

John 7:53-8:11

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[0:00] Amen and good morning. If you will please join me in your copy of God's Word, John chapter 7, the text that follows verse 52.

! Likely does, but I'm just not sure if it does.

You will note, if you look there at the end of chapter 7, in brackets, and then the text that follows in double brackets, the earliest manuscripts do not include chapter 7, verse 53, through chapter 8, verse 11.

And then, in the ESV, a footnote that says some manuscripts do include 7, 53, through 8, 11.

Others add the passage here, or after 7, 36, or after 21, 25, or after Luke 21, 38, with variation in the text.

So, what are we supposed to do with these texts? I will tell you at the outset, the portion of my Bible that I intend to read to you, found on this page, is the only portion I intend to read, what I just read.

[1:38] That was it. My goals for us this morning are twofold, which, if you like to take notes, here's the outline for you.

They're as follows. Two goals. Number one, explain why I don't believe that John 7, 53 through 8, 11 belongs in our Bibles, and therefore, why I will not be preaching it this morning.

So, you could more simply call that point exclusion. Secondly, I would like to explain why we can have a great confidence that our Bibles are God's inspired, authoritative, inerrant word.

Texts like this ought not cause us to be concerned about the veracity of the fact that this is God's word. So, again, if you want to abbreviate that point, you could call it confidence.

So, exclusion and confidence. We do have some texts for today, so I'm not going to not use the Bible at all today, just not this particular text.

[2:50] I'm just going to ask you to hang with me here on it, and if you'd like to turn as I go along, please join me where I go. But before we do any of that, let's pray God's blessing on this sermon.

Father, thank you very much for this morning. Father, we thank you for your word. We recognize that it is inspired and therefore authoritative.

It is inerrant. And Father, we want to come to it humbly. We want to understand it rightly. We want to obey it. And so, as we come to a bit of passage that's difficult and hard to understand exactly what we ought to do with it, I pray that you give us great wisdom.

And we pray this in Christ's name and for his glory. Amen. Okay, firstly, exclusion. I want to explain why I don't believe that John 7, 53 through 8, 11 should be at least in our Bibles the way it is in most people's Bibles.

Now, I'm assuming, again, it's the way it is in mine, right? The text is there with these double brackets and these careful notes. There is external evidence to this end.

[4:02] This text, John 7, 53 through 8, 11, is not found in any of the best or earliest manuscripts. We have a vast number of early manuscripts, right?

Some in total, some in fragments. But putting them all together is how we arrive at the text that we have before us today. The work of doing this is called textual criticism.

And that is the academic discipline aimed at reconstructing the original text of the Bible with utmost accuracy. There are brilliant people doing really careful work to this end, both past, present, and Lord willing in the future.

This endeavor relies on the manuscript's quality and its contextual consistency. So there's comparison across these early, early manuscripts.

And it is a painstaking work. Textual critics pore over these early manuscripts to ascertain what does and what doesn't belong.

[5:14] Uncertainty that these verses belong is the reason for the double brackets found in the ESV with the comment and the additional footnote that I read for you.

Those manuscripts that do contain it, as was mentioned in the footnote, don't all place it after 752. Sometimes it's found in other places and in variations.

So, it is most likely a story that may or may not have happened, but was passed down orally and added in at a later time.

It found its way into some of the later copies of the Bible. We don't know if it happened. I'm unsure. Could have been a thing that happened in the life of Jesus.

But we're just not confident of it. Further, the late Bruce Metzger, a well-respected textual critic of the 20th century, in his work, a textual commentary on the Greek New Testament, notes that, quote, No Greek church father, prior to Euphemius Zagabinus, I think, from the 12th century, comments on the passage, and Euphemius declares that the accurate copies of the gospel do not contain it.

[6:34] It's the 12th century, right? 1100s. It's the first time we see a church father comment on it, and he there says, not found in the most accurate copies of the text.

This is why I am convinced, as much as one can be convinced when dealing secondhand, all of this information is coming to me through others.

I am certainly no textual critic, and I don't intend to present myself to you in that way. That's why I'm convinced that these verses should be omitted altogether, or they should be footnoted, like John chapter 5, verse 4.

If you want to, as I'm talking, turn there and notice that there is no John 5, 4 in the text, but there's a footnote that speaks of it. We referenced that when we preached that text.

And there's other verses in the Bible that are dealt with this way as well. D.A. Carson, in his commentary on John, the seminal commentary, the one that everybody should have if they're studying the book of John, says this.

[7:42] This is the quote that's in your bulletin today. These verses are present in most of the medieval Greek minuscule manuscripts.

Those are more recent manuscripts. But they're absent from virtually all early manuscripts that have come down to us. Jim Hamilton, who you're probably familiar with, wrote a book on the chiasmic structure of the book of John, wrote an article making an argument to the English Standard Version that they should be putting this down as a footnote.

So just not enough early and best manuscript evidence that is there. It's omitted in those cases. And so it's good for us to think in those terms.

So there's some external evidences. There's also some internal evidences. And I won't spend much time developing my argument at this point because I know that what I'm going to say is subjective. When I'm proposing to you, you could take it or leave it. So I just won't spend a whole lot of time on it. I find that the previous comments that I've made are sufficient to the argument that I'm making this morning.

[9:09] But I do want to take a moment to point out the interruption of 753 through 811 in the flow of writing, John's writing from chapter 7 and into chapter 8, I would argue, picks up in verse 12.

Earlier in chapter 7, we read verse 37. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

So at the Feast of Booze, the last day, we're unsure if it's the seventh day or the eighth day. I want to think that it was on the seventh when they're going through this water ritual that we've talked about previously.

The centerpiece of that text, Jesus stands up and he states that he is the fulfillment of the water ritual. He's the fulfillment of that ritual.

Those who are spiritually hungry should come to him for the satisfaction of their soul. There was also, at the Feast of Booze, a candle lighting ritual.

[10:18] Also there, which we're going to discuss further as we study on into chapter 8. In chapter 8 and verse 12, we see the record.

Again, Jesus spoke to them saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

I think John is writing and setting this stage with some conflict that happens in between. Jesus both saying, I'm the fulfillment of the water ritual and I am the fulfillment of the light ritual that you go through.

And so this story comes in as an interruption to that. Now again, that's subjective. You may not feel like it is, and I'm okay with that. Further though, 753 through 811 are not chiastic.

I tried and tried to find any chiastic structure to it. And it messes with the chiastic structure of the entire narrative all together. And so I think that's another indicator.

[11:25] And it's at this point. I will digress. All of this taken together is enough for me to decide not to preach this text.

Not include it in our preaching schedule. That said, you are most welcome to disagree with me. We can still be friends.

I promise. So put your fists down. It's okay. If you have some other knowledge and you want to come debate with me after our time together, here's my response.

So maybe you just won't. I'm going to go, okay. I don't care that much. However, I do want to be so very careful when we say, thus saith the Lord.

That he did in fact. That we have some confidence that the text we're putting before you on a Sunday morning is God's word. Now I know that some of you may love this story.

[12:26] It's very possible that you, even as we picked up a study of John, thought forward to this and couldn't wait to hear it explained. I've taught it in the past.

It places on display Jesus' merciful nature towards sinners. It juxtaposes the legalism of his day with the offer of grace found in the gospel.

The issue at hand is not one of trying to avoid some teaching that is complex or contradictory. Something that's going to undermine our understanding of what I would now do.

We might do so to avoid teaching that we should handle snakes and drink poison as a testing of our faith. Not so in this case. People have done objectionable things with the text we're talking about.

But I think you could teach this text and not err in any way whatsoever. That's not what's going on here. But rather just taking the time to be careful, to give care to what we are noting as God's word.

[13:35] Confidently noting as God's word. Before I move on, allow me to take a moment to say two things that we might have derived from the text.

But we're not going to. But I'm going to do it from places that we are confident are God's word. If this is not, in fact, does it not belong in John, we don't lose anything because the Bible teaches elsewhere the things that we could learn from it.

Two things quickly. Number one. The avoidance of judgmentalism. A legalism that looks down its nose at others doesn't apply the same standard to yourself.

Jesus teaches in Matthew chapter 7, verse 1 through 5. Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged. And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Is he excluding careful correction? Absolutely not. Because he goes on. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

[14:49] Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite. First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

So there is instruction here for how we ought to view our own sin. To see it as big and massive. A log in the analogy here. That we would properly deal with our own sins so that we can be a help to others.

Removing a thing that does need to be removed, a speck. It's agitating and not good for the brother. There's a way that we ought to go about correcting one another.

We should avoid this kind of judgmentalism that you might teach from the text. Second, the loving kindness of Christ for sinners.

I said this previously. Jesus welcomes to himself people who are sinful. He's got big, broad arms for people who come to him for the forgiveness of their sins.

[16:00] Again in Matthew chapter 11, verse 28 and following. Jesus says, Perhaps this is what he may have said to this adulterous woman, assuming that she existed.

So we don't lose anything if we say, Perhaps not. We're not confident this is God's word. I wish my copy had it relegated down to a footnote at the bottom.

I think this would serve us better. But what do we do then if we say, Well, there's some places that we're not sure are the Bible, and yet they find their way in.

What do we do with this? This brings me to my second point. I want to explain why we can have a great confidence that our Bibles are God's word.

This doesn't have to shake our confidence. In fact, I think it should increase our confidence that our Bibles are God's inspired, authoritative, inerrant word.

[17:20] The Bible is unlike any book ever written. At the most fundamental level, it is both authored by human beings and by God.

The word Christians have commonly used to describe this process is inspired. This means that the Bible is the product of God inspiring and using human authors to write his perfect, holy words without error or defect.

No problems with it at all. And yet, here we find ourselves with copies handed down, translations given to us, finding a possible error here.

We're talking about God's inspiration. We're talking about that original text that was given that we have now received. And we've received it with some challenges to it. Two passages that explicitly tell us the Bible is God's inspired word.

2 Timothy 3, verse 16. I hope you're familiar with this. That phrase in the Greek, breathed out by God, is more literally translated, God breathed, or expired.

[18:45] Expired. You expire when you breathe out. So breathed out by God, breathed into the human author.

That's where we get this word inspired. Breathed out by God, so that it was breathed into the human author. He is the source using the human author to accomplish his ends.

Second text, 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 20 and 21. Knowing this, first of all, The Bible originated not with the will of its human writers, but with the will of God, the Holy Spirit.

Over 3,000 times, biblical writers claim to have received their messages from God. God the Holy Spirit inspired, right?

Breathed out, breathed into the scriptures through these human writers. To be clear, this does not mean that God dictated the Bible to its human authors.

[20:02] That they took on some kind of robotic form and just pinned down the text. Rather, they wrote with their own creativity, in their own styles, with their own vocabulary, accomplishing all along exactly what God wanted them to accomplish.

He used all of those means to accomplish his ends. That word, carried along, it's a single word in 1 Peter, is the same word that describes Paul's ship and axe that's carried along by the storm.

A ship has sails to catch the wind. It has a keel to prevent it from tipping over, a rudder to steer it, but ultimately, a ship goes where the wind carries it.

So, we believe that God's word, original text, is inspired by God. So, it is inerrant, and it is authoritative, but how about the thing we have?

How do we know this is God's word? Let me make an argument for you first for the Old Testament. Now, if you are already really confident that this, in fact, is God's word, and then just take this as an apologetic, a way to help others who may struggle with these truths.

[21:23] So, argument for the Old Testament. Jesus himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, validated the Old Testament's inspiration by quoting from all three sections, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

You can see this in Luke 24, in verse 44. He endorsed the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament in detail. Matthew chapter 5, verse 17 and 18.

The Bible of Jesus' day, what he's referring to, was our Old Testament. The 39 books that are canonized as our Old Testament.

Listen to what Jesus says in Luke chapter 11, verse 49 and following. Therefore also, the wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation.

I'm going to get wrapped up in the details of what's going on here, but he's indicting those who are going to kill him and his apostles, just like they killed the prophets. And then verse 51 says, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.

[22:44] Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. Okay, so he's referring to prophets who had been killed and he bookends Abel to Zechariah, a specific Zechariah, one who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.

So Abel, in the text, is not called a prophet, but here Jesus calls him a prophet. Genesis chapter 4, verse 10. It's that Abel.

The Lord said to him, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

Abel, dead Abel, slain by his brother, cried out as a prophet, Jesus says. Genesis 4, in verse 10.

So the first prophet, Abel. Zechariah, found in 2 Chronicles chapter 24, why is he the bookend?

[23:47] Why is he at the other end of this? Let me just show you, this is the Zechariah, 2 Chronicles chapter 24, verse 20 and 21. Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, the priest, and he stood above the people and said to them, Thus says God, Why do you break the commandments of the Lord so that you cannot prosper?

Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you. But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord, the one who perishes between the altar and the sanctuary.

Chronologically, the last martyr was Uriah. If you put her on a calendar, chronologically, the last martyr, we go from Abel to Uriah, whose death is described in Jeremiah chapter 26.

So why does Jesus say Abel to Zechariah? It's because the Jewish Bible of Jesus' day was ordered differently than ours.

I think ours should be ordered the way theirs was, personally. But, it's not ordered in that way. Our Old Testament is grouped by literary type.

[25:04] Jesus' Bible not grouped this way. 1 and 2 Chronicles were one book, Chronicles, and was written as an overview of Israel's history with a particular emphasis on David and the temple.

It was placed at the end of Jesus' canon to help God's people look forward to a better David and a better worship. That's a neat way to read through the Old Testament.

So in Luke 11, when Jesus says, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, he's indicting the generation for the death of the prophets of his Bible. Notice what he's doing.

He's affirming that everything from that prophet to the last prophet as they would have read it is the scripture. Those people were all the prophets. So that, we can have great, great, great confidence that our Old Testament, although now coming to us in a different order, was Jesus' Bible and he affirms that it is God's word.

So now, how about an argument for the New Testament? I will say to you that the New Testament does sit, those 27 books that we call the New Testament, do sit on the foundation of the Old Testament, right?

[26:15] They reference back to the Old Testament constantly. But what else? What else might we think about how we arrived at the New Testament? Did Jesus have anything to say about it?

Well, he did prepare his disciples for the coming of it. John chapter 16 and verse 12, right? The Spirit was going to lead them in the truth.

And so, he endorsed it in principle. There will be some further writing. Paul received revelation pertaining to redemption. We read in Galatians chapter 1, verse 11 through 17.

And he expected his writings to be received as from God. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 13 and verse 15. Peter classified Paul's writings with the inspired Old Testament.

2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 16. So we get some hints within, right? That would lead us to at least conclude that there ought to be some books that make up the New Testament.

[27:19] So how do we end up with these 27 books? Well, there was careful criteria applied to how to canonize these books.

Number one, they had to be written by a recognized prophet or apostle like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Moses, Paul, or Peter. that had to be written by those associated with a recognized prophet or apostle like the book of Luke or Acts.

They were measured on their truthfulness. Deuteronomy 18, verse 20 through 22. God says, if a prophet claims to be speaking from me and what he said is not true, then he has not spoken from me.

Faithfulness to previously accepted canonical writings was important. Those things seen as operating as God's word, were they faithful to those books?

If they had been confirmed by Christ, prophet, an apostle, Luke 24, verse 24, 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 16, I mentioned previously, and church usage and recognition.

[28:35] These are the criteria that were applied. The church used these writings and was deeply edified by them. They were believed over time that they were from God and so the final acceptance of the recognition of the 66 books of the Bible as scripture took place at the Senate of Carthage in A.D. 397.

Now there could be much criticism of the Bible at this point, the New Testament at this point. The claim is always that the church made the Bible.

It selected what it did and didn't want to be contained within it. But we like rather to think that the church did not make the Bible but rather the Bible made the church and they merely verified its use and its veracity.

So Christians gathered at the Senate of Carthage and said using these criteria what do we believe God has been using to work in the life of his church?

Bring some veracity to it. And to that end we can also think in terms of our own experience. experience. It's something worth mentioning.

[29:54] The longer I spend studying the Bible and the more flawlessly I see it all fit together even pieces written thousands of years apart the more it seems to me like the work of God.

Isn't it an astounding astounding book? A bunch of men couldn't have colluded to pull this thing off. Now I know that that's not an argument that you can bank your life on but for me in addition to the more objective arguments I have to say that it feels like what it claims to be.

God illuminates the text to me he makes it come alive. I hope he does the same for you. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 14 the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

So we contend that the Bible is God's inspired word to mankind and if so if it's inspired then it follows that it is inerrant it doesn't have any error in it because God cannot lie and it is authoritative because he is God God and so we should in closing I want to quote two scholars Gary Phillips and William Brown they say quote it is true however that the quality of the New Testament manuscripts is less than that of the Old Testament ones more variant readings do exist although these are usually matters of spelling or word order not matters of doctrine however because there are so many manuscripts of the New Testament available by comparing the readings the original can be reconstructed the result of the science of textual criticism is an almost pure text and most of the remaining textual problems have reasonably sure answers that's so good so good that the careful work has been and is being done and so it's carefully noted for us when there is something a tad odd the Bible translators and textual critics are not trying to hide anything from us that's why I think these variances should give us even more confidence no one's trying to pull anything over on you double brackets they're trying to draw your attention although I still think it should be a footnote they're trying to draw your attention that the earliest manuscripts do not include chapter 7 verse 53 through chapter 8 and verse 11 so with minds toward the great mercy that Christ shows to sinners that's there in the text but it's all over the rest of the Bible I hope you'll look forward with me to concluding our study of John 7 at verse 52 and then picking up in chapter 8 and verse 12 next time we're together let's pray together