

# Heaven and Earth Shall Pass Away

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Matthew

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*Heavenly Father, tonight it has been the goal of the evening as well as the challenge laid forward that you would be our vision, as that song says, you would be not only the King of our heart, but the Ruler of all. Lord, tonight, we subject ourselves not just to the reading, but to the teaching, the preaching, the understanding of your word. Lord, you've laid forth the challenge not that we would conform you to our will, our way and our agenda, but that we would be as you illustrated so specifically in scripture, that we would be the clay that you would mold, that you would shape. God, today I pray that we would not somehow form our own philosophies and agendas in regard to tonight's text, but we would allow you to mold us and shape us. And as that old hymn says that we just heard, not that we would give in to men's empty applause, but that we would care only for yours and yours alone. It is the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

Well, tonight we continue our study of the book of Matthew. We find ourselves again in chapter 5 of the book of Matthew in a very famous section of scripture collectively known as the Sermon on the Mount, most assuredly probably one of the most famous discourse is not only in all of Scripture but in all of history. And tonight, I'm going to go ahead and read a verse that we're not actually going to study tonight and the reason I'm going to do so is it shares for you the importance of tonight's subject matter in the content of the passage. What we know as the Sermon on the Mount is comprised of three chapters. It begins with those famous beatitudes, blessed are these, and they shall experience and/or receive the following that is mentioned, but what we know as the Sermon on the Mount ends with Jesus telling the story of two individuals who build a like-minded houses, so to speak. One is built on the sand, one is built on a rock. Both of them are subjected to the storms. Both of them are subjected to the difficulties of life. But as you well understand, only the house that is built upon the rock is able to withstand the storm. There is this challenge that Jesus is laying forth in the Sermon on the Mount that unless our lives are placed in him and built upon him, we shall not survive the storms that not only come in these days, but in the days to follow.

What we know as the Sermon on the Mount, as many of you are well familiar with on Sunday evening, was spoken not only on the hillside thousands of years ago, but to a group of individuals who essentially believed that they could do enough or stop enough things to earn a righteous place with God, that sacrificial system that we know not only of

the temple worship, but of the Old Testament. Many of them most assuredly had been down to the Jordan River, they had met whom we know as John the Baptist, they had repented of their sins and he said, "Follow the Lamb of God," being Jesus Christ, "who takes away the sin of the world." Beginning in verse 20 of Matthew 5, there is a statement that is made and we'll address this in following weeks, but over the course of the next two and a half chapters Jesus is going to lay out a paradigm, he's going to layout for us how humanity judges themselves when it comes to their own righteousness. How does humanity view themselves as being "right with the Lord."

In verse 20 of Matthew 5 it says,

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Now, why is there a problem with that verse? Because most people in their own eyes feel that they've done enough or not done enough harm in order to be deemed righteous in the eyes of God. We have this perpetual problem of humanity of self-rationalizing and self-justifying our lives. In fact, I've rarely if ever been in a public venue where somebody is recognizing that of a celebrity nature that has "expired from this life," where they not always either infer or implicitly state that they are "watching us from heaven." Why is it that they would make that statement? Because in their eyes they feel that that person somehow is and was righteous.

Here's the problem, verses 17 through 19. This is what we're going to study tonight. This is a critical text tonight because it not only comes on the heels of this declaration that those before the Lord Jesus were the salt of the earth and the light of the world, but it goes on to serve as a bridge to how do we determine who is righteous? How do we determine what is righteous? How do we in a world today that wants to redefine and re-approach everything, how do we determine what is right and what is wrong? How do we determine that which is true and that which is error?. Beginning in verse 17 of chapter 5 of Matthew, it says,

17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. 18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. 19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Here's what Jesus Christ has done: he's drawn the proverbial line in the sand before mentioning our righteousness. He says if you want a judge, if you want a gauge, if you want a line how do you know what is right in the eyes of God and what is not, it's really simple, all you have to do is go back to scripture and it is our guide.

Last week I addressed that on a scale of 1 to 10, we were going to be politically incorrect. Tonight, we might take it up to 12. That being said, what did Jesus state for us in these critical verses? First, to begin with a temptation, "Think not." Why would Jesus begin that way? Because we have a propensity to think, we have a propensity to agree, we have a propensity to advocate this position. He says, "Think not that I've come to destroy the law or the prophets. I've come not to destroy but I've come to fulfill." How many times have we looked at passages of scripture or texts that are before us, and we say, "Well, that was in that day or that was in that context, or it was a different world, it was a different culture." If I've heard it one time, I've heard it 1000 times. We read a passage in the Bible that we don't like, you say, "Oh, but it was just a different day and we thought differently then." Here's the problem: 100 years from now it will be a different day, and we'll think differently 100 years from now. If our gauge is the wind of whatever culture is blowing, then we're ever minded to be trying to keep up with the latest, most popular rationale and justification.

So when is it that we fall into this temptation? When do we fall into the temptation to say, "Well, I know what the Bible says but..."? It's when we rationalize, when we rationalize our desire to engage, to participate in, to endorse and/or celebrate that which is condemned by scripture. James 1. He makes it very clear that sin enters our life when we are drawn from our own lust, when we want that to be true which God said is in error, when we want that to be allowed when God condemns it, when we want that to be celebrated of which God says is an abomination. We fall into this temptation when we rationalize, "Well, maybe that's not exactly what the Bible meant or maybe that's not exact, or maybe it was just a different context or different culture." That's when it happens.

So how do we actually fall into the trap? He says, "Think not that I've come to destroy." We go from rationalizing to justifying. Now, rationalization is basically thinking it's a good idea. Justification is actually defending why we stand behind what we stand. In Genesis 3, a famous context of scripture, whom we know as the serpent comes and tempts humanity and there's this dialogue back and forth that we'll deal with more specific in a moment. But one of the frightening conclusions is this statement. It says, "And when the woman saw," in other words, she believed there were three things that eating of this fruit would do for humanity. Number 1, it was good to be eaten. It would make them wise like the gods and surely this would prosper them.

"When the woman saw." Do you understand the danger of that statement? She had not only heard, she had heeded the advice of the serpent and the humanity made this conclusion that we know more than God does because surely what he said back then cannot apply to today. You realize that we fall to the same trap. How many times do we say, "Well, it was a different day. It was a different culture. We acted different. We didn't know what we know today." Understand from Genesis 2 to Genesis 3, we don't know what the time frame is. It could have been one week, one month, one year, one century. We don't know specifically, but what we know is this, they fell into the same trap we do. We rationalize what we want to be true and then we justify that the time has changed, it's

a different day today than it was yesterday, so therefore it is fitting that we do that which we think is best on our behalf in spite of what God has spoken.

So how do we do this? Really simple. There are three things that humanity does. 1. We take things that God has said in the Bible and we remove them, now maybe not literally, but we say that that no longer applies to us today, that is no longer, shall we say, applicable for us today. We take passages and we remove, for example, this is what the serpent did in Genesis. You go back to Genesis 2:16 and what did the Lord say to humanity? "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat." Do you remember what he said in chapter 3, verse 1? "Is it true, or yea, hath God said of every tree of the garden you may eat?" Do you see what he did? He removed one strategic word. What was the word? Freely. Isn't that ironic, we rationalize, we justified our freedom from the things of God and what did we lose? We lost our freedom.

One of the ways we rationalize and justify is we take what the Bible has clearly said, God clearly said the word "freely," and we just remove it and say it didn't actually should have been there or maybe it wasn't meant there, etc. The second thing is this: we add to it. You say, "What do you mean we add to the Bible?" Oftentimes, we claim the Bible says things it doesn't actually say. There's a lot of examples therein but let me use Genesis 3 for the sake of time when what we know as Eve is dialoging with the serpent there in chapter 3, he says, "Is it true that you should not eat of every tree?" Not only does she say, "You're right, it's not that we should not eat," she makes this statement, "and neither should we touch it." You do realize that God never said that? Now can I go ahead and confess, I don't think it would be a good idea to touch it, what it was, but at the same time, she put words in God's mouth that never came out of his mouth. How many times do we claim that the Bible says or means things that somehow make God this tyrant of a God that he never said, he never spoke, and we claim things that are not actually true regarding him and his word.

Sometimes we take away, sometimes we add to, but probably the most dangerous thing that we do is we take it out of context. Notice made the statement, "Surely, you will not die." Well, physically, Adam and Eve did not die when they participated in that forbidden fruit. But what did happen? Not only did they realize they were naked, not only did they realize their relationship and the context therein to their Creator and their God, they died spiritually, even though they might not have died at physically that day. One of the most horrific things that we're guilty of when it comes to the Bible today is not so much taking away and/or adding, which we do, is we take a passage, we take a phrase, we take a verse, we completely remove it out of its context so that we can make it say what it never said or intended to say to justify what we want it to say in our lives. One of my favorite examples is going to come up in chapter 7 of Matthew, verse 1 says, "Do not judge." How many times have you had a conversation with somebody's lifestyle, their decisions, and you say that's just not ordained of God, it's not admonished by scripture and they say, "Oh, the Bible says do not judge." You're absolutely right. It does say do not judge, but you have to read the rest of that passage. "It says do not judge, lest you be judged for with what judgment you give it shall be meet unto you." That's not a passage about judging.

That's a passage about hypocrisy. Basically, we should not say to somebody your life is wrong and mine is right unless we're willing to look at our own life in the totality therein.

So what is the test that Jesus gives? He says, "Think not I've come to destroy the law, the prophets. I've come not to destroy, but to fulfill." Jesus Christ said that he was not only the embodiment of what we know as the Old Testament, but that everything that had already been spoken was still true and he was here to validate, he was to verify and on three subject matters tonight of scripture of Jesus himself and of our interpretation thereof. What is the "nature" of the scripture? Notice when he says "of the law and the prophets." Jesus made it very clear that you cannot elevate one section of scripture and/or above another one. In other words, we don't have the right to say, "Well, that's just a section of the Bible that I'm not a fan of." This may sound just horrific to you, but it actually took place. Years ago, I was in seminary, and by the way, you know, sometimes we call seminary the cemetery, that's where good preachers go and die. But nonetheless, I was there at cemetery, and I was in a leadership course. Now, understand, I know it's not Old Testament or New Testament theology, it wasn't systematic. I get all those heavy weighted courses. It was leadership. And we needed or had to write a paper on biblical leadership. And I promise you, church, if I'm lying, I'm dying, okay? I had a professor look at our class and say, "When you write your paper, please do not quote from the Apostle Paul. I'm not a fan of his." Okay, then who are you a fan of? You know what he responded? "I'm a real fan of Jesus." Oh, okay, so I thought the Bible said that all scripture is inspired. From his perspective Jesus' words were above Paul's words.

When he says that, "I've come not to abolish the law but to fulfill the law, the prophets," Jesus Christ made a very clear statement that none of scripture, you realize, and this is hard for us to understand that John 3 is no more important to the Lord than Leviticus 3. And oftentimes we love to stagger the scripture, "Oh, this is a more important one or this is a higher weighted one." He says, "No, no, no, it's all." And then he says, "The necessity is you need to rightly divide the word of God as a workman that needeth not be ashamed." As we're going to discover tonight, one of our biggest problems when it comes to scripture is not what it says, but really it's who it says it to and what it is saying in the context therein.

What does it say about Jesus? He says, "I am not come to destroy but to fulfill." I mentioned last week that one of the great dangers as I see it in our contemporary Christianity, there's a movement called the red-letter movement. If you're not familiar with it, what it basically says is this, in your gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, there are these red letters, they are the words of Jesus, and this movement says that the red letters are the most important ones, and everything else is second rate to. Why would humanity do that? Why would we rationalize? Why would we justify? Do you know how many "sinful behaviors" that are listed in the Old Testament Jesus did not specifically call out. You said, "Well, why wouldn't he do that?" Do you realize how long the gospels would be? Have you read the Old Testament? I mean, it's long. When you read Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, I mean there is this list that just keeps going. Jesus did not have to specifically mention every sin and abomination to God because he said, "I've come to fulfill." In other words, "If anything has changed, I'll let you know."

And then obviously of our own interpretation. Humanity must realize our disposition and our nature. The Bible says in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." It is our nature, it is our propensity to rationalize and justify. It is who we are. We do everything we can from the garden of Eden to today to somehow, someway, talk ourselves into the fact that God doesn't know what he's talking about, and we know best. That's our nature.

So what is our necessity? Our necessity is not just to rightly divide, but to come into conformity to what scripture says about our life. Before we get to the next section, let me go ahead and remind you and some people struggle with me saying this but it is true: there are things and there are statements in the Bible that I'm not a fan of. Why? Because my flesh says I want to do otherwise. There are things in scripture that I'm not fond of. You say, "Well, why not?" Because there is this rebellious nature in me that says, "But I want to do it my way. I think my way is best. Hey, God, watch this." It never works anywhere or anytime.

One of the statements that's made here in verse 19, it says, "Whosoever therefore." In other words, whosoever shall break one of these commandments. Tonight, I want to walk through five very important therefore's. I want to address what you and I as humanity do not have the right to, and yet at the same time we have the important understanding thereof.

Here's the first therefore: humanity does not possess the privilege of picking and choosing the content of scripture. We don't have that right. How many times have we said, "Well, that was just the Old Testament or that was just this, that was a different day, that was a different time." As I've already mentioned back in the book of Genesis, this is what Satan did. Satan basically said, "We're going to remove this word so as not to alarm you. I'm going to remove this word so you'll believe." You do understand the best lies are 90% true, and that's exactly what happened in Genesis 2 to Genesis 3 as far as Satan tempting humanity. We do not have the right or the privilege to say, "I don't like that book of the Bible, so therefore I won't subject myself to it."

You know, one of the great men of the faith 500 years ago, by the way, none of us nor them were perfect, a man by the name of Martin Luther. You know what he said? That the book of Hebrews, in his opinion, was an epistle of straw. He didn't like the book of Hebrews. Well, I've got news for him: it's not up to him. It's not up to you and it's not up to myself. In fact, if you've ever read through the scriptures from beginning to end, I promise you there are sections that you're not a fan of. There are those that you're just maybe it makes you uncomfortable, maybe you don't see the purpose in. You and I don't have the right of choosing and picking the content of scripture.

Secondly, humanity does not possess the privilege of picking and choosing the intention of scripture. Now I'm going to give you a big phrase tonight that you may or may not have heard of, it's called hermeneutical gymnastics. Now we're all familiar with what gymnastics is, of course, particularly in this community, it's become very popular in

recent days. Typically, gymnastics involves jumping and twisting and turning. Hermeneutics is a big fancy word for a scientific study and understanding of the scripture. So when I use the phrase hermeneutical gymnastics, basically what that means is we jump and bounce all around the Bible to try to make it say what we want it to say instead of just allowing it to say what it simply says.

As alluded to earlier in Genesis 3, what did humanity do when we made the statement, "Oh, we're not just to eat it, we can't touch it either." The hand, so to speak, that we played in that conversation is we said humanity, that God's intention by what he said was to harm us and deprive us. Isn't that interesting, there are so many things in the Bible that humanity says, "Oh, that was for a different time and a different day, it doesn't apply today, it doesn't really mean what it says," because we somehow place upon God this intention to restrict, this intention to harm. You know, how many times have you, particularly raising children, grandchildren, those of you that are in education, you have "instructed or brought the rules into play," and I know this happens in our home, I said it when I was a child, I had my children say it to me, we say, "I'm sorry. We do not allow you to play in the highway." And what do your children say? "You just don't love me." Oh, okay. In other words, to allow them to go somewhere that we know is harmful, they claim that we don't love them. Or how about this one? Are you saying you don't trust me? That's what a teenager says, right? Say, "You know what? I just don't think you should be out later than this time period." What does a teenager say? "Oh, is that because you don't trust what I'll do?" Absolutely. You're absolutely right. I don't trust what you're going to do because I was a teenager at one point, and I know how teenagers think. But what is the intention? Typically, our response is you don't trust, you don't love, you have a desired harm for us. Can we all be honest? Why do we as parents and grandparents, why do we have restrictions? Why do we have curfews? It's honestly because we care. It's because we love. Why did God tell humanity not to eat the forbidden fruit? Because he knew if we ever had exposure to sin, what it would do in our lives. So what did we say? "Oh, he won't even let us touch it. He's this mean, this bad God." And so it is today. When we read passage after passage of what the Bible says about our thoughts, our behaviors, our mannerisms, whatever, and we say, "Why would God deprive us?" Well, it's not just he's depriving us of fleshly experience, he's depriving us of the pain, the agony and the death that comes alongside of it.

Third, humanity does not possess the privilege of picking and choosing the interpretation of scripture. What did Satan say to humanity? "Surely you will not die." In other words, we don't have the right to go back into the Bible and say God didn't really mean that because back in Genesis 2:16, allow me to quote exactly what God said, he says, "Neither shall you eat thereof for in the day that you do," listen, "you shall surely die." What did Satan say? "Oh, that's really not going to happen. That's really not. That's not what God really meant. What God really meant was fill-in-the-blank." And that's what we've done not just in days past, but in days present. We've gone back into the scripture and say, "Well, that's not really what God meant. That's not really his intention." The way he said it just sounds so harsh. It sounds so legalistic. What he really meant was one of the greatest dangers that you and I face is when we go to the Bible and say, "I know what it says but what it really means is..." Now, by the way, when we get later in the Sermon on

the Mount, Jesus is going to say, "It is written but I say unto you." He's not changing what the Old Testament said. What he's doing is clarifying that it still means what it says in spite of what the religious leaders have done to twist and/or turn it to mean something different than the way that God wrote it.

We do not have the privilege of picking the interpretation. We don't have the right to say, "Well, that's really not an abomination." We don't have the right to say, "That's really not a sin." We don't have the right to say, "Well, God really won't hold you accountable to that." We don't have the right. Fourthly: Jesus does not change the meaning of the law, rather he is showing our mishandling of scripture. As I alluded to, right around the corner, it has been said, "But I say unto you." At no point do you read anywhere in the gospel accounts, particularly the gospel, Matthew, where Jesus says, "You know those 10 Commandments? You can just toss them out. They're not important anymore." At no point does he talk about these things and say they're no longer valid. If they were no longer important for our lives, you would not have them in your Bible. You realize that, right? In fact, one of the things that he would have clearly communicated to the Apostle Paul and to the early church is, "Hey, now that we have an empty tomb, now that we have a resurrected Jesus, get rid of that Old Testament. All we need is the New." You know, there's multiple reasons for that. Number 1 is because the Old Testament gives in detail everything that Jesus agreed with. Number 2, you do realize the Old Testament isn't so much a story of the history of yesteryear as it is a prophetic message of the days to come. In fact, let me give you a statement somebody said this to me years ago. It is so good. If you want to know what to believe, read the New Testament. If you want to know what's coming next, read the Old Testament. In other words, so many of these prophetic statements, so many of these "end time events" that are contained in the Old Testament have not been fulfilled as of this date. So obviously we need the Old Testament for multiple reasons.

Jesus says, "It has been said, but I say unto you." Fifthly, Jesus is the fulfillment of and the embodiment of scriptural righteousness and expectations. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the famous story of the rock and the sand, the famous story of the building that has been built. The thing that I want to share with you about the Sermon on the Mount, particularly as we go into verse 20, where it talks about our righteousness and comparing it to other individuals and how that looks, is I believe the challenge that Jesus was laying forth is this: okay, you think that you're righteous, you think that if we open up the books and we look at your life compared to the Lord himself, you think you're going to do okay? You see one of the blessings of wisdom and maturity in life, and particularly when it comes to traveling in life, is that we realize our futility in life.

You know, when I was in at Baylor University, there was a T-shirt that was made and I thought this was a great T-shirt. You know, oftentimes in college, particularly in those days, we'd make T-shirts that expressed more than just what's on the shirt. There's a philosophy behind the word, so to speak, okay? There was a T-shirt that was made, this was hysterical, it was called the Top 10 Lies that are Told at Baylor University. You know what number 1 was? I was a great high school athlete. You know why? Because when I went to college, we didn't have YouTube. We didn't have the apps. We didn't have



the video coverage and everybody would talk about, "Man, when I was in high school, there was nobody faster. There was nobody stronger." You know what you realize when you come together with a bunch of people from a bunch of different states is you're not as fast as you thought you were. You're not as strong as you thought you were. And it doesn't matter what your skill set is, you think you can sing. Well, let's pull people from all over the world and we find out I don't sing as good as I thought I did, whatever it may be. But now we have raw footage. We have YouTube. We have exposure to and we realize that we are oftentimes not what we thought we were.

And that's exactly the purpose, the point of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, "Okay, you think your righteousness is good, you think your interpretation of scripture, you think all this is in the right place? Okay." And he's going to begin to go subject matter by subject matter, by subject matter, and what you're going to discover in the Sermon on the Mount is not how righteous you are, but how stinky, filthy, rotten you are because it's not going to be by the end of chapter 5, you're going to look at the spiritual mirror and say, "Uh-oh, I've got a problem with that one." Why? Because humanity doesn't judge righteousness based on what we have believed and/or thought, humanity judges righteousness on by whether or not you've been caught. And Jesus says, "Oh, it doesn't matter if you've been caught or not. It doesn't matter if the trial has taken place. Oftentimes that which has taking part between your ears makes you just as guilty as if you have been thrown into prison and caught for the crime."

So what's the time frame? I mean, Jesus gives us a time frame. He says, "Okay, you don't know the validity of scripture, you want to know how good this is or how long this is good for. Till heaven and earth pass away." Now last time I checked, that's a long time. What do we do in our culture today? We make the statement, "Well, it's just a different day. It's a different culture." I love this one, "If the Bible were written today." I've got news for you, if the Bible were written today, it would probably be longer than it is. You say, "Well, why would it be longer?" Because we've invented nuances to the sins of the Bible and different means and different ways and different approaches and whatever it may be.

He says, "The Bible is good till heaven and earth pass away." We don't have the right to say, "It's the 21st century. We have air conditioning, indoor plumbing and PhD's. We got this." He says, "I'm sorry. It is true until heaven and earth pass away," and he says, "not one jot or tittle." If you were to look in the Old Testament the way that the Jewish people and the scribes wrote, a jot and a tittle is the smallest of marks. Basically in our context, what he's saying is this, that every comma is there for a reason, every semicolon is there for a reason, every letter is there for a reason, every word is there for a reason, every sentence is there for a reason, every paragraph is there for a reason, every book is there for a reason, and the totality of the testament is there for a reason. We don't have the privilege or the right of saying, "Okay God, it's going to be forever till it passes away but not this verse or this passage or this subject matter or this scenario."

What does he say? "Till all be fulfilled." I want to go back to the Old Testament in conclusion tonight and give you a ratio. You know, we love to talk about Christmas and

Easter and the first coming and what we know as the resurrection after the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Rightfully so. I would say that probably 95% of the songs we sing are about the first coming. In fact, if you find a song that mentions the second coming, I can tell you typically it's tucked down in the third verse. By the way, this is just an aside just for grins. One day I joked that I'm going to have time to write some books that I don't have time to write, and one of my books is going to be called "The theology of the third verse." Have you ever noticed in Baptist churches we sing the first, the second, and the fourth, but rarely the third? The third verse oftentimes it's the most theologically rich one of the four, and oftentimes involves what you and I know as the second coming. I guess we're just uncomfortable singing about the second coming, but nonetheless, that being said, most of our content of our music, most of the content, almost everything, regards what we know as the first coming. Here's the problem: for every passage in your Bible that involves the birth, the life, the death, and the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, for every one of those, there are eight verses about the second coming. There are more passages in your Bible about what is yet to come than what has already come.

So what does he say here? He says, "till all be fulfilled." So in other words, we hear this statement "till heaven and earth pass away," that's such a big statement, it's such a grand statement, it's such an ethereal statement, it's so hard to grasp, our finite minds struggle with heaven and earth passing away. Obviously, we understand what one jot or one tittle means but "till all be fulfilled." In other words, he's saying that until everything that is spoken comes to fruition, until everything that is addressed, till everything is mentioned and even then it shall not pass away.

So let me ask you a series of somewhat sarcastic rhetorical comments. So do you think for one moment that God is interested in one's popular opinion of when it comes to the content of scripture? In fact, can I share with you a headline that I read this week? It's frightening to me on so many levels and I promise you, I'm not being political, I'm using this as a transition to theology here. Here was an editorial that was written this last week. You ready for this? Here was the editorial headline that the Supreme Court of the United States is now acting outside of the majority opinion of Americans. Now I want you to let that just settle in for a moment. What was that editorial saying? That we should establish laws based on public opinion, not on what is right and/or what is wrong. What if the majority of Americans decide all of a sudden that murder is okay? Do we change our laws? What if all of a sudden we decided that this may be... You see, the problem is that there are "laws of this land" that go contrary to the lifestyle these people want to live and they say, "Oh, we must subject the laws to our opinion or our perspective." No, no, no. That's what we've done with scripture. What we've said today is, "Oh, did you know," this is being rhetorical, "Did you know that now the majority of humanity disagrees with what the Bible says about fill-in-the-blank? It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whether you agree with it or not. It doesn't matter whether I agree with it or not." In fact, I've got news for you: one day when you show up and meet God face-to-face, he's not going to care what the latest CNN poll says. He doesn't care. He's going to say, "But you don't understand. In the 21st century, it was a different day. It was a different time. We progressed. We advanced. We evolved." He's going to say, "I'm sorry. Till heaven and earth pass away when not jot or tittle shall pass away till all be fulfilled."

You see, the problem in our culture today is we've gone full circle. You say, "What do you mean we've gone full circle?" We've gone all the way back to the garden of Eden. You know isn't it funny that we think we're getting so much smarter? We think we're advancing so much but all we've done is gone back to the garden of Eden, we've allowed Satan to whisper in our ear God doesn't know what he's doing, he doesn't really mean what he said, and it's not going to happen the way he claims. And so what do we do? We look at whatever we want to participate in, we look at whatever we want to advocate in, we look at whatever we want to celebrate and we say, "You know, this looks really good. It's pleasing to the eyes. It will be good for food. This will make me a better person." What happens? We discover that after we participate, after we subject ourselves, we find ourselves in the same position Adam and Eve did. It says they realized they were naked. Now I know there's a lot of connotations there, but can I just walk down this one road before we close? Do you know what they realized? They made a horrible mistake is what they realized. No longer did they possess the attitude, the perspective that they once had, no longer did they have the home that they had resided in. Everything had changed.

You see, one of the greatest lies that Satan has tempted humanity with is that the momentary pleasure that whatever sin we so desire provides will not come with grave consequences after the fact. Adam and Eve fell into the trap, and today humanity is. You and I do not have the privilege of determining what the content of scripture is, what the intent of it is, or what the interpretation is, and particularly when it comes to verse 20, we don't have the right to say, "Well, this is what makes me right with God. As long as I feel good about myself or as long as others claim I'm in the right," whatever it may be. Jesus Christ made it very clear in the Sermon on the Mount that our righteousness, our standing with him, will never be determined on public opinion, it will never be determined on human declaration, it is always based on, "Thus saith the Lord." Let us not fall into the same trap, not just of today's world, but of the garden of Eden, consistently falling for the same tactic, the same temptation that yields the same results.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Tonight, as we come to our time of formal response, you know, it is Sunday evening and there may be someone here tonight, here in person or online who has yet to come to an understanding of their sin condition and their need to cry out to Jesus to save him. If that is you tonight, please do what the Bible says. The Bible not only says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, it also says that today is the day of salvation. But I understand that in this context and in this environment, there are many of us who were saved years ago, some of us decades ago, and if we were to be honest with ourselves, we subject ourselves to so much information and so many opinions that oftentimes we've allowed our environment around us to shape us more than the word of God that is before us. Maybe today is not about stepping out and stepping forward with a public decision of our walk with the Lord, but maybe tonight's one of those moments where we think back to the relationships that we interact with every day, the conversations that we have, the places we go, and reflect and say you know how much of this have I allowed the world to dictate, how much of this have I allowed populist opinion to dictate versus how much of this is exactly as the Lord has prescribed and described? Maybe today, this evening it's not about stepping out and

stepping forward, maybe it's more about going into the life the Lord has given us with a biblical perspective and not a populace opinion perspective.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, Lord, we confess that there is not much about tonight that pleases our flesh. God, we admit we're much like our forefathers, Adam and Eve, that when it comes to the things of this world, we crave what you condemn. God, oftentimes we condemn what you celebrate. So God, I pray tonight that you would take our mind, you would take our heart, you would take our totality and we would do as Romans 12:1-2 says, we would not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. By this time of response, not just be a response that may necessitate a public decision but may we put the proverbial stake in the ground and say this is what you've said and there is no other option. Help us today to come in conformity not with environment around us, but the word before us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*