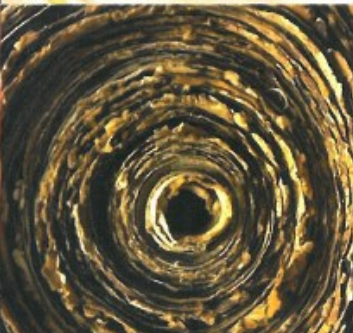


Discovering a
*Living
Treasure*

by
Josh D. McDowell



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Talk about a tense moment. I was nervous, really nervous. With eyes shut, I prayed again that God would allow our ministry to possess what we dearly hoped for—at least one small fragment of an ancient New Testament manuscript. We had just acquired some 1600-year-old Egyptian artifacts in the hope that hidden within them we would find ancient copies of Scripture. We had waited for two days while experts carefully dismantled the pieces, and the moment of truth had now arrived.



It was December 6, 2013. Our ministry had organized an unprecedented event in Plano, Texas that brought together highly specialized scholars in ancient languages, including Coptic and Greek. Coptic was the last stage of the written Egyptian language after the Greeks conquered Egypt. The writings beneath these artifacts would probably be either of the Greek or Coptic language. I was seated no more than fifteen feet from the table at which trained specialists had been doing their work for hours. It was not so much the actual artifacts themselves that interested me; it was the fact that their infrastructure was made of layers of papyri dating between the 3rd century BC and the 5th century AD. These experts had been tediously extracting and identifying the papyri from these rare Egyptian burial artifacts, and I was waiting—as patiently as I could—to learn whether what they found would be of a biblical nature.

Dr. Scott Carroll, an ancient manuscript specialist, was ready to announce the findings. He was surrounded by a gallery of about 200 “invitation only” Christian apologists and leaders who were participating and watching to see what was about to be revealed. The moment of truth was about to arrive.



Delaying the Moment of Truth

As I sat there in nervous anticipation of what Scott and his team was about to uncover, my thoughts went back to how I got there. Scott was the one who had previously arranged my acquisition of a Hebrew Torah, which I named the Lodz Torah.

It was a 540-year-old scroll of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. I had been displaying it during my speaking engagements. It helped me explain how Scripture was truly reliable in ways I had never dreamed possible. The audience response, especially from young people, was amazing. The teaching value of the Lodz Torah led me to pray that God would allow our ministry to obtain an ancient New Testament manuscript. Displaying such an artifact to thousands upon thousands of young people and adults alike would bring them face to face with the reality of the written truth about Christ and his life-transforming message. So I naturally thought of Scott as the person to locate a manuscript for us.

We had first met Scott two years earlier at a small seminar at Baylor University where he was carefully dismantling papyri from the inside structure of an ancient Egyptian mummy covering (called cartonnage). He had developed his own proprietary methods for this exacting process that had led to extraordinary discoveries of ancient classical and biblical texts. The papyri we watched him extract were for the Green Collection which Scott was directing at the time. He had helped that group amass a collection of over 50,000 ancient artifacts, papyri, and parchments valued into the millions of dollars. If anyone could locate an ancient New Testament fragment for us, it was Scott Carroll.

I was fascinated by Scott's work. His research and many contacts within the field of ancient and medieval manuscript study gave him a unique understanding of what to look for. Rather than searching for manuscripts at archaeological dig sites, Scott sought to legally obtain ancient cartonnage with an infrastructure made largely of discarded papyri.

Papyrus, of course, is the papyry substance people wrote on during the time of Christ. Once a papyrus began to deteriorate or the writing started to

fade, it was copied onto a new papyrus and the original was discarded. This was true of the apostles' writings as well. But the ancients did not live in a throw-away society as we do today. Nothing that could be used again or repaired was ever trashed. People often gathered up discarded pieces of papyrus to, in effect, recycle them. They would dampen them and press them together to form various items.

The Egyptian burial artifacts I saw Scott dismantling at Baylor were made of pressed layers of papyri. Egyptian mortuary priests used discarded papyri to form a papier mâché, which they used as the infrastructure of mummy coverings or other objects. They would sometimes cover the papyrus mold with plaster and then paint it with silver or gold. To visualize the process, think of tearing the pages out of a worn book, wetting them down, and then pasting them on the face of a department store mannequin, shaping the nose, brow, lips and ears to the form beneath. Then after the paper dries, lacquer and paint the form in flesh colors, and you have a mask. Beyond mummy coverings this papier mâché technique was also used to create various decorative panels, reinforcements for book covers and bindings, and even household items.



Our ministry commissioned Scott Carroll to find one or more of these reconstituted items in hopes of discovering biblical writings on the papyri from which the papier mâché was made.

Scott spent months of research and traveled thousands of miles scouring ancient structures and sites in a number of countries. The search took time, mainly because Scott would not deal in the black market. He insisted on obtaining everything legally, and I fully concurred. Finally, however, he reported back to me.

"Josh, I have looked at over 100 artifacts and have found what I believe may be an amazing discovery."

"I'm listening," I replied.

"Well, I can't guarantee it," Scott continued, "but I found ancient artifacts that I believe date back to the 4th to 5th century AD. They come from an area that tells me there is a good probability of having biblical papyri within them."

My heart began to beat faster and faster as Scott related his findings. I swallowed hard and asked, "What's the next step?"

"You give me the go ahead," Scott responded, "and I'll make the owner an offer. I think we can get them for the price we discussed."

I told Scott to acquire it all. My mind began to race as he made the arrangements to get the hidden treasures that I felt confident would be used to advance God's kingdom. Imagine if the artifacts produced just one papyrus fragment of the book of Matthew or John or any New Testament passage. That was all I needed. It would be a powerful illustration to kids and parents alike, showing how God's truth was carefully passed from one generation to another. I wanted them to know that just as parents and grandparents passed down Bibles through the generations, ancient Christian parents revered these handwritten copies from the apostles and wanted their children to know the truth about Jesus. My hopes were up. My long-awaited dream was about to come true. Or so I thought.

Talk About Disappointed!

I felt the buzz of the cell phone on my belt. It was a call from Scott. I felt sure he was going to tell me he was on a flight back from Europe with the artifacts in hand. Instead he relayed the bad news that another collector had stepped in and acquired every artifact I had authorized Scott to obtain.

Talk about disappointed! I felt my heart sink to my stomach. I learned later that those artifacts yielded early biblical papyri that were truly valuable and rare. I thought to myself: *Those were supposed to be ours!* I was heartsick. I tried to console myself by saying there were other artifacts out there. But the bitter taste of disappointment lingered.

Weeks passed. Scott kept at it and eventually reported back from Europe that he had found some ancient artifacts that he felt were worth obtaining. It included two mummy funeral masks, two pressed papyrus panels, and a pressed papyri roll. I said, "Let's get it all right now!"

24 Hours to the Moment of Truth

Rather than rushing to extract the papyrus from these ancient artifacts, Scott and our ministry decided to make an experience out of it so that other people could learn from the process. So we invited 250 apologists, Christian

leaders, lay people, and highly specialized scholars in ancient languages to what would become the “Discover the Evidence” event.

The event was scheduled for December 5 and 6, 2013. On the first morning, a major ice storm hit Dallas. The roads iced over and the electricity in the event building went out. It seemed that someone didn’t want this meeting to happen. I wouldn’t say I was a nervous wreck, but I was certainly anxious. Would the ancient language scholars make it in? Would any of the specially invited guests make it? I tried to stay calm and prayed that God’s will would be done so that he would be honored.

To everyone’s surprise, about 90 percent of the speakers and participants made it in. The electric power came back on and we started the event, albeit an hour late.

The whole idea of the event was to allow others to be a part of this unique, even historic, experience. We would all be present and have opportunities to watch as scholars and experts actually went through the painstaking process of deconstructing and identifying the contents of ancient cartonnages. Imagine watching and participating in the unveiling of ancient classical or biblical texts that had not seen the light of day for a thousand or two thousand years or longer. Perhaps we had a classical text that had never been discovered before. Or maybe a biblical text would surface that was the oldest to date. No one really knew what we might find within these ancient artifacts. The process would not be complete until the second day, so to round out the event we had scheduled experts in the field of translating and preserving biblical texts to speak.

I was highly interested in hearing the speakers, of course. But I could hardly wait until later in the second day when the dismantling of the artifacts was complete and the scholars told us what we had. Meanwhile, I settled in and looked forward to what the various speakers had to say.



One of the speakers was Dr. Peter Flint, Director of the Dead Sea Scrolls Institute at Trinity Western University in British Columbia. He shared that he spent years in Israel editing and/or co-editing almost thirty Dead Sea Scrolls for publication.

As he spoke I was struck anew by how God had supernaturally preserved his Word over the centuries. Dr. Flint explained that practically every modern English translation was based on a single Hebrew manuscript known as the Leningrad Codex dating to 1009 AD.

What is amazing, he pointed out, is how a relatively recent discovery confirmed the accuracy and reliability of that Hebrew text. That manuscript discovery, the greatest of modern times, occurred in a set of caves near an ancient site called Qumran.

Almost 1,050 scrolls have been identified so far, including approximately 300 classified as biblical. And these scrolls, now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, date from 250 BC to 68 AD. That means we now have Hebrew manuscripts that date over 1,250 years earlier than the Masoretic text (The Leningrad Codex) that was used to translate our English Old Testament.

The big question, Dr. Flint pointed out, is how the Leningrad Codex, upon which our Old Testament translations are based, matches up to the earlier Dead Sea Scrolls. Using an overhead projector he placed a transparency of the Leningrad Codex text over the same biblical text of the Dead Sea Scrolls. We could clearly see that there was a near-perfect match. But there were also differences.

Dr. Flint explained that our present Hebrew Old Testament is identical, word for word, in more than 95 percent of the text. He further explained that 4 percent of the differences consist mainly of spelling variations. For example, of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen letters were in question. Of those, ten letters were a matter of spelling, and four were simply stylistic changes. This left only three letters in question. Dr. Flint stated emphatically, "The Dead Sea Scrolls confirm that your Bible was handed down 99 percent accurately and faithfully." He then went on to elaborate about that 1 percent difference.

He asked us to look at Psalm 22. The writers of the Gospels refer to this Psalm as a prophecy of Christ's crucifixion. In verse 16 most English translations read, "My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and feet" (Psalm 22:16). This obviously refers to Christ being nailed to the cross by the Roman soldiers. But Dr. Flint pointed out that critics challenge that rendering, and rightfully so. Some later Hebrew manuscripts of verse 16 do use the word "pierced," but the earliest and considered the more accurate Leningrad Codex renders verse 16 as, "a pack of evil ones close in on me like a lion on my hands and feet."

The critics point out that translators ignored the more accurate Hebrew words and inserted a reference to Jesus into the text because they wanted it to be a prophecy of Christ's crucifixion. "But the question is," Dr. Flint asked, "what words did the Dead Sea Scroll use when copying verse 16?"

He continued, "Look at Psalm 22:16 of the Dead Sea Scroll. I translated this passage myself. There it is." The words appeared on the overhead. "This is the oldest copy of Psalm 22 in the world. And it says, 'Dogs have surrounded me, a band of evil ones have encircled me; they have pierced my hands and feet' Isn't that amazing?"

I sat there as chills went up my spine. I was looking at a projection of the oldest known copy of Psalm 22, and it confirmed that King David did in fact prophecy the crucifixion of Jesus just as Mark, John, and Matthew had affirmed. The critics were wrong. The Hebrew manuscripts that our Old Testament is translated from are in fact accurate!



During the second day of the event, the day I would learn what treasure was beneath our ancient cartonnage, Father Columba Stewart spoke. He is the Executive Director of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library at Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. He explained how he and his colleagues are dedicated to the protection and photographing of ancient manuscripts around the world. His ministry has been instrumental in photographing over 40,000 manuscripts. He described the dangers of going into war-torn countries where terrorists are prevalent. I was amazed to learn that by coordinating local teams, this ministry is still preserving about 5,000 manuscripts a year.

We also heard from Dr. Dan Wallace, a New Testament Greek scholar and Executive Director of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts. His ministry too has been dedicated to the preservation of biblical manuscripts. He has focused specifically on digitally photographing all surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts and posting them free online so that scholars can research them. I was impressed and encouraged when Dr. Wallace made this definitive and bold statement: "In the last 130 years, there has not been a single authentic manuscript discovery that has produced a new or different reading for the New Testament."



Just think—there have been thousands of New Testament fragment discoveries within the last ten years, some dating earlier than what was used to translate our current English New Testaments. But like that of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the new finds only confirm the accuracy and reliability of our New Testament.

The Moment of Truth Finally Arrived!

After lunch on the second day, we all gathered back in the “examination room.” Scott and his colleagues had worked through lunch to carefully extract the papyri from the cartonnage and had identified a number of pieces. This was the moment I had been waiting for. I sat some fifteen feet from the table that had papyri fragments laid out all over it. Language scholars were huddled over them with magnifying glasses.

As the crowd settled in, Dr. Scott Carroll cleared his voice. “Let me start with Josh’s stuff,” he said. I was trying to be calm. My grandson was sitting on my lap. Dottie, my wife, was seated to my right and one of my colleagues to my left. Scott had a pair of tweezers in his hand. He carefully picked up a papyrus fragment and looked toward me. I took a deep breath.

“Here is a paraphrase of the gospels—a biblical Coptic text—4th century.” My colleague took hold of my arm and said nothing. I simply took another deep breath, looked toward the ceiling, and whispered, “Yes! Thank you Lord!”

Scott set the fragment down and picked up another. “Here is a second text from the Gospel of Mark, 3 lines... Very nice biblical unsealed uncial text.” He repeated this process again and again. After all the identification and analysis was done, God had allowed me and our ministry to become the owners, rather stewards, of possibly six ancient New Testament passages and one Old Testament manuscript fragment—seven treasures in all! (Each must be vetted, researched, and published.) These included a manuscript fragment from Jeremiah 33, which I learned was one of three of the earliest known Coptic papyri of this passage in existence today; manuscripts of Mark 15, John 14, Matthew 6 and 7, and 1 John 2—possibly all the earliest papyri record of these passages in any language in existence today; and Galatians 4, which dates as one of the earliest known papyrus passages ever recorded. I was utterly elated!

I walked to the table and gazed at these tan-colored fragments, and then I lightly touched them. A wave of emotion swept over me. God had actually answered my prayers. It reminded me of the wave of emotion I felt when for the very first time I set eyes on an ancient biblical manuscript—and the dramatic impact it had on me.

Coptic Manuscript Findings



1 John 2:21



John 14:28



Matthew 7:4



Jeremiah 33:24



Galatians 4:17



Matthew 6:33



Mark 15:9

It was over fifty years ago. I was nineteen years old at the time and quite a skeptic. My skeptic's quest led me to the Glasgow University Library in Glasgow, Scotland. I had left college with the intent to disprove Christianity—specifically to show that the New Testament was historically unreliable and that Jesus Christ could not have been the resurrected Son of God.

I stood gazing at a rare Egyptian collection that had been excavated from the rubbish heaps of the ancient Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus. As I stood before the glass case housing fragments of papyri from the second to sixth century AD, my eye caught a portion of the Gospel of John. How strange that here I was over fifty years later, again looking at a text of the Gospel of John, only this time with a totally different attitude. I was humbled that God was about to allow me to share this treasure and other passages with the world.

Visiting Scotland as a rebellious teenager, I was far from humble. My arrogance had gotten the better of me. I was out to prove to a group of Christian students that their faith in Christ and the Bible was both foolish and unfounded. When I scoffed at them, they challenged me to examine the evidence that the Bible was reliable and that Christ was who he claimed to be. I accepted that challenge in pride, and my journey began in Glasgow.

I made my way from the libraries and museums of Scotland to the English libraries of Cambridge, Oxford, and Manchester. I examined and studied the ancient manuscripts housed there, including the earliest known manuscripts of the New Testament. Before my journey was over I spent months researching at the universities in Germany, France, and Switzerland. After devouring dozens of books and speaking with leading scholars, I ended up at the Evangelical Library on Chiltern Street in London. It was about 6:30 in the evening when I pushed the many books aside that were gathered around me. Leaning back in my chair, I stared up at the ceiling and spoke these words aloud without even thinking: "It's true!" I repeated them two more times. "It's true. It really is true!"

A flood of emotions swept over me as I realized the biblical record of Christ's life, death, and resurrection was recorded accurately and was in fact true. I could no longer reject the truth of Christ and be intellectually honest with myself. The impact of that reality was truly a defining moment for me. I realized I was not rejecting Christ for any intellectual reason, but for emotional reasons. I was slowly coming to grips with my rebellion and hatred toward my alcoholic father. I began to realize my life of sin was standing between me and a loving God who sent his Son to die in my place. The profound meaning of those ancient manuscripts brought me face to face with the person of Truth, and his name was Jesus.

The Power of a Papyrus Fragment

Thinking back, I realized that the bombshell epiphany that exploded in my mind in that London Library had been set up earlier in a Scotland library when I saw a small, ancient fragment of papyrus written with words that had been inspired by God himself. Seeing that fragment of John led me to realize that a real person had copied that text for an important reason. The writer, more accurately the copier, obviously felt that the message in that book was so valuable that it had to be passed on to the next generation.

It dawned on me that these handwritten manuscripts were copied by people who wanted to tell the story—the Good News—of Jesus. Behind each ancient manuscript copy of Scripture was a person who had carefully and reverently copied each word, letter for letter. The ink placed on each papyrus seemed to reach out to me and say, “The truth of these words about Jesus Christ has given others new life. They are written for you too. Will you believe in Christ and experience a new life in him?”

That is the message the apostle John wrote on papyri centuries before. When John realized who Jesus really was, he committed his experiences to writing and explained why he did it: “Jesus’ disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life” (John 20:30-31). There was power in these handwritten words, and there still is today.

The power of those papyrus fragments and other ancient manuscripts I encountered on my quest so many years ago brought me to an inescapable conclusion: the scriptural writings were reliable, Christ was who he claimed to be, and he rose from the grave to give me eternal life in relationship with him. And now, over fifty years later, here I stood in front of seven powerful Scripture fragments that God was going to allow me to share with the world.

Think of it. These were no ordinary fragments with mere writing on them. These were handwritten words copied around 350 AD from other copies of letters from the apostle Paul, John, Mark, and Matthew. I was awed when I realized that at that time these important documents were not yet even officially recognized by a church council as the inspired words of God! The New Testament wasn’t canonized until the councils of Hippo in AD 393 and Carthage in AD 397.

Then why were these letters and writings still being copied some 250 years or so after they were originally written? The answer is truly significant.

The Coptic Christians in Egypt recognized that there was something supernaturally powerful about these writings. As they read the words, they sensed the presence of God himself. An official church body may not have yet declared these writings as Holy Scripture. But they sensed that they were in fact "God-breathed." The Holy Spirit of God spoke from these pages. Paul the apostle had clearly stated in his Galatians letter, "I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12). And these Egyptian parents and leaders realized that God himself was alive in the words they had copied and preserved.

There would have been no other compelling reason for these Egyptian believers to keep copying Matthew's writings, those of John, Mark, Paul, etc. except that they knew in their hearts they were reading a living treasure prepared by men sent from God. They were aware, like the Hebrew writer said, "The Word of God is alive and powerful" (Hebrews 4:12). And as I touched the words penned onto each papyrus fragment, I too realized that what our ministry had in its possession was a treasure that was miraculously "alive and powerful."

It seems clear that God's hand has been in all this. And it's been thrilling. But there seemed to be something additionally profound about what God was granting to our ministry through these ancient Scripture fragments. I couldn't put my finger on it until a friend shared something with me. When I saw it, chills went up my spine.

Let me explain. There is still a lot of work to do. These fragments have to be analyzed by scholars and then published. This could take up to 4 years.

A Profound Affirmation of God's Ministry

God had previously granted us a Hebrew Torah. Now added to that were seven papyrus fragments which would powerfully reinforce to young people and adults around the world that God's Word is supernaturally inspired and absolutely reliable. But it seemed that God wanted to grant us something additional. He apparently wanted to affirm something about what I had been doing for over fifty years. There was something about these seven specific fragments that I wasn't quite prepared for or could ever have anticipated. When a friend pointed this out to me, I could hardly believe it. It's still hard for me to believe.

What I'm about to share does not mean God is validating "our" ministry. This is about HIS ministry, of which he has allowed me to be a part. I couldn't be doing what I'm doing without God's power and strength.

As a young man I had a lot stacked against me—a home torn apart by alcoholism and anger, the childhood trauma of sexual abuse, my struggles with feelings of inferiority that came out in stuttering speech—yet God took the weak things in my life and made them strong through him. Over time I learned to know where I've come from and understand that had it not been for God's grace in my life, I would be nothing at all. Yet I learned to embrace God's words to Paul as my own when he said, "My power works best in your weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). And while "my" ministry is weak in my strength, HIS ministry is strong in HIS strength. I consider the following a profound affirmation of God's ministry to the world.

A friend laid out the seven passages God has allowed us to obtain and helped me connect the dots. He pointed out that each fragment is from a passage or is within the context of a chapter that underscores the message I have been about all my ministry life. When I saw it I was taken aback. It was as if God was saying, "You now have the living treasure I meant for you to discover. Someone took the cartonnage you thought you wanted but, as in the life of Joseph, I 'turned into good what [others] meant for evil' (Genesis 50:20). I have allowed you, Josh, to obtain certain passages of my Word for a purpose. These fragments record my message from my Word that you have been sharing for over fifty years, and I want to say to you loud and clear: *keep spreading that message around the globe until the whole world hears!*"

Read with me what these seven biblical manuscripts communicate:

1. We now have a fragment of possibly the earliest known papyrus with these words from the apostle Matthew quoting Jesus: "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (Matthew 6:33).

This passage and others is what I turn to when I face disappointments in life. God apparently wanted me to know that he was giving me everything I needed even though it didn't always seem like it at first. This passage represents the "God who is passionate about his relationship with you [and me]" (Exodus 34:14). The theme of all my past relational messages spanning over 50 years has been "Seek God and his ways morally, ethically and in all your relationships and God will give you what you need because he is your loving provider and protector."



Matthew 6:33

Obtaining the ancient fragment of Matthew 6 is like God saying to me, *"Keep speaking this message for me until the whole world hears."*

2. We now have possibly the earliest known Coptic papyrus with these words from the prophet Jeremiah: "Have you noticed what people are saying? – 'The Lord chose Judah and Israel and then abandoned them! They are sneering and saying that Israel is not worthy to be counted as a nation'" (Jeremiah 33:24).



Jeremiah 33:24

Even though the wayward nation of Israel was being judged, God gave them a promise. The context and theme of Jeremiah 33 is found just prior to verse 24. "For this is what the Lord says: David will have a descendent sitting on the throne of Israel forever" (Jeremiah 33:17). This fragment of Jeremiah is declaring that a Messiah will come; he will not reject his people. "Instead, I will restore them to their land and have mercy on them" (Jeremiah 33:26).

Throughout my years of ministry, I have been speaking on Messianic prophecy and sharing the evidence that the one prophesied in Jeremiah and Isaiah was born in Bethlehem of a virgin, was called Jesus—the Son of God—and will reign on the throne of David forever.

Obtaining the ancient fragment of Jeremiah 33 is like God saying to me, *"Keep speaking this message for me until the whole world hears."*

3. We now have possibly the earliest known papyrus of these words from the apostle John: "I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it" (1 John 2:21, NIV). "Who is a liar? Anyone who says Jesus is not the Christ...I am writing these things to warn you about those who want to lead you astray" (vs. 22, 26).
4. We also have one of the earliest known papyri with these words from the apostle Paul: "Those false teachers are so eager to win your favor, but their intentions are not good" (Galatians 4:17).



1 John 2:21

Ever since I began my ministry I have warned young people and adults that there are false teachers who claim Jesus was just a good teacher but not the divine Son of God. I have spoken thousands of times, offering the evidence that Jesus had to be who he claimed to be – God in the flesh.



Galatians 4:17

Obtaining these ancient fragments of 1 John 2 and Galatians 4 is like God saying to me, *"Keep speaking this message for me until the whole world hears."*

5. We now have possibly the earliest known papyri with these words from Jesus: "How can you think of saying, 'Friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye" (Matthew 7:4).



Matthew 7:4

This is a passage I have been speaking on for decades. It is a message to help Christians realize that God has given his church a way to judge rightly what is true and false, what is right and wrong.

Obtaining this ancient fragment of Matthew 7 is like God saying to me, *"Keep speaking this message for me until the whole world hears."*

6. We now have possibly the earliest known papyrus with these words from the apostle John quoting Jesus: "Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again" (John 14:28).



John 14:28

7. We also have possibly the earliest known papyrus with these words from Mark quoting Pilate: "Would you like me to release to you this 'King of the Jews?'" (Mark 15:9).



Mark 15:9

A key part of my ministry from the very beginning has been to provide evidence of Christ's death and resurrection. These two fragments are within the context of Jesus being turned over to be crucified and his lengthy explanation to his followers that Pilate had no power over him. He explained in this John 14 passage that he is the way, the truth and the life, and after he was raised from the dead he would go to prepare a place for us and return so we can live with him forever. I have spoken on this resurrection and salvation message thousands of times and it has been part of our ministry from day one.

Obtaining these ancient fragments of Mark 15 and John 14 is like God saying to me, *"Keep speaking this message for me until the whole world hears."*

These ancient manuscript fragments were an astonishing discovery. God permitted us to obtain these living treasures to help young people realize his Word was God-inspired and historically reliable. But what is equally astonishing to me are the passages themselves. I would have never imagined that these seven passages would represent what I have been about all my ministry life. The message written on these papyri fragments is what I have shared thousands of times in person with millions of people. And I am awestruck that God has allowed our ministry to discover these very specific passages. Some might say that is a coincidence. I see it as a rallying call from God to keep doing what I'm doing. In part, that is why I am teaming up with my son Sean to share these messages for the next three years and beyond.

Raising Up Heroic Truth Champions

Today's Christian families and Christian gatekeepers of young people face an enormous challenge. The studies show that currently young people are growing up, heading off to college, and not returning to the church. David Kinnaman of Barna Research Group claims that within ten years of adulthood, most young people professing to be a Christian will walk away from the church and put whatever commitment they make to Christ on the shelf! Many kids from good Christian homes and churches are not embracing the faith of their fathers and mothers. A major study shows that the number one reason kids say they are rejecting the tenets of the Christian faith is intellectual skepticism.²

When kids were asked why they were skeptical about Christianity, their answers included statements like: "It didn't make sense to me;" "Some stuff is too farfetched for me to believe in;" "I think scientifically there is no real proof;" and "There were too many questions that can't be answered." But the most prevalent comment was, "No one would answer my questions."³

Sean and I are teaming up in an effort to give our kids and their parents answers. We will be conducting a Friday night, all day Saturday event for parents and their kids called the Heroic Truth Experience. We will have the ancient Lodz Torah and New Testament manuscript fragments with us. We will help a generation realize that God has given us a reliable and trusted Bible. We will dig deep into the questions kids are facing in a skeptical and anti-Christian culture. We will cover questions about God, creation, how you can know what is true, and a host of issues designed to equip your kids to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you wave" (1 Peter 3:15, NIV). We must not allow the world to reason our kids out of their faith. For more details about these events, go to www.heroictruth.com.

These are challenging times, yet God is alive and present in this generation. He wants our young people to know not only what they believe, but why they believe it. Yet he wants them to go beyond mere belief to living his truth out in their everyday lives. That is what you want for your kids as well.

The ancient manuscripts God has allowed us to be stewards of belong not simply to us, but also to the Body of Christ. We want to share them with you. We want your kids to understand that God's Word is a living treasure that is meant to live in our hearts. You can claim the promise for your family that God made to Israel when he said, "I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people" (Hebrews 8:10).

God's words are alive and powerful. They are a living treasure he has gifted to each of us. Allow his words to saturate your mind. Allow him to write them on your heart. And then pass them on to your family, to your neighbors, and to an entire generation until the whole world hears!

¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 74.

² Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 89.

³ *Ibid.*

These newly discovered Coptic manuscript fragments are awaiting further research and publication. I would not use these discoveries authoritatively until they have been vetted. (possibly 2-4 years)

The photos have been purposely obscured to protect copying of manuscripts before their publication



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