Repeated Phrases of Jesus: "Truly I Tell You"
July 5, 2026

Today we begin a sermon series called: Repeated Phrases of Jesus. Now the rationale behind this sermon series is simple: It seems to me that if Jesus said something repeatedly, and if the Holy Spirit saw fit to move the Gospel writers to record it repeatedly, then this is a phrase that we would do well to examine and take to heart. Our focus verse for this morning's sermon, and our first "Repeated Phrase of Jesus"is (Matthew 5:18) For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (Revelation 7:12) "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

The first "Repeated Phrase of Jesus" we will consider in this sermon series is the phrase that brought the idea for this sermon series to my mind in the first place. As I was reading in the Gospels, I noticed that Jesus frequently said, "Truly I tell you." In the Gospel of John, John typically adds the word "very" to the phrase. He typically quotes Jesus as saying, "Very truly I tell you." That peaked my curiosity. I wondered just how often the gospel writers quoted Jesus saying those words, "Truly I tell you." So I opened my Bible Concordance and started counting. To my amazement, I found it 80 times in the four Gospels 80 times! Considering the fact that there are 89 total chapters in the four Gospels, that means that Jesus says this phrase on the average of about once-per-chapter. Why so often? Why does Jesus repeatedly say, "Truly I tell you." The Apostle John gives us the answer. John describes Jesus as the embodiment of God's Word.

(John 1:14 & 17) The Word [that is, Jesus] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Jesus himself reiterates that fact. (John 14:6) Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. And again, (John 18:37) Jesus answered, "... the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." By repeating the words "Truly I tell you," Jesus wasn't only trying to emphasize a specific teaching to his listeners. He was reiterating the fact that he was the Word of God embodied. He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophesies. He was the living representative of the truth of the almighty, eternal God.

When Jesus said, "Truly I tell you," he was reiterating the fact that he was the way and the truth and the life. And to prove that to his disciples and to us, he often said those words, "Truly I tell you" to underscore events that would happen shortly. For example, Jesus said the phrase when he had just performed his first miracle. He promised his disciples, very truly I tell you, you will see greater things than that and indeed, they did! Jesus said the words when speaking about the future destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. He said the phrase when revealing that one of his disciples would betray him, and when warning Peter that he would deny him. He said to them when telling the dying thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus said to them again after his resurrection when telling Peter that one day he would be martyred for Christ. And as the disciples reflected afterwards on these statements of Jesus,

preceded by Jesus' words "Truly I tell you," they were reminded again and again that Jesus was the embodiment of truth. As we had mentioned, the Gospel writers record Jesus' words, "Truly I tell you" 80 times. There is another related phrase that happens to be the second most repeated phrase of Jesus.

The second most repeated phrase of Jesus is, "It is written." Jesus is quoted as saying it or a similar phrase over 40 times in the Gospels. Which means that in the 89 chapters in the Gospels, either the phrases "Truly I tell you" or "It is written" appear on the average of almost 1 ½ statements per chapter. Which is why our focus verse is so appropriate to this discussion. Jesus says: (Matthew 5:18) For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Now understand that when Jesus said this, he was not just speaking about the many laws that God gave to Old Testament Israel. In both the Old and the New Testament, the word "Law" was used to denote, not just the laws of God, but all of the words of God as revealed to the prophets through the Holy Spirit. When Jesus said that not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished, he was speaking about all the words of God as revealed to Moses and the prophets. In other words, Jesus was saying that not a single word of God's Scriptures would ever fail. Not a single word would ever be false. Not a single word would ever be untrue. Not a single word would slip away unfulfilled. How can this be? Well, that leads us to a very important point.

The point is this: the Scriptures are not just some more writings of some dusty, old religious zealots. They aren't just the fancy musings of some ancient philosophers. They aren't just wonderful, historical writings reflecting the religious views of ancient Jews. They aren't just the words of men. They are the actual words of God. How can humans write the actual words of God? The Apostle Peter explains: (2 Peter 1:20-21) Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus is called the Word. That's why Jesus says, "Truly I tell you" so many times. That's why Jesus says, "It is written" so often. Because Jesus, because the Word incarnate, because God's Word is absolute truth.

Now here's an interesting statistic. According to the Barna Research Group, 7 out of 10 Americans don't believe in absolute truth. That's not a totally surprising statistic in this post-millennial world. But here's another one that may be. According to the Barna Research Group, 4 out of 10 Christians don't believe there is absolute truth. That means that 4 out of 10 Christians don't believe that the Bible is absolute truth. That statistic should not only surprise you, it should shock you to your very core. How can those who claim to follow Christ, refuse to accept his word as absolute truth?

But yet, we are also guilty of doubting the integrity of the Scriptures. Perhaps we doubt the concepts that seem to be at odds with popular opinion (like creation, the exodus through the desert, or the miracles of Jesus). Perhaps we doubt the words of the Bible that speak about things beyond our comprehension (like the Trinity, the dual nature of Jesus, eternity, or the end of the world). Almost certainly we doubt the Scriptural words that are at odds

with our personal opinions (perhaps like the roles of men and women, moral principles, damnation of the uninformed, yes, perhaps even the inerrancy of Scripture). And we surely don't like those words that point out our faults, our flaws. In fact, the Bible uses a very politically incorrect term.

The Bible, God's absolute truth, talks about "sin." Not only does it talk about it in general, but it talks about it specifically affecting every one of us. (1 Kings 8:46) " ... there is no one who does not sin. (Romans 3:23) all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And the Bible also talks specifically about the result of that sin for all of us. (Isaiah 59:2) But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Ezekiel 18:4) The soul who sins is the one who will die. Not only do we sin by disobeying God's 10 Commandments, but we also sin when we doubt the truth of God's word. Jesus has some very strong words for those who doubt his words, for those who doubt any of God's words.

(John 8:43-47) Jesus said to them, "... Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ... If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

Jesus' message is very straight-forward. Either we accept the words of Jesus, or we don't. If we do, we are listening to God. If we don't, then we are listening to the devil. If we do, then we belong to God. If we don't, we belong to Satan. Jesus says, God says, "Truly I tell you" so don't fool around with my Word." My Word is absolute authority. My Word is absolute power. My Word is absolute truth.

People who pilot small airplanes can receive two different certifications on their license. Either the pilots are certified VFR, "visual flight rating" or they are certified IFR, "instrument flight rating." Only pilots with an "instrument flight rating" are authorized to fly at night or in bad weather conditions. The reason? Because at those times, at night or in bad weather, only instruments can be trusted. Eyesight, balance, and other senses will deceive a pilot. In the same way, our emotions or intellect can deceive us in the darkness and storms of life. In those times of peril, we need something we can rely on, something we can trust implicitly, or we run the risk of disaster. When our marriage is crumbling, or our health is failing, or our child is sick, or our parent is dying, or our employment situation is tenuous, or our paycheck isn't keeping up with our bills. When storms are buffeting us, when darkness is surrounding us, when we can’t see, and we don't know which way to go, what course to take. When we see no solution, and very little hope. We turn to our instrument panel. We look to our source of absolute unwavering truth. We trust the one who says repeatedly "Truly I tell you" and “It is written.” We remember that, (Psalm 119:105) Your word, [O Lord], is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. We remember what Jesus said, (Matthew 5:18) Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

And not only is God's Word a comfort to us when struggling with the difficulties of life.

God's Word is the greatest comfort of all to us when we face our sin, and the consequences of our sin. As Paul tells us, (Romans 15:4) For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. As John tells us, (John 20:31) But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. As Jesus himself tells us, Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (John 8:51) Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death." (John 6:47) Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has everlasting life. (John 5:24) "Very Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

That's why Jesus came to earth. Not only to testify to the truth, but to LIVE the truth. He came to fulfill all the prophecies that spoke about him. Ultimately, he came to be God's holy Sacrifice for the sins of the world. To give his life as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" by his death on the cross. The Holy-Spirit-inspired Scriptures show us our redeeming Savior all throughout their pages. Jesus said over and over again, "Truly I tell you" because he was the Word incarnate. And he said over and over, "It is written" because God's Word is the source of absolute truth.

What is the obvious conclusion? Accept the truth! Acknowledge once-and-for-all that if God's Word says it, then it is truth! This takes so much stress out of life. This is so incredibly comforting. Though humans tend to rebel against absolutes, the truth of the matter is that we do better when we have absolutes. We are more comfortable. More sure of ourselves. More content. More happy when we have absolutes. Well, Brothers and Sisters, recognize that in Jesus, the Word, we have absolute truth. Recognize, and rejoice that the Scriptures are absolutely true. And find in them the answers to your questions – the answers to life, and death, and eternity. As Jesus said "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)