

Week 5 - The Basis for Belief - 2Peter 1:16-21

Scripture Reading: Luke 9:28-36

Introduction

Imagine you're sitting at home one day when the doorbell rings

And when you open the door, you see two nicely dressed and well-groomed young men smiling at you

They introduce themselves, and you discover that they are representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons here to talk to you about their faith

As they talk, you are impressed because they know their stuff

They talk about Jesus and use all the same words you've heard many times at church, and they seem to know the Bible better than you do

But the reality is, they have a completely different view of Jesus and salvation, and what they believe is entirely at odds with what is taught in the Bible

For instance, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus, while noteworthy, is a created being and a lesser, though mighty, god and that during his incarnation, he was a mere human and not God in human flesh

They also believe that the Second Coming of Christ was an invisible, spiritual event that happened in 1914

Mormons believe that Jesus is our spiritual brother who was born a spirit child of God

Consequently, Mormon faith is never directed toward the deity of Christ and his complete atonement on the cross for the sins of the world

Instead, faith is more works-based and considered to be a proper response to what Christ commands rather than demonstrated trust in his ability to save

Those are just a few of the differences between those two faiths and biblical Christianity

Still, by all appearances, what they believe seems to be working for them

After all, they seem to be moral, well-adjusted, and sincere, so how do you know they aren't right?

We can quickly get into trouble when the only basis we have is our personal experience because others can claim similar experiences of lives changed by placing their faith in other places

And, if the ones I've dealt with at my front door are typical, they make a strong case with how they present themselves

So, how do you know that what you believe is true? In other words, what is the basis for your belief?

That's the issue that Peter turns his attention to in the verses we will be considering this morning

Remember, Peter's original audience was facing persecution from outside the church and now were facing false teaching from within the church

And Peter's purpose in writing this second letter was to ground his readers in the knowledge of the truth of God's Word

To give them a solid basis for their belief so that they would be able to stand firm against the false teaching that was primarily centered on denying the bodily return of Christ to judge the world

We will see this spelled out when we get to chapter 3 as we read the following in verse 4 [2Peter 3:4]–

They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

That is the argument lurking behind the scenes as Peter turns his attention to the body of the letter

And Peter refutes it in the verses before us today as he points to two reasons or bases for believing in the Lord's return

We will see first that our belief is based on **the apostles' first-hand witness** and, second, on **the Bible's prophetic revelation**

Let me encourage you to open your Bible to 2Peter chapter 1, so you can follow along as I read verses 16-21 [**2Peter 1:16-21**]

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

We will begin by looking at the first-hand witness of the apostles in verses 16-18

I. The Apostles' First-hand Witness

Peter begins this section with a disclaimer that addresses an apparent charge by the false teachers concerning the integrity of the apostolic teaching concerning the second coming of Christ

And the terminology that they used was quite unflattering - like accusing the apostles of being snake-oil salesmen

It seems that the false teachers were accusing Peter and the others of telling mere stories or fables about Christ to deceive or delude their hearers

The essential nature of myths is that they represent man-made substitutes for the truth - they are humanly concocted stories that have no basis in fact

And by labeling them "*cleverly devised*," they were claiming that Peter and the others were being sly or cunning in concocting these tales and that they were, most likely, devising the stories and deceiving their hearers for personal gain

So Peter quickly issues an emphatic statement meant to negate the charge completely

Of course, the context of this false charge was when the apostles told of "*the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*"

The second coming of Jesus is commonly attested in the New Testament, where it is spoken of more than 300 times

We see Jesus speak about the nature of his coming in Matthew 24

Look with me at **Matthew 24:3**, where the disciples asked, "*Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?*"

And Jesus spends the remainder of the chapter answering their question

In verse 27 [**Mat. 24:27**] he says,

"For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

And in verses 36-39 [**Mat. 24:36-39**] he says,

"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. 37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

Paul also spoke of the second coming in **1Corinthians 15:23** and **1Thessalonians 3:13** and **4:15**

As did the Lord's brother, James, in **James 5:7-8** and John in **1John 2:28**

It's also evident in the New Testament that a display of his power will accompany his coming

Look with me at **Matthew 24:30**, which says –

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Let's look back at that passage from **James 5:7-8** that I mentioned just a few moments ago because it may well have given credence to the false teachers' scoffing

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

There is a difference between an event being "imminent" or "impending" and an event being "immediate"

To say a thing is "immediate" would mean that it's not delayed by an interval of time - it is going to happen instantly

Whereas to say a thing is "imminent" means that it *can* happen at any time, and there is nothing that needs to transpire before it happens

To say a thing is "impending" means that it will happen soon because the things that need to transpire can happen quickly

The only genuinely wrong interpretation of James' words is that the second coming would be "immediate"

I'm not going to delve into the nuances present between the other two views today

Let's suffice it to say that you just don't want to make the same mistake that the false teachers made

Because it is the same mistake that many are making today in assuming that, since the second coming hasn't yet happened even though the apostles said it was "at hand," it isn't going to happen

To say that we don't like to wait for things would be a gross understatement

We are an impatient lot and we chafe at delays

If you don't believe me, you've never been at an airport gate waiting for a flight that isn't happening as scheduled

Apparently, even the disciples weren't keen on waiting for the Lord's return as they continually asked him about the timing of his return

Perhaps that was because three of them had personally witnessed his majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration

And Peter next turns to give his readers an interpretation of the Transfiguration that we read about in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Peter declares that the declaration that he and the others proclaimed wasn't just a collection of fabricated tales but was based on sound and authoritative testimony

And the point of him sharing the eyewitness testimony isn't to prove the authenticity of his letter or even to defend the integrity of the apostles

He intended to show the reality of the hope of the second coming, and to do that, he turned to the factual nature of the Transfiguration and introduced it as evidence of the majesty of Jesus

The majesty of which John, James, and Peter were witnesses has a divine element, as we see in verse 17, as having to do with God bestowing honor and glory - and therefore some form of divine majesty - upon Jesus

Let's look at that verse again [**2Peter 1:17**] –

For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,"

The Majestic Glory is a name for God as alluded to in Exodus 16:10 and Numbers 14:10

This indicates that God the Father - manifested physically as the Shekinah Glory - exalted Christ with the statement, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

So what we see Peter testifying to here is that Jesus received honor and glory from the source of honor and glory - God himself

Then we see that the words that God spoke weren't directed to Jesus as they were at his baptism but to the disciples. And significantly, there were three of them present, making what Peter states here the testimony of three witnesses, which, according to **Matthew 18:16**, makes the testimony authoritative and competent

And in verse 18, Peter makes clear that the three of them were physically present with Jesus when this event occurred, and they saw what happened with their own eyes and heard what was said with their own ears

So Peter underscores that this was a real-life situation testified to by three witnesses, and there could be no question about the reality of it

This is hard evidence that Peter is presenting, as shown by his use of the word "for" three times in these three verses. And, having put forth his first-hand eyewitness testimony, Peter next turns to his next piece of evidence - the Bible's prophetic revelation in verses 19-21

II. The Bible's Prophetic Revelation

Verse 19 is a difficult verse that has caused many problems with interpretation

Let's look at it again together [**2Peter 1:19**] –

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed,

We will stop right there because it's the phrase "*more fully confirmed*" that causes the problem

Of course, the "*prophetic word*" that Peter mentions here refers specifically to prophecy found in the Old Testament

We would include the whole Bible today because all Scripture is tied together as a unified whole but Peter would have been speaking specifically of the Messianic prophecies found in the Old Testament

And there are two competing schools of thought regarding what Peter meant when he said "we have the [Word of God] more fully confirmed"

One group believes that what Peter is saying is that the Bible is more complete, more reliable, more authoritative, and more permanent than the personal experience of anyone - including his experience of witnessing the Transfiguration

That would be the interpretation favored by the NIV Bible which renders the phrase as:

We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable

Or the NET Bible which says:

Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing.

And I think we can agree that what we find in the Bible ranks above our experiences because we can so easily misinterpret or misjudge our experiences because our understanding is limited

However, if that is Peter's meaning, he is somewhat undercutting and devaluing his experience that he has just taken pains to mention as being conclusive proof of his position

The **second** school of thought is that Peter is saying that, while the prophets spoke accurately about Christ, at least some of what they said about him wasn't fully understood until events made their meaning clear

We see this demonstrated in the account in Luke 24 when Jesus came alongside the disciples on the road to Emmaus and interpreted what the Old Testament said about him -

The truth was there to be seen but it wasn't fully understood

Jesus' explanation didn't make what the Old Testament said about him true or even more true but it helped the disciples to fully comprehend the prophetic word

So, Peter could be saying that experience informs one about the truth of the Bible and therefore in a sense "confirms" what the Bible says in the sense that it helped them see the truth of prophecy

We believe that all of the words in the Bible are God's words and that the Bible is therefore accurate and authoritative

We also believe that the words of the Bible are self-attesting which means they speak for themselves and cannot be proven to be God's words by appeal to a higher authority -even our own experience

Still, other evidence is useful to us as we try to understand what the Bible teaches

And I believe that gets to the crux of Peter's meaning here

He is saying that the prophecies found in the Bible teach us the truth about Christ and that the prophecies are a firm foundation on which to base belief and as we see the prophecies fulfilled we are ever more convinced of that fact

After all, nothing confirms a prophecy like the prophecy coming true

And Peter is saying that, having seen the glorified Christ more fully confirmed the truth of the prophecies

Not that it made them true but that it provided a firmer grasp, a more accurate understanding, of the truth that is there

That would be the understanding provided by the translation found in our ESV Bible, the ASV, and others

And Peter continues by saying that a person does well to pay attention to the Word of God because it is a light shining in a dark place

That phrase sounds like **Psalm 119:105** doesn't it?

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

We have talked a great deal about being sojourners on this earth and there is no doubt that this world is a spiritually dark place

The light of Scripture is necessary to keep us on the path and out of the ditches in this world while it remains dark

Which it won't forever

Because, as Peter points out, there is a day coming when Christ will return and light will reign once more

And we will have no need of Scripture because the living Word of God will rise in our hearts and give us full knowledge

Paul basically says the same thing in **1Corinthians 13:8-10** where he writes:

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

When we have the light of Christ fully in our hearts, we will have no more need for the Scriptures

Just as a person cherishes a love letter while their beloved is absent, but sets it aside when he or she is present in favor of the personal contact

But Peter is far from demeaning Scripture and he turns next to give the reason one should pay attention to it

In verses 20-21 [**2Peter 1:20-21**] he writes:

Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Peter says that his readers should know as a matter of first importance that no biblical prophecy comes from someone's own interpretation - but what did he mean by that?

There are those who say Peter simply used two different ways to talk about the origin of biblical prophecy in these two verses

However, I think the solution is much simpler than that

It shouldn't be surprising to discover that a prophet needed to interpret the revelation that he or she received
Prophecies often came as rather cryptic symbols that required explanation in order to understand their meaning

And, according to my Greek lexicon, the word Peter used means: "to explain the meaning of something, with the implication that the text in question is difficult or complex"

But, as we read in **Daniel 2:27-28** Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar:

*"No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, **but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries**, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days."*

Even today, we recognize there is a distinction between Scripture's revelation, its interpretation and its application

And Peter expands upon his meaning in verse 21 when he comments on the source of prophecy being God through the activity of the Holy Spirit

Our English translations obscure the fact that the same verb is used to speak of what didn't happen and what did happen

It literally says "no prophecy was carried out by human will, but human beings were carried along by the Holy Spirit"

Peter is clearly negating one source of prophecy and affirming another

And the fact that prophecy didn't come from a human origin would have been clear to anyone with knowledge of the Scriptures because one of the characteristics of a false prophet was that he prophesied out of his own mind

For example, look at **Deuteronomy 18:20** which states:

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.'

It really shouldn't be too difficult to understand that God is the source of the prophecies and their meaning because a prophecy is of no use if one doesn't understand it

And a good rule to remember is that **nothing in the Bible can mean anything that God didn't mean when he inspired it**

When it comes to understanding Scripture, we should never be looking for "new" meanings

Saying "This is what this verse means to me" should not be a part of the Christ-follower's vocabulary

The Bible means what the Bible means and the source of its meaning is the same as its source of existence - God

Now, application is another matter and application of a passage may indeed be at least somewhat personal

But any application must still fit within the original meaning of the text when it was written

Think of it this way:

Think of the Bible as a skyscraper sitting on a foundation of meaning with the number of floors rising above corresponding to different times and all the windows of each floor representing individual situations and applications of the biblical truth contained in the foundation

Logically, nothing can be outside of the original meaning because the Bible can only mean what it has always meant but there may well be myriad ways of applying any truth to an individual's life

That's what makes the Bible profitable as we read in **2Timothy 3:16-17** where Paul writes:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Conclusion

What Peter has done in this section of his letter is lay the groundwork for his coming denunciation of the false teachers
And he has cut the ground out from under their feet by presenting two facts

The apostles' eyewitness testimony to the Transfiguration that revealed Jesus as divine making his return certain
And the prophecy of the Old Testament that was divinely inspired and that was made clearer by the eyewitness testimony

So, in effect, Peter has presented two witnesses to the truth of what he is saying - his own eyewitness and God's witness in Scripture

And from that foundation that he has laid, Peter is now ready to take on the false teachers to show how they are wrong

Next week, we see Peter introduce the false teachers and their danger as we begin looking at chapter 2

Let's pray

Luke 9:28-36 (page 867)

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said.

As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.