

"SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES"

JOHN 5:39

THE CONVENTION SERMON

DELIVERED BY

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"SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES"

By Dr. Morris H. Chapman

I want to tell you...God has a word for Southern Baptists. That word is our chart and our compass. That word is our pillar of cloud by day and our pillar of fire by night. That word is our lamp and that word is our light. That word is pure and precious. That word is the full and final authority. Jesus was talking to religious scholars of His day and this is what He said in John 5:39. "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testified of me."

As He talked to these intelligent men, they counted every letter, weighed every word, scrutinized every sentence of the Scriptures. But for all of that they were still strangers to the truth. They had spent their lives searching the Scriptures but they had failed to find the Savior. What a waste! What a tragedy! Men have spent their lives in the pursuit of truth but they have found themselves in bondage to their own thoughts and their own theories. But I tell you the truth, the theories of men come and go but "the word of the Lord endureth forever."

You ask, "Why search the Scriptures?" The answer is to know the truth. Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word...ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). As we search the Scriptures I want us to see the permanence of God's Word.

I. **The Permanence of God's Word.** As Southern Baptists we must refocus our thoughts on that which is our issue, the holy, written Word of God. The Bible is it's

own best commentary and it builds verse by verse, truth upon truth. In Psalm 119:89, the Bible says, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.

Now what is settled in heaven ought to be settled on earth. What is settled with God ought to be settled with Southern Baptists. We have long said we have no creed but the Bible. We have said there is no need to defend the Bible, it needs no defense. I agree but we do need to defend how the Bible is represented to the people, by the people and for the people called Southern Baptists. We have no choice. Some talk about liberals and fundamentalists. Others talk about moderates and conservatives. Still others talk about the left and the right. But it is not a matter of the right turn or the left turn, it is a matter of the right turn or the wrong turn in the history of Southern Baptists.

J. Sidlow Baxter warned about the weakened condition of the modern church. He said, "The root cause is a defective attitude toward the Bible. If we are shaky there, we are shaky everywhere." He forecast division within denominations and in expressing his belief in the plenary inspiration of God's Word he said, "There will never be unity of purpose and action until there is unity of conviction about the Bible. That is not to limit the right of every man to interpret for himself what is in the Bible. There has never been complete uniformity of interpretation but there must be unity of attitude toward the Bible or there is simply no final authority."

From the depths of my heart I say to you that we will never get beyond the discord until we with one accord search the Scriptures. God is calling us to a collective

conviction and to a cooperative spirit. They should go like hand-in-glove. Dear folks, the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the very breath of God. The Bible is the infallible Word of God for God cannot lie and the Bible never misleads or deceives. The Bible is the inerrant Word of God because God breathed out His perfect Word. The Bible says, "The law of the Lord is perfect" (Ps. 19:7). All scripture is given by inspiration of God. When God breathed out the Bible, He breathed a perfect Word. Just as our Lord Jesus was conceived to be without sin, God's written Word, the Bible, was breathed upon this earth without error. When God decided to breathe out the Word without error, He breathed out the substance of Scripture. Whether or not we allow it to function in our hearts, God gave us the Bible without error and make no mistake about it, when He inspired the holy Word of God, He inspired not only the men, He inspired the very message.

In light of the permanence of God's Word, what must we do? We are to (1) profess the Word. Jesus said to those Pharisees, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me." (John 5:46) And He said, "If ye believe not Moses' writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:47) Now we know that Jesus had the highest respect and love for the Old Testament. He believed the Old Testament Scriptures implicitly. He quoted them constantly. He obeyed them perfectly. The Lord knows the way through the wilderness and that way is the Word of God. During His temptation in the wilderness He quoted from Deuteronomy. Three times Jesus said, "It is written."

In response to the first temptation, Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). "Every word of God is pure," it says in Proverbs (30:5). Never has there been a generation that more desperately needs the truth than our generation and we must raise up generation after generation of our young people to hear the Word, to heed the Word and to herald the Word to the next generation. In generations past some have said, "Thus saith Bruner." Others have said, "Thus saith Barth." Still others have said, "Thus saith Bultmann." But the Bible says, "Thus says the Lord God."

In recent months and years there has been a cry for us to return to our Southern Baptist heritage, our historic Baptist principles and practices. Therefore, I have a question. What did our forefathers intend in the establishment of colleges which would bear the Baptist brand? Now I know that Southern Baptists have only indirect influence upon our college campuses because they are supported by our state Baptist conventions but listen to what the Southern Baptist Convention said in The 1913 annual session in St. Louis. It comes from a report by the Christian Education Committee.

The report says, "If we hope to bring this world to the foot of the cross and the glory of the crown, let us not undervalue our work in Christian education. The denomination ought to have such control of its colleges as will make speedy correction possible when the college begins to verge from the doctrine or spirit of the New Testament." The report goes on to say, "The Baptist preacher who does not keep himself informed as to the educational interests of his denomination and who does not

take a deep, abiding and intelligent interest in the same, needs to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

In the convention session in 1922 in Jacksonville, Florida, the Report of the Committee on the Report of the Education Board said, "If textbooks cannot be found which are not destructive of the faith of the students in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, the teachers in such departments ought to be of such pronounced faith in the Bible and of such learning in their departments as to be able to so explain the defects of the textbooks as to magnify the message of the Bible rather than to discredit it."

In the 1925 annual session of the Convention, Southern Baptists spoke again saying, "Because we have solidified ourselves according to the beliefs of God's Holy Word, we need to find a way to cooperate together. We need to establish the distinctives of our faith." In that year was born our Baptist Faith and Message and in that year was born our Cooperative Program. From that day to this we have purposed to run on these parallel tracks of Biblical inerrancy and cooperative spirit and we must never stop or we shall be derailed. I thank God for the professors I had in my Baptist college, in my Baptist seminary and I want to say to the professors of this great Southern Baptist Convention, I love you and pray for you and encourage you as you teach the Word of God but I must remind us all that a professor is one who professes and there is nothing greater than to profess the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and as

Lord of our lives. Every professor in our Baptist colleges ought to be a Christian...born again into the Kingdom of God.

We are a people of the faith who believe in the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God and we need professors in our Baptist schools, seminaries and colleges who believe in the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. Isaac Newton said, "If all the great books of the world were given life and were brought together in one convention, the moment the Bible entered, all other books would fall on their faces."

On this day we must stay the course which was blazed in the past by our fathers in the faith. And our young people will have the joy of sitting at the feet of professors who believe in the historicity of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, in the miracles of the Old and New Testaments and in the virgin birth, the sinless life, the sacrificial, substitutionary death, the bodily resurrection and the literal return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Vance Havner said, "You can't tell it like it is, if you don't believe it like it was."

It is not uncommon for faith to flounder in the academic classrooms of higher education but let it not be so with those who are called Southern Baptists. Unwavering faith must forever flourish on the campuses of our Baptist schools. R. G. Lee once said, "We have the higher education, but it is evidently not high enough to get us where we ought to be. We have the new chemistry and the new psychology but they do not give us a new heaven and a new earth."

Do you want to know the importance of education, the right kind of education? You only need to read the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar had a plan to win over the allegiance of the most brilliant young people of Judah who had been captured by the Babylonian army. He determined to accomplish his scheme through education. He ordered Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah to be taught the language and the literature of the Babylonians. In other words, he attempted to undermine their faith.

He sought to confuse them, he changed their names because all of them in some way incorporated the name of the true God.

Daniel - El - Elohim

Hananiah - Ah - Yahweh

Mishael - El - Elohim

Azariah - Ah - Yahweh

Nebuchadnezzar said, "I'm changing your names" and Daniel became Belteshazzar, Hananiah became Shadrach, Mishael became Meshach and Azariah became Abednego. He sought to confuse them and he sought to compromise them. He attempted to get them to eat food which was against the levitical law under which they had been trained. But notice their defense. The Bible says, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself." (Daniel 1:8) Do you know why? Because these four young men, before Nebuchadnezzar ever got hold of them, were taught as boys to walk by faith and not by sight. They were men of conviction, they

were men of courage. And oh, dear Southern Baptists, we not only need our conviction, we need the courage of our convictions. There is nothing to lose and everything to gain.

These four stood before the king and their faith set them apart. The Bible says none was quite like them. They stood fast in the faith. But listen, I want you to notice the subtlety of Satan. Generations after generations later in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ we teach our children to sing the pagan names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. We still have the Babylonian gods at our doorstep. Let us sing about Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, those names of God.

In 1987, during the annual meeting of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools in Kansas City, Missouri, Dr. Denton Lotz, Deputy General of the Baptist World Alliance delivered the H. I. Hester Lectures. He said, "I believe the existence of a Christian or Baptist college has as its only reason for being to reclaim the minds of our country for Christ. The West will never be converted until the college is converted. And the college will never be converted until there is a radical rediscovery of the unity of all truth in Jesus Christ. A Baptist college has no right to exist as an institution of Christian education if it is not a servant of and responsible to the community of faith that nurtured founded it."

Our hope for world missions lies in our students who are worshipping in our churches and who are walking on our campuses. Yet the hour is late. Other world religions are pouring millions of dollars into Africa, Asia and South America to reach

people, especially young people, and to disciple them. But I believe we are poised and ready for the greatest mobilization of missionaries in human history.

We are to profess the Word and we are to (2) practice the Word. The Bible says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another" (Gal. 5:25-26). The Resolutions Committee considered a one year moratorium on resolutions this year. We have a greater need and that is a resolution, a moratorium on name-bashing and character assassination. This denomination is not a demolition derby. Conviction and compassion are not mutually exclusive. A person's conviction must never be compromised but they can be expressed in the spirit of unconditional love. Both absolute truth and unconditional love are born in the heart of God and must abide in the hearts of Southern Baptists.

We need more personal conferences with each other and fewer press conferences. We make our decisions in a democratic form of government. Much of our resolution can come by vote but our cooperative spirit must be built. We must not have friend against friend and brother against brother in spirit. And I know that there are some that have the spirit of fear but let me appeal to you. The Bible says, "God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). If there is any fear in your heart, hear the Word of the Lord, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:1). When that is accomplished, he says, "I will be exalted among the heathen,

I will be exalted in the earth" (Ps. 46:10). That phrase "be still" literally means "cease striving."

Well, I've shown you the permanence of God's Word. It is settled in heaven, it will endure forever. There is the Person of God's Word.

II. Person of God's Word. "They are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). Jesus and the Bible are inseparably linked together and when you love the written Word you'll love the living Word. When you love the living Word you'll love the written Word. The Person of the Word is our dear Lord Jesus Christ. In Revelation 19:13, the Bible says, "His Name is called the Word of God." Whose name? Jesus. Jesus is saying, "Search the Scripture and search again until you find the scarlet thread through the Bible."

There is the Person of the Word as well as the permanence of the Word and then there is the Power of the Word.

III. Power of the Word. Jesus said, "All power is given me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). We see Jesus as the Sovereign King, the Suffering Savior and the Compassionate Shepherd. (1) He is the Sovereign Power. The Bible says, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein: (Ps. 24:1). Listen, regardless of what we face, our Lord Jesus Christ reigns supreme. "He is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:17). Whether it is now or whether it is later, "every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all!" (1 Romans 14:11). I tell you Jesus Christ is Lord of all. He is Lord of heaven above, He is Lord of earth beneath, He is Lord of hell below.

To know the sovereign power of God we must every day guard against any personal pride that may come into our lives. We must surrender any desire for prominence, prestige, position or power. The words on our lips must be, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). He is the sovereign power and, (2) He is the saving power. As Abraham and Isaac marched up Mt. Moriah, Isaac asked his father, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Gen. 22:7) and in a trembling voice Abraham said, "The Lord will provide an offering" (Gen. 22:8) and that is the first mention of the lamb in all the Bible. And the question is raised, "Where is the Lamb?"

The Old Testament is a search for the Lamb. As lambs were laid upon the altars of sacrifice thousands upon thousands asked the question, "Where is the Lamb?" The question is not answered until you go through Matthew, Mark and Luke and you finally come to the gospel of John. For the first time in the New Testament the Lamb is mentioned. John the Baptist stood on the banks of the River Jordan and saw the Lord Jesus Christ coming and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). When Jesus died upon the bloodstained Cross of Calvary He paid for our sins.

Dear folks, let us tell the old, old story that Jesus saves. Southern Baptists, let us stand before those Jericho walls of doubt and disbelief and let all the people shout. Let all the people send out the great shout. Let all the people shout the sounds of salvation and the walls will fall down flat! God said in His Word, "My Word shall not return void. It shall prosper the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

(3) And He is the sustaining power..."The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Ps. 23). I don't know what you're facing but whatever the disappointment, whatever the discouragement, whatever the distress, whatever the depression, Jesus says, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Goodness takes care of our steps and mercy takes care of our stumbles and today we need a touch of glory. We need a touch from God and we need to pray "Restore unto us the joy of thy salvation" (Ps. 51:12).

The Spirit of God ignited the fires of revival in Wales one day in February 1903 at a youth church meeting. A little girl who had just been saved stood up and said, "I love the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart." Her unrehearsed testimony electrified the meeting and in three months 100,000 had come to Christ.

Jesus says, "Search the scriptures; for they are they which speak of me" (John 5 :39). And God's Word says, "Ye shall find me when ye search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). My dear brother and sister, God has the answer and we must be on our faces before God so that when we stand for our convictions we stand with an unconditional love that says to the world, "I love the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart." May it be so with each of us...with all of us.