

"If Jesus' Eyewitnesses Could Talk"

2 Peter 1:12-21

What was it like to have been there at Jesus' birth? While we have the gospel accounts we still only have snapshots of a few of the events. We have no recorded conversations between Joseph and Mary. We know the shepherds went and told people about Jesus but we don't have their actual words. Or their description of what the angels' appearance was really like. The Magi are quite mysterious and 2000 years later we're still unsure whether Jesus was born in a stable, a cave or a house.

Sometimes we think 'If only I had been there' or 'if only I had some great experience of seeing one of Jesus' miracles or had a vision from God or walked on water like Peter or touched the nail-scarred hands of Jesus like Thomas or heard the earthquake Easter morning like the women that maybe I'd be a stronger disciple of Jesus'. A lot of Christians look for an experience to strengthen their faith but what if we could hear from one of the apostles themselves about their own experiences with Jesus? Was it the experiences that strengthened their faith or what the experience pointed to?

We have some writings of John and Peter and Jesus' step brothers James and Jude, but they're very thin on telling us about specific events they were eyewitnesses to. Except for one event mentioned by Peter; the transfiguration of Jesus. Here in 2 Peter 1 Peter recalls the experience that only he, James and John saw – Jesus in His coming back-glorified state. Does he explain that the experience made him strong in the faith and that we should look for our own experiences to make us have stronger faith? Or did he use it to point us to something better and more lasting than an experience?

As Peter begins a newer section in v.12 he looks back to his introduction when he writes,

¹²So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.

What are the 'these things' which he has already reminded them of? When you go through vv.3-11 you see numerous references to the teaching of God's Word. We have everything for life and godliness through our "*knowledge of Him*"

This consists of His "*very great and precious promises*". We are to add to our faith many things but knowledge is in the middle of them all. And it is our knowledge of these things that enables us to be effective and productive. And knowing these things keeps us secure in our salvation.

So Peter continues to encourage his readers in vv.12-15

Never Stop Growing in Your Understanding of God's Word **(1:12-15)**

One of the main purposes of this letter which he spends all ch.2 on is to help them stand strong against false teaching. The only way you do that is by knowing the truth so deceptive teaching is easier to spot. So he returns to the Word itself to help us in growing in it.

¹² So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

Most scholars put this letter in mid 60's AD. Peter would die in 67 AD. The persecution is strong. He knows his time is short. He's referring to Jesus' words to him in John 21 when the resurrected Jesus spoke to Peter to go back to the disciples and feed them and lead them. Yet it was also there on the shore of Galilee that Jesus forewarned Peter that he would be arrested himself and die giving God glory.

Peter has already written one letter so it is possible that is what he mentions here when he says he is reminding them of these things. Or he may have spent some with them in his journeys. Peter's passion is to see God's people grow in their knowledge of God's Word because he knows when we're in the Word . . .

It makes us spiritually stronger (v.12)

Peter says these people already knew God's Word and were "established" in it. Peter likes this word. He used it in 1 Pet.5:10 when he said,

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast

"Steadfast" is the same Greek word here for establish. He also used this word at the end of 2 Peter 3:17;

¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position.

"Secure" position is again that same Greek word *sterizo*, establish. Peter knows from experience that suffering and false teaching can destabilize you if we're not growing in the Word of God. This is why he desires to see fellow disciples continually growing in the Word of God. If we're not in the Word consistently then the subtle false teaching of the enemy or the struggles in life will cause us to drift away from our spiritual foundation. That's why being in a group in studying God's Word is so important. We need accountability and fellowship and the encouragement from others. God designed us to grow in community. When we have very little spiritual family time we lack the resources to grow as we should.

Peter is passionate about this. He senses he will die soon. He and Paul would both die on the same day, June 29th, 67 AD. As one nears death their vision becomes clearer, their purpose single. Peter's dying purpose was to establish Christians in the truth of God's Word and so . . .

It should be our main purpose for each other (vv.13-15)

How many of us ask each other what are you reading in your bible these days? Or invite them to a Bible study that you're involved in? How many of you would be embarrassed to say I've never asked anyone how they do devotions or how they pray or what they do for Bible reading and study. The number one repeated prayer request in the New Testament is for us to grow spiritually. So that should be our primary prayer request for one another. That's how I design the prayer bookmarks with versus that we can pray for each other to grow spiritually.

Here's a little memory tool. Think of praying spiritually for one another as our 911 call to God. Why 911? Because the best prayers in the New Testament for spiritual growth are found in Phil. 1:9-11 and Col. 1:9-11. It's a way in which you can pray this for anyone because we all need it. Some of us badly.

Peter says in v. 13 he wants to 'refresh our memory'. The word refresh means to 'wake up'. Some translations say 'to stir you up by way of reminder.' Heb. 2:2 says

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

That's what happens to us when we get lazy with our personal time with God and cut out meeting with fellow Christians for worship or study. We can even come up with really good excuses sometimes, but let's be honest and just admit we're only lying to ourselves and we're not fooling God.

Peter wants his readers to keep growing after he's departed. Peter uses interesting language to describe death. He calls his body a tent – a temporary shelter – from which he will soon set aside like clothing. When we die we say goodbye to this body and get a new one. The word 'departure' has the idea of transfer. When we die we just transfer from this reality into God's presence – or if we don't know Christ to a terrible, Godless painful existence.

How is Peter so sure of all this? In vv.16-18 he explains

The Word Prepares us for the Coming of Christ **(1:16-18)**

Just as the prophecies about Jesus' first coming to Bethlehem, born of a virgin to the line of David prepared people for Jesus' birth so do the prophecies of His second coming prepare us for His return. Peter says his teaching – unlike the false teachers he'll describe in ch. 2 didn't come from devised stories. It's not uncommon for false teachers to claim they've had visions or dreams from God. How do you defend against that? Easy – does it agree with Scripture? Peter saw Jesus glorified on the mountain when he, James and John were invited by Jesus to join Him. In Matt. 17:1-9 we read that Jesus appeared in his glory and Moses and Elijah appeared beside him. Peter asked Jesus should he build 3 shelters, 3 sukkahs for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Then the shekinah glory of God enveloped them all and God spoke, *"This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him"* (17:5). Then the cloud disappeared and only Jesus was there.

Peter, James and John had a powerful experience of Jesus as He'll look when He returns. John would see even more on the island of Patmos and he recorded it in the book of Revelation. So the Word of God prepares us for Jesus' coming because . . .

It has already been confirmed . . .

Visibly by Jesus & Audibly by God

3 witnesses saw Jesus and heard God speak. This is why Peter was so passionate about stirring people up to get into the Word and grow because this is truth and Jesus is coming back to fulfill prophecy just as real as He came the first time fulfilling prophecy. This is why Christmas is so exciting for the disciples of Jesus. Since He already came as predicted He'll comeback exactly as predicted. This is why Easter is so exciting for the disciple of Jesus. He really died on the cross and

rose from the dead. Which means we'll really rise ourselves after we die if we confess our sins and accept Christ as our Saviour. This is real! This is what's waiting for us forever. We're living in tents now. Our departure is imminent. This is what really matters because this is eternal stuff we're dealing with. That's why tonight is so important. We're telling our community that Jesus came for them to die and offer them hope and real life and a future reality of eternal joy.

Peter goes on to tell us that . . .

The Truth of Christ's Coming Enables us to Live Confidently **(1:19-21)**

Peter was a firm believer that prophecy should change the way we live. Past fulfilled prophecy about Jesus' birth, death and resurrection does for sure. But so also does future promises of His coming back. Listen to how Peter concludes his point in all this in v.19,

¹⁹And we also have the word of the prophets made more certain, [or 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.²⁰Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

As great as the experience of seeing Jesus glorified was, Peter points us to the Word of God. The experience backed up what the Word says so we can trust God with great confidence and live out what His Word says because it's true and is what's best for us. The Word of God gives us confidence,

In our present battle with sin (v.19)

Because we're still in our earthly tent, we still sin. We need to pay attention to the Word because the Word acts as a light shining in this dark and sinful world. Surrounded by temptations? People who don't know Jesus? You need to be in the Word. When I first became a Christian at the age of 25 it was hard where I worked. I was the only believer there. God got me through it because I had a church family I was growing with and fellowshiped with on the weekends and I met for a Bible study in the middle of the week where I grew and was refreshed. I needed that light because I was surrounded by darkness. The morning star is the promise of dawn. It reflects the light of the sun shortly before the darkness gives way to the sun and the night to the day. If you're not in the Word of God with the people of God the darkness will bring you down. When God's Word says obey Him, love others, seek forgiveness, pray for others flee temptation, believe it and act on it, because God wants us to live joyful and confident lives.

The Word helps us in the present in our battle with sin but it also enables us to live confidently . . .

In our future hope as we wait for prophecy's fulfillment (vv.20-21)

What you hold in your hands isn't cleverly devised tales. This isn't just our holy book and others have theirs. This is the Word of God, written by people who walked close with God and were carried along by the Spirit to write exactly what He desired. Our future is secure in God when we choose to follow Jesus, believing He came as one of us (Christmas) to die on the cross for our sins (Good Friday) only to prove he was God's Son by rising from the dead (Easter) to assure us we will have victory over death one day but can also have victory over sin today.

The fulfilled prophecies about Jesus' birth – even though we weren't there to experience it – assure us that those events actually happened. Many witnesses verify of the events. The gospels record many accounts of Jesus' miracles and healings – all verified by witnesses. And what Peter, James and John saw on the Mountain was a glimpse of what Jesus will look like when He returns (not to mention the book of Revelation, the prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, etc).

This is truth we have before us. It contains everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him. But if we're not in it we won't know these things and we're opening ourselves to false teaching, to cleverly devised tales and to an unconfident and less secure life that is living for the wrong purposes.

Did God's words stir you up by way of reminder this morning that you realized you've drifted away from God because you've drifted away from His Word and His people? And as a result drifted away from living God's purpose which is to help each other grow spiritually? We all need the 911 prayers every day because we are so easily distracted by this world of darkness. Our departure is more imminent than we realize. Maybe we need a wakeup call this Christmas to remind ourselves Jesus was born exactly the way, and where and when God said He would then He's going to return exactly the way and where and when God says He will. The Word is real and living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword that penetrates through soul and spirit judging the attitudes of our heart – which it did this morning. Lord, thank You for your speaking to us through Your Word again. Don't let us deceive ourselves just because we listened to it, but help us to listen and do what it says.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net