

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...

On our recent return from Germany we took a day and stopped off in London. A one day pass gets you on the subway – *the London Tube*. After we checked out the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace we boarded at Victoria Station and took the Circle Line East to the London Bridge. *There really is a London Bridge – and despite what you’ve heard, it hasn’t fallen down.* From London Bridge we headed north to King’s Cross.

Of course, the Tube stops and starts at dozens of stations in between. And there’s a recording that plays each time the doors open. A British accent warns you of the gap between the platform and the train. A voice says, “Mind the Gap.” It’s become a London trademark, “Mind the Gap.” In fact, you can buy a T-shirt that reads, “Mind the Gap.”

When we got off at King’s Cross we walked two blocks north to the British Library where we saw a treasure chest of biblical manuscripts. On display was a Bible that dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. “Codex Sinaiticus” is our oldest complete copy of the NT. It’s proof of the Bible’s reliability. We also saw a Guttenberg Bible, one of the first books printed. The British collection of ancient documents is absolutely priceless.

Afterwards, we re-boarded the Tube and I kept hearing that voice... “Mind the Gap,” “Mind the Gap” And it hit me, *God did just that!* God paid attention to the gap. A holy God is in heaven. Needy humans are on earth. And sin has caused a gargantuan gap between them.

People are *too sinful* and *too limited* to discover God on their own. The only way for us to know God is for Him to disclose His identity and His will. *And He has...* God “minds the Gap...” He’s spoken across the divide and bridged the gap between *His holiness* and *our ignorance*.

Our text today states two enormous, unavoidable realities – truths with which every person must contend... **God is** and **He has spoken**. There is a God - and this one, true God has unveiled His will to us.

*Speculation* is human guesswork. Throughout the centuries proud men have not hesitated in speculating about who God is and what He desires. Whenever you hear, “If I were God...” – what follows is nothing but sheer speculation. It may be interesting, but it’s certainly not reliable.

Far more trustworthy than *speculation* is **revelation**. There is no need to guess about God. He doesn’t have lockjaw. God has spoken.

Last week we talked about **the nature of God**. Today, I want to discuss **the revelation of God** – the ways in which the one, true God has revealed Himself and His will to mankind. God *minds the gap*... God has spoken!

Each week I’m starting with a statement of doctrine – we’ll work through that statement - then at the close, I’ll invite you to recite it with me. Here’s today’s statement, “We believe God speaks, through general and special revelation. The highest court of authority is His Word – the living and written Word. The Bible is God-breathed and God-preserved. And it provides Christians all we need to know, to live pleasing to God.”

Speaking of God’s revelation there are two broad categories – **general** and **special revelation**. Think of *general revelation* as a billboard on Hwy. 78 – and special revelation as a text message on your cell phone.

A billboard communicates to everyone in the community over a long period of time. A text message addresses a narrower audience and conveys a more specific message. So it is with

God's revelation.

**General revelation** includes the witness of God we find in nature. Psalm 19:1 tells us, "**The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.**" The enormity, and power, and complexities, and creativity we find in nature tell us about God. It's been said, "**The Stars are God's Oldest Testament.**"

Love and hate, joy and sadness – the emotions that exist in the world indicate God is emotional... That personality exists, suggests that God is a person... The beauty in the world is best explained by a God of glory. John Calvin once wrote, "**Human beings cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see God.**" God has left His mark all around us.

General revelation also includes God's providence – or His overarching supervision in the world. God not only created. He sustains His creation. When Paul preached to the agrarian community of Lystra, he attributed rain, and seasons, and growing cycles to God's general revelation. Paul says of God in Acts 14, "**He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons...**" The processes of nature that sustain life on the planet say something about God's goodness and love. They're part of His general revelation.

Often God in His providence orchestrates circumstances. The rabbis have a saying, "**Coincidence is not a kosher word.**" It's true. Nations rise and fall. Promotions come. People cross paths because God is at work. God is behind the scenes working through our situations to accomplish His purposes. His providence is also an example of His revelation.

God's witness within us is another example of general revelation. *Our conscience – our sense of right and wrong - our innate hunger for God – our propensity to worship – are all ways God has revealed Himself. Our yearning for higher ideals is ultimately explained by a higher purpose.*

These are all examples of general revelation, but this type of revelation is limited. It conveys truths about God, but leaves out crucial information. Providence, nature, and conscience - don't communicate God's name, His way of salvation, His standards for holiness, His justice, or His grace. This is why we also need **special revelation.**

This includes **supernatural demonstrations...** *God's voice from a burning bush - an angel for dinner in Abraham's tent – the dove at Jesus' baptism – prophecy, and the gifts of the Spirit - dreams, and visions, and the appearance of angels...* these are all examples of special revelation.

Joel 2 predicts special revelation in the last days. "**Old men shall dream dreams... young men shall see visions...**" I turned 51 yesterday and I'm confused. I'm not old, but I'm not young – so do I dream dreams, see visions - or dream about visions - or have visions about dreams???

I do think the distinction between general and special revelation might best be summarized as the difference between **works** and **words**. General revelation is sent through the *works of God*, but when God gets specific He uses *words*. God and humans convey ideas through words.

Jesus is one example of God's special revelation - and it's no surprise John calls Him "**the Word.**" John 1:14 tells us, "**The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory... full of grace and truth.**"

Tired of being kept at arm's length – of being misconstrued by unbelief - God clothed Himself in flesh, and blood, and bone. Jesus took a human heart and hands and revealed God and His will up-close and personal. As we're told in Hebrews 1, at various times and in different ways God spoke by Hebrew prophets – but in the last days He speaks by His Son.

Jesus is *God's living Word* and the Bible is *God's written Word*. Jesus is the Word made

flesh. The Bible is the Word made Scripture.

The most intimate human communication takes place through words.

The other day I watched a teenage girl pull out her cell phone and send a text message. It was amazing to watch. An executive secretary couldn't type as fast with 10 fingers as that little girl did with her two thumbs. Kids today find it easier to put words in text than to speak them.

Early on, God chose to reveal Himself and His will in *text, with ink, on parchment*. We call it "Scripture." The Bible is the *scripted* Word of God.

Of course, the Bible isn't the only book that claims to be from God. Every religion has its sacred writings - the Koran of Islam, the Hindu Vedas, the Buddhist Sutras, the Book of Mormon – *but when it comes to religious literature the Bible is in a class all by itself*. It's unique.

Let me highlight for you a bit of the Bible's uniqueness...

First, the Bible is **unique in its continuity**. We say the Bible is one book - but it's actually 66 books written over a 1500 year period - by 40 authors, on 3 continents, in 3 languages.

It was written in **various places** - prisons to palaces. Its authors had **various backgrounds** – princes, peasants, farmers, and fishermen. It was written under **different circumstances** - triumph *and* tragedy. It's comprised of **different types of literature** - poetry, prose, and proverbs - *yet the Bible deals with scores of controversial subjects without a single contradiction*.

No other book has such diversity yet unity. From cover to cover the Bible has one central theme - *the work of Jesus*. Try to find any other collection of 66 books with this continuity and you'll search in vain.

The Bible is also **unique in its content**. Other books contain rules and rituals you have to perform to get to God. The Bible portrays salvation as God's free gift. It's all about grace – what God has done to **mind the gap**.

Third, the Bible is **unique in its candor**. It treats its heroes with brutal honesty - "**warts and all**." Noah got drunk - Abraham lied – David stopped to adultery and murder. The Bible has no skeletons. *It has the ring of truth!*

The Bible is **unique in its correctness**. In fact, every new scoop of the archeologist's shovel proves again the historical accuracy of Scripture.

The Bible is also scientifically reliable. 1900 years before Columbus set sail, Job 26:10 stated, "**(God) drew a circular horizon on the face of the waters, at the boundary of light and darkness.**" Careful Bible students knew the earth was round long before explorers verified the fact.

The Bible is **unique in its completed prophecies**. Isaiah 45 predicts the reign of the Persian King Cyrus – 200 years before he was born. The Bible predicted the conquest of Alexander the Great - the rise of the Roman Empire – the rebirth of the modern state of Israel. Daniel 9 predicts 500 years in advance, the exact day Jesus would make His final entry into Jerusalem. The Bible contains 300-plus prophecies of Jesus' first advent.

The Bible's predictive accuracy is evidence of its author's vantage point. The true God sits outside of time. He sees the end from the beginning.

The Bible is **unique in its constancy**. It's survived countless attacks.

In 303 AD, the Roman Emperor Diocletian ordered the destruction of all Bibles. Christians at the time worried about the future of their movement. *Yet how quickly the tide changed...* Diocletian's successor, Constantine, embraced Christianity and ordered 50 new copies of the Scriptures. In fact, Constantine financed the project with money from Diocletian's coffers.

It's been said, "The Bible is an anvil that has broken many hammers." Luke 16:17 tells us, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle (a stroke) of the law to fail." Rome is history – Diocletian is a footnote – but the Bible lives forever. "The Bible outlives its pallbearers."

The Bible's uniqueness sets it apart from all other books. No wonder the Bible is the world's all-time best-seller. And it has but one explanation – the Bible has a supernatural origin. It's God's revelation. It's *from God to us!*

This is why Paul writes to Timothy and tells him to *read the Bible, study the Bible, live the Bible, preach the Bible*. He says in 2Timothy 3:16... "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Look at each word here in verse 16 - "All Scripture" (that's canonization) "is given" (that's preservation) "by inspiration of God" (that's inspiration) When we say the Bible came *from God to us* we're tempted to think He sent it to Earth tied to a meteorite – but God chose a far more spectacular approach – the processes of **inspiration, canonization, preservation...**

First, let's talk about **inspiration**. The Greek word translated *inspiration* is the word "theopneustos." It's a compound word. "Theo" means "God" - "pneustos" means "breathed".

Inspiration is the supernatural process by which God breathed His Word into existence. 2Peter 1:20-21 tells us, "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." People didn't just make up the Bible. Its authors were influenced by the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit oversaw the natural process of the author's writing to insure that what was written on the parchment was what God desired. Just as the living Word, Jesus, shared some of His mother's features – *perhaps He had Mary's hair or a Jewish nose*. Likewise we can expect the written Word to retain the writer's style, vocabulary, culture, personality...

Four words help us understand what we mean when we talk about the doctrine of inspiration – **literal, verbal, plenary, and inerrant**.

**Literal** means we take the Bible at face value. *What it says - it means*. When the Bible says God created the earth in six days - or Jonah was swallowed by a fish – or Jesus is coming again – don't try to spiritualize! The Bible means what it says. There are Bible passages that are meant to be taken figuratively, but when they are, it's apparent from the text.

**Verbal** inspiration means *every word* of the Bible is God-breathed, not just its thoughts or intent. This is God's attitude toward Scripture. In Jeremiah 26:2, He tells the prophet, "Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak... all the words that I command you to speak... do not diminish a word." All 774,746 words in your Bible are God-breathed.

The rabbis use to say... "When Messiah comes He'll not only interpret the passages for us, He'll interpret the very words; He'll even interpret the letters; in fact, He will even interpret the spaces between the letters!" They believed even the spaces between the letters were inspired.

Inspiration is also **plenary** – which means "the whole of Scripture." Not just the parts that deal with theology or ethics, but all the Bible is inspired by God - even its historical and scientific statements.

Some folks have a "Dalmatian theology." They only take seriously a spot here or spot there. *But Paul says all!* "ALL Scripture" is inspired.

Also the Bible is **inerrant**. We believe that in the autographs (or original documents) the

Bible is free from all error. Proverbs 30:5 in the NIV reads, "Every word of God is flawless..." This was Jesus' endorsement of the Bible. In John 17:17 He prays to the Father, "Your word is truth." We believe in *literal, verbal, plenary, and inerrant* inspiration.

But Inspiration was just the first step of bringing us the Bible. Next was **canonization**. The word "*canon*" means "*reed*". In ancient times reeds were used as measuring sticks. The canon is the standard - the official list of inspired books. It defines Paul's phrase, "**All Scripture.**"

The Old Testament Canon was determined by the Hebrews. Romans 3:2, tells us that God appointed the Jews as custodians of the Scripture.

Jesus affirmed the Jewish canon. He says in Luke 24:44, "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning me." These were the same three divisions that made up the Jewish Bible – and that make up our Old Testament today. The OT canon was decided by the Jews and affirmed by Jesus.

The NT canon was also affirmed by Jesus, but in advance! He clarified the canon by limiting it's authorship to the supervision of the 12 apostles. In Matthew 18 Jesus gave His Twelve special authority "to bind and to loose." These were rabbinical terms which meant to *prohibit and permit*. And it was this authority that enabled the 12 apostles to establish the faith and practice of the early Church through the writing of the NT.

I love the comment Peter makes about Paul's writings. Peter was the leader of the apostolic church, and apparently considered Paul a peer. In 2Peter 3:15 Peter comments, "Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." Peter admits Paul is difficult to understand at times. He tackled heavy subjects. But Peter puts Paul's letters on a par with sacred Scripture.

When the last apostle neared death, John knew he was the final person authorized to write Scripture, so he closes Revelation with a warning. In 22:18 he writes, "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life..." And with that John sealed the Canon of inspired Scripture.

I've talked about the *inspiration* and *canonization* of God's Word to us.

Let me also comment on the Bible's **preservation**. Since we no longer possess the original documents, *how can we be sure that what we read today is what was first written?* How well has the Bible been preserved?

There are two ways to test the reliability of an ancient document...

**First, is the number of copies we have of that document.** The more copies the more you can look for similarities or possible corruptions.

**Second is the length of time between the writing of the copies and the date of the originals.** The logic goes, the older the copies - the closer to the originals – and the more likely they are to be free from errors.

This is where evidence for the reliability of the Bible is overwhelming. Today we have 5400 copies of the Greek New Testament. This is an unheard of number of ancient manuscripts - a *mountain of corroboration*. We have just 5 copies of Aristotle, and 7 copies of Plato, yet no one doubts their authenticity. How much more should we trust the NT?

In addition, compare these 5400 documents and you'll find a 99% agreement. The 1%

difficulty is mostly due to variations in spelling - and not one of these variants affects any major biblical doctrine.

It's also impressive to know that the oldest copies we have of the Greek classics are 800 years separated from the originals. Whereas, we have portions of the NT dating back to a few decades of the time the apostle wrote them. There's a portion of John's Gospel in a library in Manchester, England - called "[The Rylands Papyrus](#)" - that dates within 30 years of John's death.

The Bible was written in ancient times on fragile surfaces. There were no airtight cases or chemical preservatives. That we have any copies of the NT is a miracle - let alone 5400 ancient documents. Obviously, God went to great extent to preserve for us a reliable Bible.

For a time, our evidence for the reliability of the OT was not as strong as for the NT. The oldest copies we had of the Hebrew writings were the Massoretic Text - which dated back to just 900 AD. This meant 1300 years separated our oldest copies from the original writings.

But in 1947 a shepherd boy wandering around the hills near the Dead Sea stumbled across the greatest archeological find of the 20th century. The "[Dead Sea Scrolls](#)" contained copies of the OT dating back to 100 BC - 1000 years earlier than what were our most trusted copies. This discovery took us back a millennium to test the reliability of the OT we'd been reading. And we found the OT virtually unchanged!

Here's my point, the notion that over time the Bible became corrupted with myths, and errors, and embellishments has no basis whatsoever. It's academically irresponsible to question the historical reliability of the Scriptures. Our Bible today is exactly what was read by the early church.

Hebrews 4:12 says of the Bible, "[The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.](#)" The Bible is like a surgeon's scalpel. It *cuts to cure*. It lays bare our motives. It does surgery on our hearts.

The Bible is alive. It's the one book with a power of its own. Isaiah 55:11 says of the Bible, "[It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please...](#)" *God's Word* goes out empowered by *God's Spirit*.

Once, a fellow walked into a country barber shop. The walls of the room were decorated with trophies of wild animals - a deer's head, a wild fox, a wild turkey - a few stuffed birds sat on the ledge near the top of the wall. This visitor was a taxidermist, and critical of the barber's collection. He singled out an owl sitting on the shelf - "[Look at the drooping wings, and that crooked leg, and the angle of the head - it looks so unnatural.](#)" He went on and on in his criticism until suddenly the bird turned its head and winked... *This man had been criticizing the life-likeness of a live bird.*

And this is true of the Bible's critics. They critique a life bird. Berate it - deny it - say what you want about the Bible - but when it's ready, it flies off the shelf to do exactly as it pleases. *The Bible is the one book that's self-propelled.* The author comes with it to accomplish His purposes.

The Bible was the spark that lit the Protestant Reformation. Its leaders championed "[Sola Scriptura](#)" - *or Bible alone*. When the Church, or pope, or tradition, or councils contradicted the Bible... they followed the Bible. And at great cost to themselves... many of these men were ostracized, and tortured, and burned at the stake for their allegiance to the Scripture.

Certainly, there are subjects the Bible simply doesn't address. "[Sola Scriptura](#)" means the Bible is out *highest* authority not necessarily our *only* authority. To build a rocket, or replace brake pads, or learn to hit a curve ball - you go elsewhere - but in life and faith the Bible rules.

Think of our lower courts and the Supreme Court. Some matters get settled in the lower court – while other issues go the higher court...

For example, to be a doctor you go to *medical school* not *Bible school*. It's there you'll get the knowledge you need. But if a professor says that God doesn't heal - or the body doesn't have a spirit - or humans are highly-evolved apes - or unborn babies have no rights... *what do you do?*

When the medical school contradicts the Bible you revert to the higher court. The Bible makes the decision. Scripture is our ultimate authority.

2Timothy 3:16 is strategic because it tells us not just what to believe about the Bible, **but why it matters...** The Bible is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

**Doctrine** is *what to believe*. **Correction** is *what not to believe*. **Instruction** is *how to live*. **Reproof** is *how not to live*. When it comes to building your faith and navigating your life the Bible is our guiding light. Christians have confidence in *the sufficiency of Scripture*.

Here's my challenge for you this morning - are you building your life on *revelation* or *speculation*? Is the Bible your highest court of authority? In your dating, or marriage, or finances, or job, or time management – in all of your life - are you influenced by old habits, or false assumptions, or the opinion of friends – or do you seek to live a biblical life?

*Learning the Bible, repenting in response, trusting its truth, building new habits, reshaping our attitudes* – and doing it consistently - this is a biblical life. It's more than just carrying a Bible – it's caring what the Bible reveals. The Bible is all we need, but we need to give the Bible an all-out effort.

Once, a little girl pulled out her new Bible storybook, and began circling the word "God" whenever it appeared. Mom was upset that her daughter was defacing her new book. She asked, "Honey, why are you marking in your book?" The little girl answered, "Mommy, I'm circling the word "God" so I'll know where to find Him whenever I need Him."

You also have such a book. It's called the Bible. It's God's revelation.

Let's close by reciting our statement... "We believe God speaks, through general and special revelation. The highest court of authority is His Word – the living and written Word. The Bible is God-breathed and God-preserved. And it provides Christians all we need to know, to live pleasing to God."

## BONUS MATERIAL

The French skeptic Voltaire predicted in 1738 that in 25 years the Bible would be a forgotten book. Just 40 years after Voltaire's death, in 1778, the Geneva Bible Society was printing and storing Bibles in Voltaire's house.