



THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY - TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Scattering the Darkness: Eyewitness Accounts

2 Peter 1:16-21 (NIV)

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ 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.

What do people watch the Super Bowl for? The commercials! Companies pour a ton of money into these commercials to make them memorable to get us, the consumers, to buy their products. One commercial from last week that stuck with me was from Crown Royal Canadian Whiskey. In it, musician Dave Grohl of Foo Fighters fame thanked Canada for all the inventions that they gave us – everything from Hawaiian pizza to peanut butter to the egg carton to trash bags to hockey to, surprisingly, football. And if I didn't believe Canada had given us all these things, Dave Grohl challenged me to fact check him.

What do you do when someone tells you something incredible, something a bit unbelievable, something that pings your inner skeptic? We Google it. (Maybe you are doing that right now.) We ask people we trust. We ask people who may have witnessed it. We try to go to a reliable source and find out. (By the way, I did fact check Dave Grohl, and all those things were either invented in Canada or were invented or improved upon by Canadians.)

The Apostle Peter presents some incredible things to the people that he's writing to in this letter. Previous to our reading today he has already put forward that God the Holy Spirit has called us to believe in God and so dwells in us because we believe. He tells us that we have escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires, that we have been cleansed completely from all our past sins, that by the Holy Spirit dwelling in us we can grow in our goodness, our knowledge of God, in our self-control, in perseverance, in mutual affection, in love, in godliness. That's some big stuff!

When it comes to all these incredible things that the Apostle Peter is saying are true, why should we believe him? Do we believe these things because it's what we grew up hearing? But was everything that you heard growing up truth? Did you really need to wait an hour after eating to swim? Do we believe Peter because it feels right? But have there been some things that felt right but turned out horribly wrong, like a person you thought you could trust but they broke your trust the first chance they got? Do we believe these things Peter said because Pastor Klein says they are true and Pastor Klein never lies? Well, I already admitted to you recently that I am not the smartest pastor. So, when it comes to whether or not I have ever lied in my life, I know that I have. And I can tell you that I'm not lying, that I try to live a very honest life, but how do you know? How can you scatter the darkness of lies and uncover the truth?

We do some of the same things when fact checking a commercial. We go to the source. We get to do that with the Bible too. Peter even encourages us to consider this. He wrote: "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain." (verses 16-18)

Peter wants us to consider the accounts of those who were there, who saw Jesus, who interacted with him. Peter was there on that high mountain with Jesus on that day that he was transfigured before them, when Jesus's face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. With his own two ears, he heard the thunderous voice of the Father from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5)

But why should we believe Peter's story? Don't liars tell us that they are NOT making up their stories? Maybe Peter had a hidden agenda. Maybe he was going to profit off of the books he would write about his experiences with Jesus. Maybe he wanted his 15 minutes of fame.

Yet think of the outcome of Peter's life, what he set himself up for by telling people what he saw. Peter was not only willing to stake his life on Jesus actually being God and being the one who was perfect for us in our place, he died for it. If he was going for fame and recognition and royalties, wouldn't he give those up when they were getting ready to crucify him?

Add to this that Peter was not the only eyewitness of Jesus showing his glory as God. James and John were there too - two other witnesses, not even related to Peter. They all told the same story. John, who was still alive when Peter wrote this letter did not call out Peter as a liar. No, John backed Peter up with very similar words in his letter, a letter we call 1 John.

But more than one person could be lying. Why else should we believe Peter and John? Because they didn't preach or write in a vacuum. They were aware of what had come before them. Peter tells us: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things." (verse 20) The Bible, God's Word, accounts like Jesus' transfiguration – these are not things that people think up. They're not manmade because manmade gods are often like us. The God that Peter is describing is something bigger than us, something we can't fully grasp. Who could make that up?

Add to that that the prophet Isaiah some 700 years earlier said that the virgin would conceive and give birth to Immanuel – God with us, God in human flesh. The prophet Nathan told King David some 900+ years earlier that he would have a descendant who would rule over all the nations forever, a descendant that God would call "Son." This goes right along with what we heard at Jesus' baptism that happened about 3 years before the transfiguration, the same phrase Peter quoted: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17) All of these people came together with the same story even though they were separated by hundreds of years - that God became man to be perfect for us in our place and to take our sins upon himself and take them away from us forever.

But they could all be in on it, right? Does that seem reasonable, likely - multiple authors over nearly 1500 years all saying the same thing? If you've ever tried to coordinate a story between multiple authors even in our modern age of phones and emails and texting, you still can't get them all to say the same thing – a little like the siblings who can't get their story straight to Mom about the broken lamp, even though they tried to work it out in advance in person.

This brings us to another reason for us to trust what Peter is saying. "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." (verse 21) God's Word does not come from humans being clever and making fiction; God's Word comes from God. And what do we know about God? He can't lie. He has to tell the truth. He even gives us those prophecies in advance that have spanned hundreds of years and then fulfilled them perfectly in Christ. He gives us those that we can test him on his truthfulness. Is not part of our fact checking determining whether or not someone lies to us? And when that person has always been truthful, are we not inclined to believe them?

Now why is it important to us that we established Peter really saw what he saw? "We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." (verse 19) Since fact-checking Peter, comparing him to other eyewitnesses, comparing him to what came before him, we are led to the conclusion that what Peter is writing is actually, totally, completely true.

Jesus really is God, just as he showed Peter, James, and John up on that high mountain. God the Father really was and is pleased with God the Son. He really is our perfect substitute, one who is perfect where we are not, one who gives and covers us with his perfection. He is true God come to do battle with Satan and our sin and death itself. This means that I really am forgiven for all the sins of my past, even though I can't forget about them. This means that we really can live a godly life with God the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. This means that we have the truth that scatters the darkness of this world, a darkness that says that we can't rely on God's Word.

God's Word is confirmed by the eyewitness accounts. It's confirmed as what Peter saw lined up with what God had already told us would happen. This is truth is our light, a sure and reliable Word so that we know that the battle against the devil, our sin, and death is already won, that we are truly and completely forgiven, that Christ's glory, his perfection, is truly given to us by God the Holy Spirit working through his Word. With whom will you share these eyewitness accounts to scatter their darkness of not knowing whether God's Word is true and reliable? God be with you as you shine the light of his completely reliable and true Word. Amen.