

III. Thy Word is Truth in Biblical Perspective
The Supremacy and Sufficiency of God's Word
"What Does the Son of God Say about the Word of God? – 'It Is Readable'"
Matthew 22:31
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
February 1, 2015 – Morning Sermon

This is God's Word. It's the truth. Matthew 22:23–32 says [23] *The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, [24] saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.' [25] Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. [26] So too the second and third, down to the seventh. [27] After them all, the woman died. [28] In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."*

[29] *But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. [30] For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. [31] And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: [32] 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living."* [33] *And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I have a question. When someone asks you a question, what do you do? You answer it and if someone asks us, Christians, a question about Christianity we immediately want to give an answer. Our reflex is to answer the question, interestingly and maybe instructively many times. When Jesus is asked questions many times they are just trying to trap Him and very seldom it is for information. What is interesting to me is that many times when Jesus is asked a question He generally doesn't do what we think He'll do but many times He'll answer their question with a question of His own to the questioner, even more interestingly and more instructively. Many times He uses the same question back to the questioner to answer them and you see this many times in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. As I was studying for this I saw where He did it nine times and five of them being in the Gospel of Matthew and I didn't do this exhaustively. It's that question that gives us our third statement of what the Son of God says about the Word of God.

As a quick review, our ministry theme this year is Thy Word is Truth, the supremacy and sufficiency of God's Word. It is our final rule of faith and practice and it is sufficient for all manners of life. So the first thing we're doing this year is going to a series of texts where Jesus, the Son of God, makes statements about the Word of God. This is our third study. Our first one came from Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17 where He gives seven requests to the Father as He gives the vision for His church and the one in the middle is our first one – Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth, John 17:17. He has just told us the Bible is God's Word. It's not man's word but God's Word and He has just said it's truth. It is not truths, plural but truth, singular. It is not a collection of truths but it is the Truth. So from that we now know God is the Author

through human authors and God can't err, therefore His Word is singular and has many implications but it is one truth. It is also inerrant for we can trust all that God says to us about who we are, where we came from, what's wrong with us, how you live for God, how you get right with God and where you're headed to be with God. God's Word is inspired and by Him He gives it to us inerrant.

Our second study came from John 10 where Jesus says God's Word is unbreakable. It is absolutely reliable; every part of it and every word of it. In John 10 they are bringing a charge of blasphemy against Jesus and He takes from an obscure Psalm, Psalm 82, one word to confound those who brought the charge of blasphemy against Him, because all of God's Word is unbreakable. Every part of it is unbreakable and every word of it is absolutely reliable. So now we know the Bible is not only the truth, inerrant but it is unbreakable, infallible. It will bear the weight of your life, soul and eternity. It will bear the weight as to how it instructs you to live as a man, a husband, a father, a woman, a wife, a mother, as a member of the body of Christ and as a citizen of Christ in the kingdoms of this world.

Now we come to a third one. This third statement Jesus makes about the Bible is that it is readable. It is more than just readable but it is understandable in its essential place in the life of a believer. Let's go back and look at our text for this study in Matthew 22. The Sadducees came up on the heels of the Pharisees. Jesus dealt with the Pharisees and they kind of slithered away. They didn't repent but they'll try and come back up again. Here the Sadducees come and the text tells us they don't believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees are a sect of Judaism at this time that had been highly influenced by Hellenistic thought, Greek Philosophy. Part of that was the work of Plato and they had decided the physical is evil. They thought, why would we want a resurrection for this body is evil and the whole point of salvation is to get out of this body and get rid of this body so they went to the Bible to prove Plato. In other words, the Bible had not been shaping them for they had been shaped by the culture of the day which was Greek philosophy and they were reading the Bible through that lens to use it. So now they have come to Jesus to support and trap Him to admitting that there was no way there would be a resurrection.

The Sadducees did accept part of the Bible and those were the five books of Moses but that was basically all that they affirmed. In addition to not believing in the resurrection we do know they believed two other things. In Acts 23 the Apostle Paul gets delivered over to the Sanhedrin and notices there are Sadducees and Pharisees in the crowd. Paul then poses a question to them that pins the Sadducees and the Pharisees against each other and so Paul gets off Scott free. John the Baptist called the Sadducees a brood of vipers. In Acts 23 Paul gives us the three things that the Sadducees didn't believe in. They didn't believe in a human spirit, angels or the resurrection. In our text for this study they come to Jesus on the basis of their unbelief in the resurrection.

They use Levirate law found in the books of Moses against Jesus. I'm sure this isn't the first time they brought this one up to support their position of there being no resurrection. This was probably in their little handbook and my guess is that the people around them had heard it before but they hadn't tried it on Jesus. So what does Jesus do? He answers them with a question. Matthew 22:24-27 says [24] "*Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.'*" [25] *Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and*

died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. [26] So too the second and third, down to the seventh. [27] After them all, the woman died. [28] In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.”

One of the purposes of the Levirate law was a type of pointing to the resurrection. Did you hear the language verse 24, ‘you will marry...in order to raise up a child.’ They are going to something to disprove the resurrection when in fact one of the reasons it’s there is to affirm the reality of resurrection. It does it through the biological process through the Levirate law as well as through an act of mercy. Funny thing is that somewhere about man three or four I would have asked for a dispensation because obviously this thing isn’t going too well. You get married and next thing you know you’re six feet under. So they get to the end of the seventh and want to know whose wife she’ll be in the resurrection as they pose this question to Jesus.

Jesus basically says they are wrong in believing that there is no resurrection and He says they are wrong for two reasons. One is that they don’t know the power of God that is what God is going to bring forth that is even greater than what you’re experiencing in this present heavens and earth, in a new heavens and earth and in a sense your existence is going to be like the angels. So He goes right to their face because they don’t believe in angels either. The second reason is that they don’t know the Scriptures, the Word of God. Matthew 22:31–33 says [31] *And as for the resurrection of the dead, **have you not read** what was said to you by God: [32] ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” [33] And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.*

What is Jesus doing here? He is playing off that one word because the Bible is true, unbreakable and the argument can not only rest in the Old Testament but it can rest on a verse and a word – I am...the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Who did He say that to? He said it to Moses. Moses lived over 400 years after the death of Abraham. So if you’re right Sadducees, then God could not have said “I am the God of Abraham” for He would have had to say “I was the God of Abraham” but because of the resurrection He is able to say “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” because He is the God of the living not the dead. So there with that one word He affirms it.

Interestingly He comes to them with this rhetorical question, “have you not read what God said?” It’s not the first time nor the last time He does this. I counted this past week in just perusing through the Gospel, nine times that He does this. He does it five times in the preceding chapters leading up to this point. I just want to show you a few. First let’s look at Matthew 12 where Jesus is with His disciples and they are walking through the grain fields on a Sabbath. They get hungry so what do they do?

Matthew 12:1–6 says [1] *At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. [2] But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” [3] He said to them, “**Have you not read** what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: [4] how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? [5] Or **have you not read** in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? [6] I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.”*

Have you not read? Here is what they did in the days of David and now there is One greater than David that is here. Here is what the priests did and now here is One who is greater than the priests and the temple. Then He gives us those dynamics of how we function on the Lord's Day where we are allowed to do works of necessity, mercy and ministry even as we set aside the day for worship and rest. Jesus doesn't answer them logically but Biblically by asking them a question – have you not read?

Now let's look at Matthew 19. Here marriage is being destroyed and women are being left destitute because now they have a no-fault divorce that is for men only. So Jesus is being asked about His view of marriage. Matthew 19:3–6 says [3] *And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"* [4] *He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,* [5] *and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?* [6] *So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."* So how does He answer their question that intended to trap Him? He says 'have you not read'... and He goes back to God's Word where it says one man, one woman, one life.

Let's look at another time in Matthew 21 and this is in the last week of His public ministry where He is headed to the cross. This is the triumphal entry day and then for the second time in His ministry He cleanses the temple. Then He begins to do a ministry of healing to affirm His Messiahship. Matthew 21:14–17 says [14] *And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.* [15] *But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant,* [16] *and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?"* [17] *And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.*

I could go to other passages but here just in Matthew we see him taking the time to record for us that Jesus not only answered the questioner with a question but He had a singular question that was His go-to question – have you not read? The lessons are obvious in this text but before we get to the takeaway I want to give you some of the obvious lessons here.

First of all when Jesus is saying the Bible is readable and understandable He is telling us have you not read what God has said. He treats the Bible as Divine revelation, not human speculation and He affirms it again. The second thing He is telling us is that the Bible has been given to be read which means the Bible is understandable. Are some things hard to understand? Absolutely, but because it's truth and if you have hard things to understand you just go to the simple things to understand to understand the hard things to understand because they can't contradict each other. It's understandable, unbreakable, readable and it's truth. When the tests of life and death come, where are the answers? Do you see what Jesus is telling you?

Jesus is also making something clear to them for He has come to start a new religion. If you want to know what Jesus is teaching then all you have to do is go back and read. He didn't come to abolish that but to fulfill it. I am the fulfillment of all of that and I am fulfilling all of that. If you want to understand about marriage then just read. What Jesus is teaching will be no different. It will just be the fulfillment and the

exposition of it. What do you need in order to deal with the issues and questions of life? You need a Bible-shaped, world and life view. The Bible is where you start to answer questions. Have you not read? Start there. While God has given people gifts to help you understand the Bible, you don't have to go through others to get to the Bible. You can read your own Bible and understand it. The Spirit of God who gave the Bible is in you and the One who revealed truth is also the One who can give you understanding of truth. We call that the priesthood of every believer.

The lesson from this is that we are people of the Book. Without the Bible there is no Christianity. It didn't come from the speculations of men. It didn't come by philosophical speculation. It came by two things – divine revelation and divine intervention where God from heaven has intervened to the helpless and hopeless to save His people from their sins. How do I know He does this? It's because the Bible tells me so. The reason we know we're saved by grace through divine intervention in an unmerited love that God has given to us through His Son, Jesus Christ and will take us to glory, is because of divine revelation. The Bible has revealed the intervention of God and His reliability, His integrity, His inerrancy and His infallibility. That Word tells us of the God of the Word and I cannot know the God of the Word as my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer without knowing the Word of God.

That brings us to our takeaway for this study. To know the Word of God you must read the Word of God but while you cannot know it without reading it, you can read it without knowing it. To know the God you have to know the Word of God. To know the Word of God you must read the Bible. What I'm about to say is speculation; when Jesus says 'have you not read' my guess is that the people He was talking to had read it but they hadn't read it. It is like the Sadducees who had been shaped by a philosophy of the world when they went to read Scriptures instead of being shaped by the Word of God to deal with the philosophies of this age. They had been shaped by the culture and when they went to the Bible they sought a way to proof-text their world and life view from the culture, but believers go to the Bible to read and understand it to be shaped by it in order to understand all matters of life and eternity.

The Bible is to shape believers in the hands of the Spirit of God who is taking hold of us. When I become a Christian I have a new heart, record, family and a new home but I didn't get a new mind. I was given the mind of Christ and the Spirit of God. So now comes the renewing of the mind so that we begin to think Biblically but it doesn't happen by magic.

As much as I love the statements made during the Reformation where we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone, the fact is I would never know that they were saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for God's glory alone if I did not embrace by faith that the Scripture alone is our rule of faith and practice – the supremacy and sufficiency of God's Word. I think most reading this that are believers would confessionally say 'yes' to the supremacy and sufficiency of God's Word but to say 'yes' operationally you have to read it. So many reformers died to make the Bible accessible and understandable for you in your language. They did this because they read passages like 'have you not read' for God gave His Word to be read and I will die so that people can have the Word of God to be read in their language. Instead of going to a church and watching meaningless ritual and hear a cleric say something in a language you don't understand and given a Bible that's not your

language, scores of them like Huss, Tyndale, Wycliffe and more, died so you could have a Bible.

If I was to go through your house, like my house, I would probably find a number of Bibles but they don't change us by being put on the coffee table, like a magic book. Have you not read? The other day my wife and I went through a closet in our home and we came across a dangerous moment. That moment was when we found a shoe box that had my letters and her letters that we wrote to each other when we were engaged to be married and at two different colleges. My letters didn't amount to all that she wrote me because she would write me a letter every day. She wanted to go through them and I broke out in a cold sweat just hoping that every letter she wrote me had been opened. Thankfully as we went through them all the seal had been broken on all the letter she wrote to me. You and I are headed to eternity and we have 66 love letters to you in your Bible. Are there any sealed envelopes? Have you not read what God said to you?

With the full realization that we can read and read not to understand, I want to give you seven things to help you read to understand. The first one is study. When you read the Bible, study it. II Timothy 2:15 says *[15] Do your best to present yourself (study) to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* As I said, this isn't a magic book where you open it and it will vibrate and you'll get more holy. No, there is a subject, verb, adverb, adjective, participial clause and it's all there. Also the order of words are inspired by God and are inerrant, infallible and reliable. Now read it and study it handling accurately the Word of Truth that we would not be ashamed.

That's my biggest challenge in being timely in preaching. I never want to preach a text out of context. I want you to be able to understand a text in its context because when you take a text out of context you have just created a blasphemous pretext. So we need to study the Bible. How does this fit in the Bible? How does it sit in the Bible? When I examine it does it fit back in? Get yourself a good study Bible. A new modern Reformation study Bible is coming that I had the privilege to do an endorsement on. I don't get money from it but I wanted to let you know it's coming out in March 2015. The ESV has a good study Bible. Those two are excellent study Bibles. This brings me to point two.

When you study your Bible meditate on it. When I was learning how to study the Bible a man introduced me to a book by Intervarsity Press titled How to read slowly: A Christian guide to reading with the mind, by James W. Sire. Don't just skim through. There is a time for devotional reading but when you're studying the Bible meditate and contemplate on it. Put your name in those pronouns you come across as you read it. Think about what it is saying. Go through and emphasize the nouns, verbs, direct and indirect objects.

The word meditate comes from the word ruminates. Brown cow, green grass, white milk – how did that happen? It started by the brown cow putting the green grass in its mouth and the cow chewed it for a long time and then swallowed it. Then the brown cow brought it back up again and you don't want to be there when it happens because there is a terrible sound when it does happen. As the cow brings it back up again it chews it more to get more goodness out of it and then swallows it again. This process can happen up to seven times for the cow to get all the goodness out of that grass. Ruminates on the

Scriptures. Chew it. Swallow it. Bring it up again. Just meditate on it. That brings me to number three.

Three, take the time to memorize the Bible. Memorization is taking God's Word and putting it in your heart that you might not sin against Him. Memorization is heart filler. You are filling up your heart so that you can know God and not sin against Him and pursue Him. This is Scriptural memorization. This brings me to number four.

Four, then give your attention to the preaching of the Word. The Bible was designed to be preached but given to be read. In Acts 17:11 it says *[11] Now these Jews (Bereans) were more noble than those in Thessalonica; (because) they received the word (preached) with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.* So they prioritized the preaching of the Word and then they examined the Word with daily Bible reading to see if it was so. They were teachable but not open minded to the point that their brains were falling out. They knew God had given preachers and teachers for a reason. It was to help me. He gave some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints. That is Biblical preaching and teaching. If I as a pastor am not being faithful to God's Word then don't come here. Go where they are faithful to God's Word, the whole counsel of God committed to God's Word. You can't be shaped by the Word if the preaching is not shaped by the Word and just because someone is up there don't assume what he is saying is true because God tells us to examine the Scriptures to see if these things are so.

Do you remember the Ethiopian eunuch? In Acts 8 Philip was moved to go out to the Gaza, the desert and saw the eunuch who had come from Jerusalem to worship because he was a seeker. According to Acts 8 the eunuch was reading his Bible and specifically the passage in Isaiah 53. It has one of the most grandest, glorious, clear pictures of Jesus of all. Acts 8:29–31 says *[29] And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." [30] So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" [31] And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.* Philip preached Jesus to him. Reading and preaching are joined together. The Bible was designed to be preached and given to you to be read, examined and absorbed. That brings me to number five.

Five, is that when you are preaching and reading cover the whole thing with prayer. Go to the Lord in prayer and say "Holy Spirit help me understand, help my preacher, help my discipler..." and when you're praying for the understanding of God's Word, while you're studying it take that Word and just pray it right back to God.

Six, take God's Word and worship the Lord. Worship the Lord by living it in your life and as it tells you who you are in Christ. Look at our world searching for identity. People say their sexual choices are their identity or their skin color is their identity or their ancestors are their identity. As believers our identity is that we're made in the image of God and saved by the blood of Jesus. Now I want to worship the Lord for I know who I am, where I'm going and why I'm going there. So this gives me a reason to worship the Lord. Worship His Word back to Him. Don't worship His Word but take His Word to worship Him. That brings me to the last one.

Finally, stay fixed on Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Jesus said to these Bible readers "You read a Bible, you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you

have eternal life but they bear witness of Me.” Luke 24:27 says [27] *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He (Jesus) interpreted (explained) to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Paul wanted Timothy to know the Word. In II Timothy 3:14–15 Paul says to Timothy, [14] *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* Stay fixed on Jesus. How does that text bring you to Jesus and how does that text bring Jesus to you?

I want to close by sharing with a story that happened during my pastorate in Charlotte, North Carolina. I had the opportunity there to with the Jungle Aviation and Radio Service and many of their people came to our church. I was not the pastor of this story but I do know the person who gave me this story and what happened with a previous pastor they had. This missionary lady’s dad was a missionary who served over 50 years and had only come home one time during those 50 years. He had to come home with a terminal illness. He didn’t have many days left so she went to her pastor and said “My dad is not a member of the church and I hate to ask this but would you go visit my father. He has been a missionary for 50 plus years and he’s going to meet the Lord soon. Would you visit him?” He said to her “Absolutely, it would be my privilege to do that.”

The pastor went to the hospital to visit this lady’s dad and as he got to his room he noticed an empty chair near his bed that he went to sit in. The man said “Pastor, I’m so glad you’re here but that chair is already taken.” So the pastor pulled up another chair next to it and they began to talk. The pastor was enthralled at how the Lord had blessed this man and the pastor asked if he could read some Scriptures to him. The man said “Oh yes please read God’s Word.” While the pastor was reading from God’s Word the missionary would finish quoting the Scriptures back to him. As the pastor was getting ready to leave he put his chair back and since no one had come to sit in the other chair he started to put that one back and the missionary said “On no don’t move that one for that chair is taken.” The pastor said “When are they coming?” He said “Oh He is already here for that’s my chair for Jesus.”

The missionary said that every morning he would get up and open his Bible to read to listen to his Savior to remind himself for he was a simple man. He would always put a chair out for Jesus because that would remind him that He was always there with him when he read his Bible. So the pastor went home and a day or so later the lady came and said “Pastor I want to thank you for visiting with my father. He was so blessed by your visit.” The pastor said “I don’t know if he was blessed but I cannot tell you how much it blessed me.” She said “I wanted to tell you he died last night and the nurses found him this morning.” He said “I hope he went peacefully.” She said “I feel sure he did. When they found him he wasn’t in his bed, he was on his knees with his Bible and his face on a chair.” He had died the way he lived – fixed on Jesus. Have you not read? Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father, for being at work in our lives. This is God’s one Word for you – hear it and read it. Examine it daily. Pray over it. Study it. Meditate and memorize it. Worship with it

and stay fixed on Jesus. It's readable, understandable and it will shape your life for this age and the one to come. If you're reading this today and you're being shaped by this culture for the eternity of death and condemnation, a word has been said today and God's Word is here to bring you to Himself. Come and say "Jesus, I know You died on the cross for me and I come to You." If you made that decision call me at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for I'd like to give you something to help you with your first steps in walking with Jesus. Lord we pray this in Your Name, praise God from whom all blessings flow, Amen.

Power Point

III. Thy Word Is Truth in Biblical Perspective

The Supremacy and Sufficiency of God's Word

"What Does the So of God Say about the Word of God?—'It Is Readable'"

Matthew 22:31

One Theme and Five Texts

Life Takeway

To know the Word of God you must read the Word of God. But while you cannot know it without reading it, you can read it without knowing it.

- I. Study
- II. Meditation
- III. Memorization
- IV. Preaching
- V. Prayer
- VI. Worship
- VII. Fixation