



Marked (Part 11) – The Inerrancy of Scripture

JT English – October 29, 2017

Good morning! If you have a Bible, I'd encourage you to open it to 1 Peter, chapter 1. My name is JT English. I'm one of the pastors here. I get to lead what we call The Village Church Institute. I have the privilege to preach today.

Before we jump into the text, I feel a responsibility on my behalf and for the behalf of the rest of our staff to say thank you. This past week Monday through Thursday, we had the opportunity to get away for what we call our annual staff retreat. This isn't the normal staff retreat in terms of casting vision and setting a vision for the next year or five or ten years of what ministry is going to be like at The Village Church.

It's genuinely and truly just an opportunity for us to get away to be with the Lord, to rest, to have the Word of God preached to us (not to do the preaching), to have the Word of God sung over us (not to do the singing), to play with each other, pray with each other. We played volleyball. We just had a great time.

I can tell you this. The Lord met us there. It was just a sweet, sweet time for our staff. It wouldn't be possible if we didn't get to serve in such a generous place. It's your generosity, your kindness, and your care for us that affords us those opportunities, so we're genuinely thankful and grateful. We're eager to jump back in to ministry with you here.

We're going to be in 1 Peter, chapter 1. Before we read the text, I want to just remind you and kind of orient you to where we are in the sermon series. We're in this *Marked* sermon series where we're trying to say this is what it's like to be marked as a disciple of Jesus Christ here at The Village Church.

We're saying specifically there is a gospel-centeredness to what it means to be a gospel-centered disciple. Right? We're involved in gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community, gospel-

centered service, and gospel-centered multiplication. We want to be disciples who are shaped and formed by the gospel.

Now we're going through what we call our *theological distinctives*, these things we believe firmly but we hold kind of with an open hand. We have a statement of faith that talks about the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, biblical authority, Trinitarianism, things we hold with a firm hand. Now we're walking through some of the things that are going to shape life and ministry here that we think are valuable and important but we hold with an open hand.

We've already talked about believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper. We talked about the loving doctrine of God's providence and sovereignty in our lives. This week we're talking about inerrancy. In the coming weeks, we're talking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and complementarianism, what it means to be men and women.

When we think about the doctrine of inerrancy, I want to make just a really brief distinction. We think the authority of the Bible is a key issue in this age and in every other age of the church. The doctrine of biblical authority has never been under greater assault than it is today. This is the Word of the Lord.

At The Village Church, you need to know your pastors, leaders, ministers are unequivocally and unapologetically wanting to root our life and our ministry in the divinely inspired Word of God. We think the Bible is God's Word, but we also think it is inerrant. There are a lot of Christians who don't think it's inerrant, that it is perfect in all it affirms, that it is completely accurate, truthful, and trustworthy. We affirm that and believe that. That's what we're going to be spending time talking about today.

I have two main points. If you hear this, you've really caught the whole sermon. Here are my points. *We believe we have a perfect Bible because we have a perfect God. We believe we have a perfect Bible because we have a perfect God! We believe we have a perfectly trustworthy Bible because we have a perfectly trustworthy God.*

I think this is what 1 Peter is teaching here in chapter 1 if you will look at verse 13 with me. First Peter, chapter 1. We'll be reading verses 13 through 25. Peter writes to these elect exiles who are in the dispersion, and he says this:

"Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope [set your horizon, set your gaze] fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you."

I've always found this fascinating about Peter's letter here. In all likelihood, Peter's audience here was at his sermon at Pentecost. You think about this group of men and women who have seen Peter and seen his face. Perhaps some of them were actually converted under his proclamation of the gospel in Acts, chapter 2, as he teaches the incredible grace we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

They come to this incredible knowledge of God, this salvation of God, this miraculous, spiritual moment where the Holy Spirit descends and thousands of people get baptized. That's a good weekend, right? We have great weekends here when we have 10, 15, 20 people baptized, but imagine thousands of people entering the doors of the church, saying, "Jesus Christ is Lord, and he has died for the forgiveness of my sins."

They're believing in the gospel. They've seen the spread of the gospel to the nations. They're watching the gospel go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and ultimately to the ends of the earth. They have seen the power and might of God on display, but years have passed. Decades have passed. Trials have come. The storms of life have begun to creep in. Their life situation has changed. Perhaps for some of them, just the mundaneness of life (just life as it is every single day) is unchanging.

They begin to look, Peter says, to other stories of the world, other ways to make sense of their human experience. Here's what you have to catch. This is a group of people who are in danger of having had a spiritual experience, a genuine, legitimate spiritual experience, but then untethering their lives from God and his Word.

This is a group of people who have experienced one of the most miraculous moments in human history, Pentecost, but Peter now warns them to set their hope on Christ because they're living according to the passions of their former ignorance. Look at verse 13. "**...set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance...**"

He is saying, "Set your gaze, set your horizon, set your trajectory on the grace of God that's coming for you in Jesus Christ in the future. Look toward this horizon. Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance." What are these passions of your former ignorance? Well, for Peter's audience, these were... We could maybe call them false stories or false ways of understanding the world.

It was the stories they believed to be true about the world before they had come to Christ. It was these ways of making sense of the world before they had believed the gospel, before Pentecost. It was these ways of making sense of the world, reference points of goals, priorities, and stories. They wanted not so much to reject the Bible, but they wanted the Bible *and* something else.

They didn't so much want to reject the gospel. They wanted the gospel *and* something else. They're in danger of affirming the gospel but also affirming these stories or these passions of their former ignorance at the same time. Peter is trying to warn them.

You know, I was watching a show the other day. It's my favorite show of all time, *The West Wing*. If you haven't seen it, it's on Netflix. You have to watch it. It's great. I named my dog Bartlet after the

president on the show. I'm not kidding. You now have a part of my heart. *The West Wing*. I'm watching this show, and it discusses this phenomenon a lot of pilots or underwater divers will endure. It's called *spatial disorientation*.

I decided to look up stories of spatial disorientation. It's this kind of phenomenon or this thing that when pilots take off, they're taught... If they're not taught to use the instruments, what are you supposed to do? Keep your eyes on the horizon. That's right. You keep your eyes on the horizon. You watch the horizon because the horizon is a steady guide to get you where you need to go. It will make sure you're not tilting your plane too far to the right or too far to the left.

It will ensure you don't set your trajectory too high and go into a tailspin. It will ensure you don't set your trajectory too low and crash and burn. Set your eyes on the horizon, but a lot of pilots aren't trained necessarily to use their instruments. You have a certificate to use the instruments. The instruments are there so when you can't see the horizon, when you can't see the horizon in front of the plane, you will be assured you're still on the right trajectory, you're still on the right course.

What will happen is during blackout conditions or whiteout conditions or in a storm that has set in... Perhaps it's just darkness, and there are no city lights for you to see. Pilots will tell you it's one of the most disorienting times of their life because they genuinely do not know up from down or left from right. They could not tell you if the plane is pointed straight up to the air or straight down to the ground. It feels the exact same. They couldn't tell you if they're upside-down or right-side up.

There are tons of stories of pilots either emerging from clouds totally upside down or emerging from clouds heading straight into the ground. If you're not trained to set your eyes on the instruments, you're in danger of setting your hope, setting your trajectory, on the entirely wrong thing.

This is what Peter is talking about here. It's not so much a *spatial* disorientation but a *spiritual* disorientation. We who have experienced the might and the power of God are in danger of not setting our hope accordingly and properly. So when the storms of life begin to creep in, when night has set in, during blackout conditions or during blizzard conditions, we could be entirely disoriented if we don't set our hope on God's instruments of keeping us on the right trajectory.

These passions of former ignorance for these people (for Peter's readers) and for us are these other ways of making sense of the world. I have the opportunity of teaching what we call a Training Program here in the Institute. We talk about this all the time. We call these false stories of the world, other visions of the good life, other ways of setting up priorities or goals for yourself. I want to talk about a few of those that I think are so powerful for us.

The reason I want to call them false stories is there's this quote I've always just found so helpful. The reason I love sharing it primarily is because of the person's name. Her name is Bobette Buster. Isn't that an awesome name? If my last name was Buster, I probably wouldn't name my daughter Bobette, but these people did. So I would love to meet these parents.

The quote really is great too. It says, "Narrative is our culture's currency. He who tells the best story wins." Narrative is our culture's currency. He who tells the best story wins. What she is trying to get at here is there are all kinds of competing visions of the good life that are after your attention, that are trying to get you to live according to whatever story is being told. These powerful stories have a way of (like these passions of former ignorance) creeping into our lives without even knowing it. Here are some of the false stories I think we can tend to live in. The first false story is the story of...

1. *Romanticism*. This is the story that tells you that you are your emotions. The more intense the emotion, the more real or true it is. Your emotions, your feelings, can be trustworthy, so you are about living a life that is raw, authentic, and transparent because you just want to feel, and you want to feel deeply. You live a life feeling these romantic feelings, hoping this is setting you on the right trajectory, that your feelings are the instruments that will ensure you come out of the clouds right-side up.

2. *Consumerism*. This is the story that tells us we are what we have. Worth is based upon the value and the quality of the things that belong to me. We spend our entire lives accumulating more valuable things. We'll buy a car that's a certain value. But in four or five years, we'll try to buy a car that is *more* valuable, and we'll discard the car we thought at one time was so valuable. Perhaps it's clothes, a bank account, or a 401(k). We are about accumulating valuable things and discarding things that have lost their value. So romanticism, consumerism.

3. *Individualism*. This is a story that tells you that you and I are at the center of all things. Everybody else is just a supporting actor. We are at the center of the stories we are telling because we value and prize individualism. The good life for us is the authority of the independent individual. We're

going to spend our entire lives trying to become self-reliant, self-dependent. We're going to self-actualize or self-realize. We want to be personally responsible and personally reliant.

4. *Progressivism*. Man, this is a persuasive story in our culture today. This is the story that tells you things are continually getting better. "Today is better than yesterday. Tomorrow will be better than today." Advancements in science, technology, economics are constantly improving the human experience. This vision of the good life consists in trying to convince you of this story.

Do you know for whom this is a particularly powerful story? For me, it's a powerful story as I'm now a parent. I'm a dad, and I genuinely believe sometimes that it is a fact that the world will be better for my kids than it was for me, than it was for my parents. What if this story is proven to be false? What if my kids don't have the same opportunities I had? What if the world isn't progressing and continually getting better?

5. *American civil religion*. Cultural Christianity. We've termed it here before "moral therapeutic deism." This is the story that tells you Christianity should be compatible with American ideals. This is a story that wants to baptize Christianity into Americanism, but it ends up looking far more American than it does Christian.

We can't forget we have a Middle Eastern teacher who is Jewish, that we don't have a teacher from Washington, DC, who is a politician, yet we live in this incredibly persuasive story in our culture today of American civil religion that tells us our Christianity should look far more American than it does distinctly Christian.

This is a story I think many of us would want to reject, at least on its surface, but just to briefly show you how persuasive I think it is in our lives is to be reminded of this. How many of us could confess the Apostles' Creed, and how many of us can confess the Pledge of Allegiance?

If this is something that's true of us, how much does it show that we are saying things that are true and pledging allegiance to a flag while forgetting to pledge allegiance to the teaching of the apostles as revealed to us in Scripture? This is a story that's so pervasive in our lives. The final story is this. I definitely live in this one also. This is a story of...

6. *Perfectionism*. Can I get an amen? Do I need to read it? This is the story that tells you something isn't worth doing unless it's done perfectly and according to your standards. You're either going to

do something perfectly or you're not going to do it at all. This story is characterized by our striving for flawlessness, setting high performance standards, setting self-critical evaluations, being concerned with how other people want to evaluate us.

"What is this person going to think of me? Are they going to think I did a good enough job? Are they going to value me because I performed this activity perfectly?" People like me who live in this story, what kind of stores do we love? Man, we love The Container Store because we have our elfa shelving set up just right, color-coded. Every hanger is the same. Not one hanger is the hanger from the dry cleaners, but we have all the same hangers. Can I get an amen? Yeah.

We have containers for our containers for our containers. If it's not a right angle, it's a wrong angle. Some of you are like, "What are they talking about?" but you perfectionists know. We get each other. Right? The story is so persuasive. Can I remind us just briefly? None of those stories is the gospel. None of those stories is the good news that's revealed for us in Scripture.

But these passions of our former ignorance can so easily begin to seep back into our lives. They can so easily begin to influence the way we view God, the way we view ourselves, the way we view the Scripture. Here is one of the greatest challenges you and I face. It's the challenge of realizing these persuasive stories are so persuasive because we don't realize they're stories. We just think they're reality.

You live in these stories and I live in these stories because I just take them every morning as I get out of the bed as default reality. I've forgotten these stories along with me have been crucified with Christ, and I've been raised to walk in new life, not the old life. Which one of these stories do you live in?

A lady found me last night after the 5:00, and she said, "What if I live in all of them?" I was like, "Solidarity, sister. I get you. You get me." One of the most challenging aspects of discipleship in the twenty-first century is beginning to identify these passions of our former ignorance and be reminded these are false stories, not true stories.

This is absolutely essential for you to get because Peter's readers were in danger of doing the exact same thing we are in danger of: having a genuine spiritual experience but then living lives that are untethered from God and untethered from his Word. They, and we, are in danger of flying through

the storms of life, flying through our exile, flying through a cloudy night or through the darkness of night, and we can no longer see the horizon.

We can't see the grace of God that's coming for us in Jesus Christ in the future. We are not looking to the instruments of God and his Word, but rather we're looking to these other instruments or these other stories to help us make sense of the world.

This is why the doctrine of inerrancy is so important, because Peter is trying to tell us God is giving us two reference points or two instruments that are absolutely trustworthy, that are absolutely perfect, that we can put all of our hope and faith in that one day we will emerge from the clouds having trusted the instruments, set on the grace of God in Christ that's before us.

That's what I want to spend the rest of our time talking about (these two instruments that are totally trustworthy: God and his Word). We have a holy God, and we have a holy Word. Let's look at verse 15. Peter says this in verse 15: "**...but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'**"

Peter's first reference point is the holiness and the trustworthiness of God. He is saying if you're flying through the storms of life, if you've been disoriented, if you've lost your way, the first place you look is the holy, trustworthy character of God. He is your instrument. You look to his trustworthiness.

This term *holy* is used throughout the Scriptures, so you can think of Isaiah, chapter 6. "**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty.**" Jesus is described as the Holy One of Israel. What does it mean for God to be holy? Well, the most fundamental thing Peter's listeners would have heard is this: God is completely different than any other relationship you've ever had before. He is totally set apart. He is totally pure. The psalmist says it this way in Psalm 12:6: "**The words of the LORD are pure words...**"

There is no impurity in the Word of God. There are only pure words. The Bible also describes God as perfect. The word it uses to describe God's perfection is the word *teleios* or *telos*. It means God doesn't *meet* some standard of perfection; he *is* the standard of perfection. There is no external standard of perfection God somehow measures up to, but rather he as the Holy One *is* the standard of perfection. He is the goal or the *telos*. He is completely set apart.

What Peter is trying to do when he shows his readers that God is holy is he is trying to show them he is wholly trustworthy. When you set your gaze on the holiness of God you're setting your gaze on a trustworthy instrument, you're setting your gaze on an instrument that will get you through the storm, that will get you through the darkness of night.

A.W. Tozer says it this way. I love this quote. He says, "Why do I insist that all Christians should search the Scriptures and learn as much as they can about this God who is dealing with them? It is because their faith will only spring up naturally and joyfully as they find that our God is trustworthy and fully able to perform every promise he has made." Look at that! Their faith will grow when they begin to realize the God who has revealed himself in Scriptures is fully able to perform every promise he made because he is the holy, trustworthy one.

I have so many people (and I understand this, because it's been me too) who are afraid to learn more about God because they're afraid they're eventually going to learn something about God they don't like. They're afraid, "If I really dug into that book in the Old Testament, if I really dug in to these portions of Scripture I'm not as familiar with, would I find something unsavory about God? Would I find something I just don't know how to deal with? I'll just stay with these books of the Bible or these visions of God that are palatable to my sensibilities."

I have really good news for you today. You will never learn bad news about God. You will never find something about his actions, his character, or the way he engages with us in a way that isn't pure, perfect, and lovely. Why? Because he is holy. He is the trustworthy one. I understand why we question entering this relationship with God. It's because every single human relationship you and I have had up until this point hasn't been like this. That's what it means for him to be set apart, holy, and completely different.

I know for many of us, thinking about trustworthiness is challenging. Why? Because you've trusted in the past, and you've been hurt. You've been lied to. You've been deceived. You've been abandoned. You've been neglected. People had their own motives in mind, not yours, not your best interests at heart. More often than not (at least in my life), sometimes the people we put the most trust in will also hurt us the most.

The people we say, "This person has my back. This person will never leave. This person will never forsake me. This person has me," when they don't, what happens? We grow skeptical, cautious, cynical. Peter understands that. He understands what it's like to be engaged in human relationships

and to not be able to trust, which is why he is trying to point us back to the holy, trustworthy character of God, saying, "There is nobody else like him with whom you can have a relationship. He is the one who will always be holy and wholly trustworthy."

Consider these other Scriptures. First John 1:5: "**...God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.**" What he is saying is he is never shady. God is never shady in his dealings with you. There is no darkness in the God of Israel. Look at Psalm 93:5, connecting the trustworthiness and holiness of God. "**Your decrees are very trustworthy; holiness befits your house, O LORD...**" First Peter 2:22, speaking of the incarnation: "**He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.**"

I want you to hear this. Look at me. God has never been deceitful. He has never lied. He has never abandoned. He has never neglected. He has never left anyone he loves. He is the holy, trustworthy God of Israel. Look at verse 17, which says, "**And if you call on him as...**" What? "**...Father...**" He isn't this far-off, distant God who has kept his holiness in himself. Rather, he has engaged us in one of the closest, most intimate relationships possible as that of Father and sons and daughters.

We can now set our gaze, our instrument, on this trustworthy Father who is totally holy, who is totally set apart, who is pure, and who is perfect. We can do so...how? Without caution, without skepticism, and without reservation. It's not because of who we are but because of who he is. He is the Holy One who is holy, trustworthy.

Peter doesn't just say that. He doesn't just say, "Look to God." He also says...what? Look to God's Word because God's Word reflects his character. God is holy and perfect, and his Word is holy and perfect. Look at verse 23 with me. Verse 23 says, "**...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.'**"

Here are four quick things in this passage. Here Peter is reminding us there is no such thing as a spiritual life that's untethered from God's Word. Look what he says right there at the beginning of the passage in verse 23. "**...since you have been born again...through the...word of God.**" There is no spiritual life that's untethered from God's Word. We are born through God's Word, and we are sustained through God's Word.

All of the Christian life is sustained by the Holy Spirit in God's Word. There is no true spirituality outside of the Word of God. There is no true spirituality that's untethered from God's authoritative and inspired Word. He also says it's imperishable, living, and it endures forever. What does it mean? It's kind of some interesting words to use for God's Word, right? What does it mean that God's Word is imperishable?

Well, Peter is again connecting the nature of the Bible with the nature of God. To say God's Word is imperishable is to say it has experienced no decay. It is not perishable. It is not fading away. Just like God is imperishable, his Word is imperishable. So here's the application point there. What Scripture says, God says.

This has not decayed or perished in any way. You can't have a view of God and a view of the Bible that are disconnected. What the Bible says, God says, because it is the imperishable Word of God. We don't get to have a relationship with God which is unconnected or disconnected from his Word. What we're saying is that to believe God's Word is to...what? Believe God. To disbelieve God's Word is to disbelieve God. To obey God's Word is to obey God. To disobey God's Word is to disobey God.

The imperishable God has given us an imperishable Word, and this Word, Peter goes on to say, is not just what you're born through and sustained through. It's also living. To say God's Word is living, Peter is trying to tell Christians something very, very important. I really want you to catch this. It is alive. It is active. Communication from God in the Bible is meant to spark communion with God.

This isn't just some book revealing God's acts in the past, but it is God actively meeting us here by the Spirit. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces our hearts. It pierces our soul. It gives us the Bread of Life. What does Jesus say in Matthew 4:4? He says, **"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."**

You cannot have a healthy spiritual life if you're not eating. You cannot walk with Christ if you're not devouring, eating, and being nourished by his Word. This is the living Word of God, but I also think Peter uses this word *living* really intentionally. You don't have to flip there, but I want to set the scene of John, chapter 6. John, chapter 6, is this incredible story of Jesus kind of gathering the masses. He has his 3 with him. He has his 12 with him. He has the 70 with him and perhaps even more.

The masses are beginning to gather around Jesus, a lot of disciples of Jesus. They're everywhere, according to this passage. Then Jesus says something interesting. He starts talking about a hard teaching. He says, "Unless you eat of my flesh, you have no part of me. Unless you drink of my blood, you're not with me." Then he says the flesh is worth nothing. Only the Spirit of God can produce spiritual fruit.

What do many of the disciples say? It's tough teaching. At least they're honest! Right? They realize, "This is a tough teaching. Unless we eat your flesh, drink your blood, and totally rely on the Holy Spirit, we are dead, separated from you." At least they know what he is saying, but look at what they do in verse 66. They say this: **"After this [difficult teaching] many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him."**

Gosh! What an incredible scene! They had the living Word of God in their faces teaching them, and they turn away, say, "This is a difficult teaching," and they leave him. Verse 67: **"So Jesus said to the twelve..."** This is one of the most penetrating questions in human history. "When you're confronted with God's Word, do you want to walk away also? Are you going to leave too? Are you going to leave me like everybody else is leaving me?"

Imagine that moment for Jesus. He is providing them the living words of eternal life, and the disciples are doing...what? Walking away. He looks at the Twelve and says, "Are you going to leave me also?" I don't want you to miss this. Who answers the question? Peter! Peter! He has experienced this living Word of God. He looks at Jesus, and here's how he answers. He says, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know..."** What? **"...that you are the Holy One of God."**

Peter is again, here in this moment, living this moment, connecting the holiness of God, the holiness of his Word, and the living nature of the Bible. Can you imagine this? A group of Jesus followers hearing the words of eternal life yet turning their backs on Jesus? Can you imagine this? A group of Christians beginning to live according to (as Peter would describe it) the passions of their former ignorance or their false stories that are helping them make sense of the world.

When your false story collides with the Word of God, what kind of a disciple are you? One who will turn your back on the Word of God or who will say, "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take him at his Word"? The Bible is describing these men and women as disciples, and they've turned away. Peter says, "You are the one in whom we find our life. You are the Holy One of God."

I have a question for you related to these two types of disciples...*Are you the kind of disciple who comes to God's Word for good advice or for an encounter with the living God?* When you open your Bible, are you looking for a quick piece of wisdom or to be confronted with the Holy God of Israel, Jesus Christ?

I'm convinced these disciples who turned their back on Jesus would have had a high view of the Bible in their minds. They probably could have signed our doctrinal statement at The Village Church. They would have said, "Yeah, we believe God's Word is authoritative. We believe God's Word is perfect, but we're going to pick and choose a little bit. *This* part makes a lot of sense to me. *This* part makes less sense to me. I'm going to leave *this* part, this difficult doctrine, behind."

I'm convinced they would have given mental assent to biblical authority, and this is why mental assent to a specific doctrine is not enough. Please catch this. *We demonstrate a high view of the Bible not just with our words but with our lives.* We demonstrate we trust God's authoritative, inerrant Word not just with our words but with our actions, not just when we say, "Yes, I believe," but when we live according to this story.

It's not simply enough to have a high view of the Bible with your mind. We can't just read the Bible, though we must. We must be readers of the Bible, but we also have to let the Bible read us. When was the last time the Word of God read you? When was the last time you were confronted by this God and forced to be transformed and changed? When is the last time you said, "Oh, this is a hard teaching, and I'll follow"?

We can't just master the message of the Bible. We have to let the message of the Bible master us. In other words, I could not care less if you tell me you have a high view of the Bible if you don't even bother to read it and be read by it. That's what we're after with the doctrine of inerrancy. I could not care less if you tell me you have a high view of the Bible if you don't even bother to read it, much less be read by it.

A simple question is...*Do you want to follow Jesus?* Do you want to follow Jesus? If you do, you can't just love Jesus and neglect his Word. If you love Jesus, you must love his Word. Why? Because his Word gives life. There is no life in Christ apart from his Word. Peter goes on to tell us not only is God's Word imperishable and it's living but it also endures forever. God's Word endures forever.

It talks about the flesh being like grass. "The flower of grass is withering, falling, and fading." What is Peter saying? He is saying all these former stories of ignorance, all these false stories (American civil religion, materialism, perfectionism, or perhaps it's a totally different one for you we didn't even get to talk about today), are the stories that are fading and disintegrating away.

But what story will endure forever? God's Word. The story God is reconciling the world to himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In other words, what Peter is trying to teach us and tell us is the Bible is not an assistant for your old way of life; it is the doorway to your new life in Christ. If the Bible is simply coming along in order to support whatever life you want to live for yourself, you've misunderstood what the Bible is.

The Bible crucifies these former visions of the good life and gives us a good life in Christ. These former visions of the good life are fading away. They're falling away like the grass withers and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord will endure forever. Your old way of life is dead, but the Word of God remains. The extent to which the Bible has authority in your life is the extent to which God has authority in your life.

That is really good news. Perhaps it's convicting. It's convicting for me, but do you know what else it is? It's good news because we have an instrument. In the midst of life's storms, in the midst of the darkness, we can look at this and say, "As best I can, I am believing and obeying the Bible. I'm putting my trust in Jesus Christ."

We can know...we can *know*...this is God's will for our life to shape and form us into the image of Christ, because as we set our eyes on the trustworthiness of Scripture, we're setting our eyes on the trustworthiness of God himself. We have a perfect Bible because we have a perfect God. We have a perfectly trustworthy Bible because we have a perfectly trustworthy God.

Here is the good news, and guys, this is *really* good news! Look at verse 18. "**...knowing that you were ransomed from [your] futile ways...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.**" Peter is reminding us that these false stories that have such an easy of creeping back in are false stories. He is trying to tell them, "You have been ransomed. You have been bought back. You have been bought back out of your bondage and your slavery."

It is not up to you to ransom yourself again out of these false stories but to simply look to the cross of Christ where you have already been ransomed, where God has set his affection and his love, not just on us but on you. You have been ransomed. It's not up to us to ransom ourselves out of these futile ways but to simply trust in the blood of the spotless Lamb. What he is trying to do is to remind you it's now not up to you to live into God's story but to simply look into God's story in Christ.

Friends, there is only one true story of the world. It's the story that the triune God is the king of the universe, and for our sake and for our salvation, the Son of God put upon human flesh. He was crucified, buried, resurrected, and ascended, where he now reigns in the heavens as the living Lord. He will come again in the future to do...what? To judge the living and the dead (back to verse 13).

Set your hope on the grace of God that's coming for you in Jesus Christ. The reason inerrancy matters is because it's trying to perfectly preserve this story for us, this story of the gospel, which is immovable and unchangeable. God has set his affection and love on you. You've been bought with a price.

In other words, biblical inerrancy and authority is not some kind of a dead doctrine; it's a life-giving truth. The inerrant, perfect Word of God, Jesus Christ, suffered for your sake. He became sin so you might become the righteousness of God. I love how Martin Luther says it (speaking of Reformation 500). He says we need to study the Bible because it tells me not what I must do but what Jesus Christ the Son of God has done for me. Amen?

You do not study the Bible in order to find some kind of a truth or check off some kind of a box you're supposed to do now but rather to look to the saving activity of the triune God on your behalf. We look to this perfect story not so we can learn what to do but rather learn what God has done for us and proclaim it to the ends of the earth. Biblical inerrancy has everything to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pilots will tell you there is nothing more relieving than in the midst of spatial disorientation, of what feels like flying upside down but trusting your instruments, to emerge from the storm, to emerge from the darkness, to emerge from the whiteout conditions, and see, "The whole time I was trusting my instruments, when I was having to put faith and trust in these trustworthy instruments, I was right-side up. It felt so disorienting, it felt like I was flying upside down, but I trusted my instruments."

It is so relieving to emerge from the clouds, emerge from the storms, and the whole time where have you been? Right-side up. I know, as Peter says, our time of exile as we're waiting for the grace of God to come to us in Christ feels disorienting. It feels upside down. It feels like we can't see straight.

Friends, this is the good news of the gospel of the holiness of God and the holiness of his Word. As we set our lives according to God's trustworthy instruments, the storm will pass. Darkness will give way to dawn, we will emerge from the clouds of this life, and our hope will be set on the horizon of God's grace, his faithfulness, and his gospel. Let's pray.

Father, you have not left us here to our own devices. You have not left us here according to our own visions of the good life, but rather you have invited us in to your perfect story, the story of the spotless Lamb of God, suffering for our sake and for our salvation.

We are grateful for your Scriptures, that we are not left alone without a word from God, but we have an authoritative, inerrant Bible we can look to for our source of hope, our source of encouragement, and our trustworthy guide as we wait for the grace of Christ that's coming. We ask you would give us spirits in the Holy Spirit to read the Bible, to love the Bible, and to be transformed by its message. For your grace we ask in Christ's name, amen.