *never* been a group of translators more capable than these men were. They could read, write, and speak Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Latin, Arabic, and many other languages, with as much ease as they could English. For example, one of them, named **John DuBois**, could read the Hebrew Bible at age five, fluently! One researcher said, "As to the capability of these men...by the good providence of God, their work was undertaken in a fortunate time. Not only had the English language.....then ripened to its full perfection, but the study of Greek, and of the Oriental tongues, and of rabbinical lore, had then been carried to a greater extent in England than ever before or since."³

The translation committee was divided into 6 groups, which worked on different sections of the Bible, in three different locations. For 3 years, from 1604 to 1606, these groups worked on their own sections of the Bible. They followed the original text as closely as possible, and rejected making paraphrases. By the way, "thee's," "thou's," and "ye's" were no longer spoken in the 1600's; but the translators used these old pronouns in order to stick as closely as possible to Greek and Hebrew, which have *singular* and *plural* 2nd person pronouns. As for footnotes, they were used as seldom as possible. Marginal notes were *not* to promote any specific theology, such as Calvinism: they were used only to explain Hebrew or Greek words, or to give a cross-reference. The Wycliffe Bible, the Matthew Bible, the Coverdale Bible, the Great Bible, and the Geneva Bible, were used as guides for English words. They had the Latin Vulgate, the Septuagint, and several of the ancient Waldense translations from the Middle Ages, before them *for historical reference*; but the translation was done directly from the Hebrew Masoretic Text, and the Greek Received Text.

After each of the six groups had finished translating its section, their translation was then sent to each of the *other* five groups, for them to thrash over; thus, each section of Scripture was examined at least 14 times. These men were *godly* men, many of whom had been converted to Christ out of the Roman Catholic Church; and they were full of godly zeal for what they were doing. Furthermore, this entire work was *open to the entire population of England!* As each group was working on its translation, they kept their work open and updated to the public; and *anyone*, whether pastor or layman, who knew Greek and Hebrew, could give suggestions. It literally was a *national enterprise*. There were absolutely *no* politics, *no* money deals, and no smoky backroom schemes. King James himself had no say in the matter. Everything was as honest and open as it could possibly be; and the entire nation laboured over it for seven years!

My friends, this is the story of how God has preserved His words, and of how He provided for it to be translated accurately into our language. The KJV that you hold in your hand is a work of Providence! God has kept His words, and preserved them from this generation forever!

II. The resurrection of the Critical text (p. 4)

Read Jude 3, 17.

In **verse 3**, the word **"once"** is translated from the word *hapax*, which means "once for all." This is the same word that is used in **Hebrews 10** to describe Christ's **"once for all"** sacrifice. Just as Christ's sacrifice is always available, so "the faith" is always available to the saints. And what is "the faith"? It the body of words that God delivered to His saints, in the Scriptures. God's words have been delivered to His people "once for all." They are not going to go away! Yet, we shouldn't be surprised that our old enemy, Satan, would do his best to pervert God's words. Even in the Apostles' day, men were perverting God's words.

Read 2 Peter 3:14-16.

Not only were false teachers misrepresenting the *meaning* of Scripture in Peter's day; they were perverting the text itself. (The word "wrest" means "to twist or pervert language.") In 2 Corinthians 2:17, Paul says that "we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God." God's Word has never had any shortage of corrupters! Yet, the corruption of God's Word has been in "high gear" acceleration for about the last 150 years. It began in earnest in 1881, when the southern convocation of the Anglican Church recommended that the King James Bible be revised, and that archaic words and spellings be replaced with modern ones. There certainly is nothing wrong with updating older words and spellings; and so, the Anglican Church approved the effort—but with the stipulation that they were not to make any major changes. They were to use the same Received Text that the KJV translators had used in 1611.

However, this is *not* what the committee did. In direct insubordination, they produced something radically different. The product of their labours was called the English Revised Version; and it was published in 1888. This version was by no means a revision of the KJV, because it was based on the corrupt *Vaticanus* manuscript that was discovered in the Vatican library in 1481, as well as on the corrupt *Sinaiticus* text that was dug up by Tischendorf in the 1840's. Why did the committee make this radical departure from God's preserved text? Because of two forceful men on the committee named **Brook Westcott** and **Fenton Hort.**

What kind of men were Westcott and Hort? They were apostates! They had been schooled in German Higher Rationalism, which ripped apart the Bible, and denied its divine origin. They practically worshipped **Theodore Semler** (one of the architects of Higher Criticism), and **Johann Griesbach** (the father of theological modernism). At the turn of the 19th century, Griesbach had produced his own Critical Greek Testament. And what was its purpose? To undermine belief in God's Word! A theological liberal named **Joseph Buckminster** "persuaded the officials at Harvard College in 1809 to publish an American edition of the Griesbach's critical Greek New Testament, because he saw its value in promoting text criticism, *'a most powerful weapon to be used against the supporters of verbal inspiration.*"

These were the kind of men who influenced Westcott and Hort; and Westcott and Hort followed closely in their heroes' footsteps. They did *not* believe in that the Bible is God's inspired Word. Privately, they mocked and made light of it. In their Introduction, they wrote, "Little is gained by speculating as to the precise point at which corruptions came in [to Scripture]. They may be due to the **original writer**, or to his manuscript." Simply put, they thought that the writers of Scripture made errors! They did *not* believe that **Genesis 1-3** was literal history; and they enthusiastically embraced Darwin's theory of evolution. In a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Westcott wrote, "No one now, I suppose, holds that the first three chapters of Genesis, for example, give a literal history—I could never understand how anyone reading them with open eyes could think they did." Both of them thought that the account of the fall of man in the Garden was ridiculous. They believed that God is the spiritual Father of all mankind; that salvation is automatically granted to all mankind; and that propitiation through Christ's blood is not necessary. In a letter to Westcott, Hort referred to the Bible's teaching of the priesthood of believers as "a crazy horror." Though they were supposedly Protestants, they both loved Roman Catholic mysticism, and especially Mary worship. Westcott loved idols so much, that while in France in 1847, he wrote a letter to his fiancée, and said that he "could have knelt" before a statue of Mary "for hours." In contrast, they had an obvious disdain for Scripture. In 1861, Hort wrote to Westcott that he preferred Greek philosophy and "its precious truth" to Christian revelation, in which he said that he found "nothing, and should be very much astonished and perplexed to find anything." Using theological mumbo-jumbo, so as not to be overly clear, they subtly denied that Jesus Christ was eternally pre-existent before He became a man; and they denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. In their writings, they said that the atonement was through Christ's incarnation (His becoming flesh), rather than through His crucifixion, or through His blood. As for the Bible's account of miracles, Westcott said, "I never read an account of a miracle but I seem instinctively to feel its improbability, and discover some want of evidence in the account of

it."¹⁰ As if all this weren't bad enough, there is more! These men were deep into spiritism. They belonged to a group called "The Ghostly Guild," which they themselves formed for the investigation of ghosts and apparitions. Westcott's son reported that his father, while in the Petersburg, went into a cathedral alone, to pray to the saints; and while he was alone in the darkness of the chapel, he said that "there was much company"—that the place was "full," and that he was "not alone."¹¹ The good "Bishop" Westcott was communing with demons!

Now, ever since 1851, Westcott and Hort had been secretly working on their own Greek New Testament (following in the footsteps of Griesbach). They took the Vaticanus text, and spliced it together with the Sinaiticus text; and they added, subtracted, or changed 9,970 of the 140,521 words of the Received Text (about 7% of the New Testament). Hort referred to the Received Text as that "vile" and "villainous Textus Receptus." 12 They were determined to rid the world of that old Received Text. In 1870, when the revision process began, Westcott and Hort cajoled the committee into agreeing on a pledge of secrecy concerning the product of their revision. In stark contrast to the KJV, which was open before the whole world, the revision committee of the English Revised Version kept secret what they were doing particularly, the fact that they were *not* basing their revision on the Received Text. One of the men on this committee was Vance Smith, who was a Unitarian (which means that he denied Jesus' deity); and Westcott and Hort insisted on his being included. As the committee met, these two men (who had very forceful personalities) derided the Received Text, and worked hard to convince the men that the corrupted Vaticanus and Sinaiticus were "superior," because they were older than the Received Texts. They dazzled the men with their fanciful theories of how the Received Text had been "invented" by copyists in the city of Antioch, and forced on the world. Now, not everyone went along with their agenda. A godly man named F.H.A. Scrivener saw through what they were doing, and tried to turn the tide; but as Westcott and Hort drew men to their side, they came to outnumber Scrivener; and he was outvoted every time. Another good man on the committee, Bishop Wilberforce (who was the original chairman) saw what was happening from the very start; and after the first meeting, he absented himself from all the meetings. Yet, for some reason, these two men didn't have the spine to expose what Westcott and Hort were doing (probably because of their pledge of secrecy).

My friends, the corrupted text that Westcott and Hort produced is the basis of the modern "Critical Text"; and this text has been changing ever since 1881. The Nestle Aland Greek text, which is based on Westcott and Hort's, has been changed 28 times! (The scholars keep going back over the corrupted texts of Origen, and adding and deleting variant readings, to produce an "updated" text.) This ever-changing Greek text is the crumbly foundation upon which almost every English version since 1888 has been made.

The scholars of the late 1800's eagerly accepted this text, because it supported their belief that the Bible is full of errors, and that it must be treated "scientifically," like any other book. However, the tragic reality is that *sincere Christians* quickly embraced the Westcott-Hort doctrine that we must scientifically approach the Scriptures, so as to "restore the original text." This is what is now taught even in many Independent Baptist seminaries. The Bible faculty in these colleges actually believe that Westcott and Hort were "used of God" to restore the text.

How could they possibly think this? Because Westcott and Hort were masters at using theological "double-speak." They knew better than to tear down orthodox Christian doctrine *publicly*; so they kept their rank unbelief to themselves, and made their public denials of the Bible vague, and subtle. That is why even conservative Bible colleges enthusiastically endorse Westcott and Hort's theories. Do these folks love the Lord, and want to serve Him? Yes. However, they are tragically mistaken in their acceptance of the Critical Text; and the ever-changing Bibles that they approve are causing many believers to have nagging doubts. Words and verses appear in some Bibles that don't appear in others; and footnotes let the reader know that such-and-such passage isn't in the "oldest and best manuscripts." As for pastors, many men who went off to seminary to train for the ministry have had their faith shipwrecked as they went through the treacherous shoals of "textual criticism." Like their father the Devil, Westcott and Hort asked the old question, "Yea, hath God said?"; and, sad to say, many Christians are listening! Are you listening?

Conclusion: Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Do you believe this? If you have even the slightest doubt that God can preserve His every word, you'd better get is settled, because Satan is looking for opportunities to mine away your confidence in God's Word. Rest in God's promises, Christian! Should you not be sure that you are saved, I urge you to get it settled today! The same Jesus who has delivered His Word "once for all" has died for your sins "once for all." I urge you to receive His gift of salvation! Repent of your sin, and place your complete trust in Jesus!

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<sup>1</sup> Floyd Nolen Jones, Which Version Is the Bible? (Humboldt, TN: KingsWord Press, 2018), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> David H. Sorenson, Touch Not the Unclean Thing (Duluth, MN: Northstar Baptist Ministries, 2001), p. 108).

<sup>5</sup> Jones, Which Version Is the Bible?, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 59.
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