

2 Peter 1:16-21 - “The Light and Life of God’s Word”

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Before we delve into our Epistle reading from 2 Peter, a little background is helpful. Try to imagine how difficult it must have been for the early Christians at the time when God inspired Peter to write this letter. It was around 68 AD, two years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Many of the Jewish believers in Christ had already been disbursed from their homes in Jerusalem and were living in foreign lands among some believing Gentiles and many unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. In addition to all the upheaval of moving to foreign lands and starting over with new jobs and a new way of life, there had arisen false teachers in the Church who were, among other things, denying Jesus’ divine nature as God and saying that the OT wasn’t the word of God but the word of man.

Many Christians had already by that time been imprisoned and/or put to death for proclaiming the truth of God’s Word. In fact, Peter mentioned in the verses just before our text that the Lord let him know that his life in this world would soon be coming to an end (2 Peter 1:14). And like Jesus, Peter’s departure from this world would not be painless. Historical writers at the time, like Eusebius, wrote that all the apostles were martyred except for John. And the early church fathers were unanimous in recording that Peter died in Rome by crucifixion during the persecution of the Christian church under Nero’s reign (54-68 AD).

It was certainly not the easiest of times for those young congregations. So, in the midst of the overwhelming troubles Christians faced at that time, as well as the troubles we face in our time, our Lord, through St. Peter, gives us words of encouragement. The main focus of our text is the absolute reliability of God’s Word as recorded in the Bible. While our text would have been referring to the OT, it can also be applied to the NT. *“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.”* This book is not the word of man, like all the other books in this world. The Bible is the Word of God, who, through the words recorded in this book, created all things and continues to create and sustain saving faith in His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

When it comes to the NT, it was written by God’s inspired writers who were either eyewitnesses of the things they recorded or had spoken to eyewitnesses, like Mary, the mother of our Lord, who was able to share with them events surrounding Jesus’ conception and birth. Peter mentions in our text that he was with Jesus when Jesus was transfigured on *“the holy mountain.”* It was there that Peter was given a glimpse of Jesus’ divine glory. He also heard *“the voice”* spoken by *“the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”*

Anyone who doubts that God is the author of the words in the Bible should consider what the apostles would have gained by proclaiming something that they made up. They would be persecuted and in most cases put to death for proclaiming the message in this Book. Yet they remained steadfast in their proclamation of Jesus as the promised Savior, even in the face of death, because they didn’t make it up, it is God’s word of truth.

Jesus is God in the flesh, who set us free from our sins, death and the devil by dying on a cross in payment for our sins so that we can be with Him, and He with us, in this world and forever in the world to come. No amount of troubles in this life can alter this truth. Instead, God works even through the troubles of this world to bless His Church. So, as Augustine once said, *“Some good results even from the enraged people: let them be angry, and in their anger let the Martyrs be crowned”* (Augustine’s commentary on Psalm 99). Peter would be one of those crowned martyrs.

I like how a Lutheran theologian recently put it when he referred to one of our greatest troubles, death. "Christ has degraded death to be our servant, who must now bow before us and open the door for us at the end of our mortal life, so that we can step alive into the [visible] presence of Christ" (Chad Bird). Isn't that a great way to look at death?! As our servant, opening the door to paradise!

How can we remain steadfast in our faith in this Good News even though we are not eye-witnesses of Christ, like His first disciples? Peter said that "*we have something more sure.*" What can be more sure than seeing Jesus' Transfiguration on the "*holy mountain?*" "*The prophetic Word.*"

How does God's Word, both the Old and NT, make us even more sure of God's promises than seeing Jesus with our own eyes? The problem with basing our faith on simply seeing something like Jesus' Transfiguration in a moment of time is our sinful nature. Our sinful nature is still good at messing with our hearts and heads in an attempt to destroy our faith in Jesus Christ. I can imagine Peter saying after witnessing Jesus' transfiguration, "Did I really see that, and hear the voice from heaven? It all seems like a dream."

That's one of the reasons God wrote His Law on stone tablets, and inspired the prophets, apostles and evangelists to write down God's inspired Word. When our sinful doubts mess with our heads, we don't have to rely on what's in our head. We can refer to something outside our heads, God's sure Word. Through His Word the Holy Spirit continues to enlighten our minds, and dispel our dark confused thoughts with the Light of the Truth.

What is the truth? "*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). And God doesn't prevent even the worst of sinners from believing this Good News. Instead, He works through His Word and Spirit to give faith to all people. Because He "*desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:4). Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" (John 14:6).

What greater gift is there in this life? The Bible is Jesus' glorious presence with us today. Everything else in this world pales in comparison, including any problems we experience in this world. For all the troubles of this world, even what we refer to as "chronic health issues," will pass away. But the Word and promises of God will never pass away (Matthew 24:35).

So God says through St. Peter, "*You will do well to pay attention [to Prophecy/God's Word] as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns.*" Continue to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest/take to heart God's Word until the "*dawning day*" when Jesus will return visibly to raise the dead and take all believers, body and soul, to paradise with Him.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] What's your favorite subject at school? Usually we enjoy certain subjects more than others because God has given us the ability to understand that subject better than other subjects. Some of you may be good at math, therefore you enjoy math. Others may not be good at math and therefore you don't enjoy it. When God gives you certain abilities, He may be pointing you to a job later in life where you can use your God-given abilities to help others.

For me, there wasn't any subject in school that I was naturally good at. It was hard work for me to learn any and all of them. What I did enjoy, however, was helping other people in any way that I could. So, what gift did God give me to help others? The best gift God gave me to help others is the gift of faith in His love through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for my eternal salvation.

This is a gift which enables each one of us to give people what they need the most, the Good News about Jesus' death and resurrection for their eternal salvation. It's also a gift that God wants each of us to share with others in whatever jobs you choose to do when you grow up, and even now, here at church, at home, at school and elsewhere. Let other's know that "*God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*"