

Can I Trust The Bible

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Alex. Appreciate that. So, good morning to everybody. If you are with us for the first time, and I've met a couple of you already, man, so glad that you're here and checking us out. Just so you know, we kind of kicked off a summer series. Our typical habit is to go through books of the Bible, but every once in a while we'll get into a topical thing, and that's kind of what we're in now. The series is called Believable, Answering Tough Questions. And so, last week, Elliot, one of the other pastors at the church, he tackled the topic of election, not the November kind of election at the ballot box, but more of the extent of God's sovereignty in salvation. And what does the Bible have to say about that?

And I'm not going to tell you the answer. You can go back and listen to that sermon yourself, actually. So, it's on the app and the website for you to find out. He did such a fabulous job. So, I would really encourage you to do that. But that brings me to today's topic, because today's topic is, can we trust the Bible? And I'm going to say this about this sermon before I get into it. I want to give honor to where honor is due. And I say, Brian Hart, one of the pastors from our Moorhead site, man, he really helped me significantly with shaping the sermon into what it is. And so, if you love it, you're welcome. If you don't, you can email Brian Hart. And, you know, that's okay. He would love to hear your remarks. All right.

So, I'm going to begin today with a question. When it comes to knowing God, knowing who He is, when it comes to salvation, when it comes to what is the purpose of life, when it comes to the right way of living, where do we go? Where do we go for that truth? To put it another way, what is your ultimate authority versus man's opinion or your personal opinion? Now, for Christians, that authority is the Bible, the Word of God, we would call it, because we believe those are God's words written down for us. But that one book is a compilation of many different books written by many different authors across thousands of years. And so, I mean, people approach that, very smart people approach that, and they say, man, how can we be so sure that the Bible is trustworthy? Isn't it, after all, full of contradictions? How can we know a bunch of errors weren't transmitted over thousands of years into the Bible that we have today? And I want to say this, these are not little issues. And you might be wrestling with some of those questions right now. And I would say that's okay. You are not alone.

Christianity isn't one of those things that, like, you have to check your brains at the door. You don't. And so, wrestling is okay. And so, the question we have is, can 2 Timothy, when it comes to the Bible, can 2 Timothy 3, 16 to 17 be true? Because this is what the Scripture says about itself. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[3 : 22] Now, before we get into the more academic stuff, it's important to realize that, and stop and listen to that verse, and really take it in, and see what the Bible is saying about itself, but also what it isn't saying about itself. The Bible isn't saying that it is the go-to for every single thing.

The Bible is sufficient for its intended purpose. Now, before you lose your mind, or your religion, or think that I am, let me explain what I mean here. See, when I want to learn how to change the oil in my car, I don't go to the Bible, right? When I want to learn about the structure of atoms, the Bible's really going to be a disappointing place to try to turn to, to answer those questions. That isn't an attack on the Bible's sufficiency. It's taking the Bible on its own terms. And here's what the Bible says.

This is what it was intended for, and what God gave to us in a historic account of God's unfolding revelation of His plan of redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ, to save a people for Himself from every tribe, tongue, and nation. And one day, Jesus will come and close this history, this redemptive history, bringing a new heaven and new earth. Now, for all who believe on Jesus, we

are going to live in that everlasting life with Him in the fullness of His presence. Death will be no more. Decay will be no more. Sorrow will be no more. But until then, we live by what God has disclosed to us in His book, in Scripture. Now, I'll admit this to you. That isn't empirical proof that the Bible is true. And I'll put some more of my cards on the table here. No matter what proofs I could give you today, or any other scholar for that matter, at some point, you have to take it on faith. And that isn't like a cheap out for me to try to avoid the hard work ahead of me. No. I want to say this, and I would challenge you with this. No matter what you believe, at the end of the day, you take a lot on faith. Neither God nor the Bible can be empirically improved. You have to take the whole of the evidence and make a decision at some point. But either way, I would say either way you go on that. Believe, not believe. Either way, faith is involved. And in my opinion, believing is easier than disbelieving. Now, before addressing some of the common objections and concerns about the Bible, let me clear up another misconception.

Christians believe in the whole Bible because we believe in Jesus. That's not the misconception. I think the wrong assumption that many people have about Christians is that Christians believe in the Bible as the Word of God. And so, because of that, and because Jesus is in the Bible, therefore, we believe in Jesus. Now, I'm not saying that's totally wrong, but it's not exactly right. Christians, we are convinced about the gospel accounts of Jesus and that they are true. And then we go on to say, man, that really has implications for the rest of the Bible. It's kind of how things have been approached in this for church history. So, that is going to shape our approach to this issue today. And we're going to examine it in three parts. First, we want to know if the stories we have about Jesus in the gospels, that the stories about him today have been properly preserved, and that they're the same as what the apostles wrote 2,000 years ago.

And then, can we even know that? Second, even if we can know that the stories have been preserved, can we know the apostles actually told the truth? What if they just made up the story? So, we're going to seek to answer those questions. And then finally, if they did tell the truth about Jesus, then what does that mean for the rest of the Bible? So, a little disclaimer here. The beginning of this is going to feel like a lecture, but I promise it will turn into preaching near toward the end. It will start singing. And my hope is that we'll have a little bit of info on the front, but towards the end, we will be worshipping. So, first, can we know that the stories of Jesus have been reliably preserved? And that's a good question. Well, the argument, if the argument is no, because we don't have the original manuscripts, where does that leave us, right? That begs a lot of questions. And we don't have the original manuscripts, but there are thousands of manuscripts, and of these thousands of manuscripts, not a one is perfectly identical to each other, and that would seem to raise a serious problem. But I would say this, modern translations of your Bible aren't hiding that fact that there are some small discrepancies, and they even show up, and they're put in the footnotes and other things. For example, in the last chapter of Mark's gospel, most of the early manuscripts exclude verses 9 to 16. And then the same thing with John chapter 8, the beginning of that chapter, there's the story of the women caught in adultery. Now, I would say this, even the most pro-Bible scholars acknowledge that most likely a copyist, at some point, added those bits in at a much later time. Well, what do we do with that? People adding verses into the Bible? This seems like a very serious issue. It might even lead us to wonder how much tinkering has been going on since the originals were written. Well, despite those discrepancies, you can still trust your Bible. And that is thanks to a science called text criticism, which is as boring as it sounds. Let me tell you, I have read yay many books about that thick on this subject, trying to get ready for this. And what do we do?

[9 : 27] What is text criticism? Probably many of you are like experienced like an inner groaning for the first time, too great for words. But if you do geek out on this stuff, the Lord's favor has smiled upon you today. So we're going to talk a little bit about this, all right? Because it's a very helpful thing to understand and going towards, man, can we really trust our Bible? And so what is text criticism? It is the science of examining and comparing ancient texts. Now, the New Testament, as you probably know, we're going to spend our time talking about that specifically and then move into the Old Testament from there. The New Testament originally was originally written in Greek, and every copy was handwritten until 1516, when after the printing press was invented, and a guy named Erasmus did that for the first time. So 1,500 years. You have 1,500 years of men and handwriting a copy from one version to the next, making new copies. 1,500 years. A lot of different manuscripts. And here's the thing, we have quite a few of those. Now, let me say this. There are two things to know about those manuscripts. First is the number of them, and second is the age.

And the best way to appreciate both of these is in context. So let's consider other famous manuscripts around the time of Jesus. So we're going to, I'm going to show you a slide, all right? So we have some other manuscripts, other things written at the time of

Jesus. You have the histories and annals of Tacitus written around 100 AD. We have two of those. We have Julius Caesar's Gaelic Wars written five decades after Jesus. We have 10 of those. We have the Jewish War by Josephus. In the first century, we have 10 copies of those. We have the history of Thucydides. That's how you say it, Thucydides. He's a Greek historian. He wrote 400 years before Jesus. We have eight of those. And then we have Livy's Roman history written during Jesus's life. And we have 20 of those. So how many ancient Greek manuscripts do we have of the Bible in comparison? Drum roll, please.

All right, let's show that final slide. Look at that. 5,801. I really thought you guys would be a lot more excited about that. You know, that big reveal. Yeah. It's like, are you not entertained?

Now, let me say this about that number, that 5,801. That is just counting the Greek manuscripts we have today. If you add in the others that are written in Latin or Coptic or Syriac, you get closer to 24,000. That's an impressive number. If you're not impressed with 5,801, surely you can be impressed with 24,000, right? But equally as impressive is the age of these manuscripts, which means like how close they are to the originals. Again, let's do some comparison here. Those, that Gaelic Wars, the closest manuscripts we have were written in the 10th century or roughly 1,500 years later than the original. Tacitus' histories and annals written in 100 AD. They were written in 100 AD, but the manuscripts we have are from the 9th and 11th century. Again, nearly 1,000 years later. Now, as for the Bible, check this out. The earliest manuscripts we have date to the 1st and 2nd century. So, we're only talking about 100 to 200 years difference. So, by comparison, I mean, think about this, guys. By comparison, the quantity and the age of surviving biblical manuscripts is quite remarkable. That should give us confidence, okay? I mean, some clever text critics, they say this, the quantity of New

Testament material is almost embarrassing in comparison with other works of antiquity, said Bruce Metzger. And F.F. Bruce says this, there is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament. Now, and some of us might be like, yes, boom, done, gotcha. But some of us might be objecting, wait a second, how does age and quantity resolve the variations that currently exist between the manuscripts? Isn't that still a problem to be reckoned with? Well, let me just say this, it doesn't solve the problem, but it explains it partly.

[14:08] One text critic explains it this way, a guy named Lightfoot. He says that the Greek language of Jesus' day to when some of these manuscripts were written centuries later, the Greek language didn't stay static. Kind of like our English language didn't stay static. It evolved, right? Think about just the, since the printing of the King James Version Bible, thank goodness we don't use shell and shant anymore, right? We have a very different lexicon of the English language. And even the spellings between how they spell things in the English language of the original King James Version 2 today, we spell words differently. And that shows up in some of these manuscripts spread out over time. And actually, that makes up for the bulk of variations between them. Other minor differences would be differences in added words that were like prepositions and articles, like instead of using for, they would use the word with, or the addition of the articles like the, which in early Greek you didn't have.

To give you an idea of what that might look like in English, here's a slide. So let's just pretend we have like English from the first century, English from the second century, and English from the third century, and it's a verse, and it's the same verse, but different manuscripts. So you have God of heaven loves you. God in heaven loves you. The God of heaven loves you. See the, see the minor differences there. When, when, when guys are coming to the Greek manuscripts and doing differential comparisons, that's the kind of small variations that they are saying. But you notice that like, even though there's these minor differences, do we lose the meaning that was meant to be conveyed?

I mean, from the first one to the third one, is the thought lost or is the thought changed? No, of course not. Which tells us this, no doctrine, because of these variances, no doctrine that we can know of hangs in the balance. Actually, we can be very confident as to what the author most likely had written and what he intended to convey. And depending on, depending on who you ask, the expert who you ask, the New Testament we have today is considered 98% to 99% intact to what they believe the originals were. And that means for the overwhelming majority of words in the Greek

New Testament, most scholars believe, even non-Christian scholars believe this, that with certainty, we can know what the original words were. All this to say, and to sum up, friends, your modern Bible that you hold in your hand is a modern marvel. It is not just the translation, it's the work that has gone into establishing the source material. An astonishing work of science and academic rigor, we can know what the apostles originally said, we can. But that doesn't answer the second question that we've set out to answer. Can we know that what the apostles had written or what they were telling us that they were true? Are their words true? See, they claim to have written down in the Gospels the eyewitness account of Jesus' life, or in Mark's case, he was writing down Peter's eyewitness account.

And when you look at the Gospels, especially Matthew and Mark and Luke, what they call the synoptic Gospels, you find what is expected from multiple witness accounts, eyewitness accounts. There is both uniformity, a lot of uniformity between them, but there are distinctions. They have a lot in common, but they, we have to reckon with, they are told from a personal perspective, different perspectives. Now, what about the contradictions in the Gospels? Now, I'm going to admit there are some tricky ones that even the smartest guys over the centuries have dug into and tried to come up with some answers, and some of them are okay. Some of them are not very good answers for those trickier ones. However, I would say those ones are in the extreme, extreme minority. And the other ones, they're not as tough to explain as you might think.

[18:27] Many have very reasonable explanations. I just don't have the time to get in today, but you can email. If you have some of these concerns, and you have some examples, go ahead and email me, jessiekay at oneharborchurch.com. We'd love to have a conversation about those things. But in the final analysis, I want to say this, the uniformity and distinction of the Apostles' record that they recorded in their Gospels make their accounts more trustworthy. But another reason to trust the Gospels is because the Gospels were written very close to the original events. Like we had said before, man, just, you know, within the, it was written within the lifetime of the Apostles' eyewitness account of walking with Jesus and seeing His miracles. And I want to say this, their account of Jesus' life, it's not like, you know, like a fish story that we might have. Like, hey, I went fishing and I caught a fish yay big, but like 20 years later, it turns into I caught this 500-pound marlin, you know? It's not like that. That's how myths become myths over time, right?

Across time, the story gets told and it gets retold and it kind of grows and it kind of morphs and all the original details get lost. And then generations removed from that, no one can really validate what was true and was not true, but that's not, that isn't what happened with the Gospel accounts. The Apostles wrote them within their lifetime. And I want to say this, if they were lying, there were people that were still living who could testify to the veracity of their words. And so if they were lying, there was going to be eyewitnesses that would heard that and say like, whoa, whoa, whoa, no, I was there. That's not how it happened.

It would have been very unlikely for the Apostles to have lied in their Gospel accounts. And by the way, if the Apostles did lie, it was self-defeating lies. Think about why we lie. We lie to protect our reputation. We lie to gain an advantage, right? If the Apostles were lying, it is the dumbest lie ever told. Their good news made them targets for abuse, imprisonment, rejection, revilement, hatred, slander. It didn't promote a life of license. Man, it was a lie that, if it was a lie, it was a lie that promoted serving others, being humble, laying your life down for the sake of others. It exalted countercultural norms that were unpopular, like self-control. It had a sexual ethic that was unpopular for its day too. It elevated and honored women and slaves in a culture that didn't. Back then, a woman's word wasn't even trusted enough to be used in a court of law. But who do the Apostles write down were the first to give an account of Jesus's resurrection?

It was women. Now, if you're wanting to spread a lie and convince people that this is true, that's kind of a dumb move. Additionally, they leave in all the embarrassing details about themselves in the gospel accounts. They do. They go out of their way to not make themselves look good.

[21:34] We see the disciples constantly bickering about petty stuff and who's the greatest. We see James and John telling Jesus, like, let's call down thunder to, like, blow up the Samaritan village because they weren't Jesus-friendly enough for them. And then we see what happens at Jesus's arrest and crucifixion. They run scared. They deny him. And they're not even there to bury him.

Somebody else, one of his other disciples have to come in and sneak in and bury him. His 12 apostles didn't even do that. I mean, look at Mark's gospel. It's Peter's account.

This is like Peter's account of my life with Jesus. He adds in the part where he denies Jesus, like the ugly part. You know what he doesn't add in? The part where Jesus restores him and forgives him.

Like, dude, why would you do that, Peter? That makes no sense. It's like they are going out of their way to humiliate themselves and not make themselves look like the heroes along the way.

But they're saying, man, we want you to notice how petty we are, feckless and spineless we were walking with Jesus. And that's not a good move if you think about it. If you're wanting to perpetuate a lie that launches a movement and to get people to trust you, to believe in that, and to trust your leadership, that's not what you do. That's not the kind of stories you tell about yourself.

[23 : 01] My point is, no one lies like this. No one would suffer so much for such a long time for a lie that gives so little return with regard to material benefits or power or pleasure.

Can you really believe that any sane human being would lie about something which gained them nothing and cost them everything? I mean, aside from psychopaths, is there anybody who suffers and dies for a lie they know isn't true? To quote Brian Hart on this, he says, though I find it hard to believe a single person would spend his life perpetuating a conspiracy that gained him nothing and cost him everything. I find it intellectually dishonest to entertain the idea that 12 people would do so uniformly and even unto death they would hold on to that lie. Such a conspiracy is both historically and behaviorally absurd. A story so implausible it is literally without comparison in the entire corpus of human history. It's why there's so many non-Christian historians that say and believe, man, those 12 apostles, we don't know if they saw the resurrected Jesus, but something happened. They saw something. They experienced something for them to change their behavior and live the way they did. And for me, and I hope for you, it's easier to believe that actually, you know what? They must have seen the resurrected Jesus. They just weren't tripping on the same mushrooms. Perhaps you don't find this line of argument convincing. I know there are some things in the gospels that are hard to believe, and I haven't addressed every objection, but I hope you can at least appreciate how not believing requires some faith too. I think the mountain of evidence strongly favors the truth of the story, and we barely scratched the surface of the evidence, by the way. So if our Bibles indeed are intact, if the apostles did tell the truth, then the story of

Jesus is true. Now what does that mean for the rest of the Bible? To say it another way, if Jesus is our way into the story, what does he himself think about the Bible? Well, Jesus had quite a few statements to make about it, or what we would call the Old Testament scriptures. In John 10, he says the scripture cannot be broken. He's in an argument with some Pharisees, and he appeals to scripture, and he says the scripture cannot be broken. So if Jesus believed the scripture was unbreakable, then so should we. On riding on this idea, one pastor observes, Jesus did not commission his people to undo the Old Testament. He faced the devil down with Deuteronomy 8.3. He faced the Sadducees with Exodus 3.6. He faced the Pharisees with Psalm 110.1. Jesus clearly operated under the assumption that the whole Old Testament, properly understood, was binding and decisive, and to be his follower, and to be his follower requires you to do the same. Jesus didn't just come to speak new truths and replace the Old Testament. He didn't come to say all new things that we never heard of before.

In his life on earth, he settled arguments. He overcame temptation by using the truth of the Old Testament. And here's another point of evidence. After his resurrection, Jesus met two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, and it says this in Luke 24, verse 27, and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. Jesus had no problem with the Old Testament scriptures. He actually revered them. He learned them. He used them.

It seems even here, I would say this, they were profitable for him. And for some of us who only think the red letter verses count or are authoritative, man, Jesus didn't treat the rest of scripture that way. They were just as important to him. All scripture is God-breathed, not just the ones Jesus spoke on earth. So all of it is profitable for us. Not only did Jesus believe that, but so did his apostles. He sent them out armed with the same scriptures that he used and believing the same thing about the scriptures. The apostles, they preached the gospel. Everywhere they went, they preached the gospel and they proved that Jesus was the Messiah using the Old Testament.

[27 : 49] Testament. They didn't have the New Testament. They were writing it at the time, right? And what does that tell us? It explains something. It explains why there is beautiful, unbreakable continuity between the New Testament scriptures and the Old Testament scriptures. They interpret

each other. They magnify each other. They bring them into their fullness of understanding so that in the end, we see Jesus and the good news of his salvation more clearly. Now, if that is true, what does that mean for us today?

Well, it means this. It means the Bible, if you are a follower of Jesus, it means the Bible is our highest authority. Because it is given by God through men, it is because they are God's very words written down for us. That means everything else in our lives must bow to it. Now, again, this is with regard to knowing God, knowing his salvation past, present, and future. In it, we have everything we need for following the way of Jesus for life and godliness. And for the Christian, it is the book we are called to abide in.

It is the book to which the Holy Spirit flows to and speaks through to open our minds to know Christ and to exalt Christ in our hearts. It is the book by which any prophecy from men or philosophy of men, it's the book by which those things are measured. And I'll tell you something else. I don't have authority just because I'm an elder.

That title does not give me any kind of authority. I only have authority as long as I stay under the authority of God's Word. That's pretty much it. Even Paul said to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul, he said, if an angel from heaven or any of the apostles of his day, if they were to come and they were to preach a different gospel, not that there is one, but if they were to do that, let them be a curse. He's saying, man, Galatians, somebody has bewitched you. Somebody has come in and spun a different truth and you came under their authority and it was a false authority and you shouldn't be doing that. And I'm saying to you today, if you are a leader in the church or want to be a leader in the church, this is a reality of God's kingdom. You need to know this. Your authority doesn't come from a title.

[30 : 12] It comes from you and I standing underneath the Word of God and that's it. My authority rises and falls as I proclaim the truth of God's Word and hold the truth of God's Word out to you. And when I stop doing that, I have no authority. That authority comes, I sit under it and that is it. So for all of us as Christians, all of us as leaders, if you want to follow Jesus, you have to live under the authority of God's Word. There is no wiggle room. There is no like, yeah, maybe, maybe not. That is it.

We got to live that way. We have to abide in it. And I'm going to say this, friends, it is so worth it. It is so worth it. When the Bible and that truth that God, when you're reading that Word and those truths, jump on the page, come into your heart, and the Holy Spirit begins to make it life and make it grow and begins to convict you. Your heart begins to sing. It is not a boring book at all.

It is the best book you will ever read, let me tell you. So abide in His Word, friends. Abide in Him, the thing that exalts Christ, the thing by which we can truly know God, the thing by which we can cut through all the confusion and chaos of this world and find out the true truths that are the most important truths to hold on to. Amen? As the band comes up and we seek to respond, if you're here, you're not yet a follower of Jesus. I want to say, I hope through this, you are warming up to the idea that the Bible is worth reading. Because it is. It's the good news about Jesus. But the Bible just doesn't talk about Jesus. It's not just a book about God's love. It is about God's love, and it reveals God's love to you and His hope for you and His love for you. But it also warns us of His wrath and His judgment for our sin. It tells us that heaven is no less real than hell. Jesus talked about both. You don't just get to pick and choose the parts you like. God, God is love. That's good. Ignoring the rest. I want to say this as hard as it may. We, as much as we may not want this to be true, no one talked more about eternal punishment than Jesus. Nobody. And if Jesus is true and what He says is true and the rest of the

Bible is true, then that means you have a choice. You can face God's judgment yourself or Jesus can face it for you. Those are your two choices, friends. That's the point of the Bible. It's why God ensured that people handed it down so carefully over the years so that you would know He's the kind of God who would rather see His own Son crucified than for you to be eternally condemned. He loves you. He loves you that much. Do you want to be saved? You can be. You can live forever, and thankfully we aren't left wondering what we have to do to be saved. It's all been written down. John 20, 30 says this. Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. I appeal to you, if you're here today not following Jesus, come to Him today.

Come to Him. In a moment, there's going to be an opportunity to respond to that. There will be a prayer up on the screen for you to pray as the rest of us followers of Jesus come to take communion.

[33 : 40] And this isn't for, if you haven't put your faith in Jesus, man, this isn't, don't come to the table, come to Jesus first. That's the point of this. Now, if you are a follower of Jesus, as you come to the table, before you eat the bread and drink the cup, I want you to think on this. Think on the truth that Jesus spoke. Man does not live on bread alone, but every word that proceeds from God's mouth.

And He went on to connect that to Himself. He's the bread of heaven, the living word come down. And He also says this about the scriptures. You search them hoping to find salvation. Actually, they're all pointing to me. He's the living word. It's about Him. And as you take communion, you are coming to receive God's blessing and grace that gives spiritual nourishment. And let us remind, let that be a sign pointing to His eternal word, His true word, which is meant to be our daily bread that we get to feast on. Now I'm going to pray. And when I say amen, go to the table nearest you, get the communion, take back to your seat and eat and drink. So Lord, we come to you right now, and I pray a blessing over this moment. I pray your presence would be here for those that are wrestling in their faith. Lord, you would come and make yourself so real. For those who are convinced and following you, that as we come to your table, we would come with gratitude. We would come with thanksgiving. We would come with rejoicing that this word that you have given us is a beautiful gift, not to be taken for granted, but a gift to abide in so that we could abide in you.

Bless this moment. Stir in our hearts in appreciation and love, honor and reverence for all of your scripture. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.