

A Shinning Light

SERMON

By

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TEXT: 2 Peter 1:16-21

PROP: We do well to pay attention to the prophetic word, as to a lamp shinning in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our heart.

2 Peter 1:16-21

16 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. **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," **18** we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. **19** And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, 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, **20** knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. **21** 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.

In the passage before us today Peter focuses our attention on the transfiguration of Christ. Though the description of this event is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke none of these writers actually participated in it but Peter was there when it happened. In fact, Peter uses words that remind us of his experience there. Notice the reference to his body, in verses 13 and 14, "*I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.*" (2 Peter 1:13-14, ESV) The Greek word translated "body" is the same word Peter used when he proposed to make three tabernacles as a memorial to Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Notice Peter's reference to his departure in verse 15, "*And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.*" (2 Peter 1:15, ESV) The word "departure" translates the Greek word "exodus" and is the same word used in the conversation of Jesus, Moses and Elijah recorded by Luke, "*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.*" (Luke 9:30-31, ESV) Jesus did not consider His death on the cross a defeat; rather, it was an "exodus. That is to say, he would deliver His people from bondage the way Moses delivered Israel from Egypt! Peter wrote of his own death as an "exodus," which was for him a release from bondage.

Peter writes, "**We** were eyewitnesses of his majesty," and he refers of course to himself along with James and John. In speaking of the experience of these three apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration John writes, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and **we** have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:14, ESV)

What then was the significance of the Transfiguration? Clearly it confirmed Peter's own confession that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Yahweh himself appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration in the glory cloud and Peter heard the Majestic Glory say, "This in my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." What could be more convincing than this that Jesus is the Messiah and very God of very God. But there is yet further evidence in this text that Jesus is the Son of God. Moses and Elijah conversed with Jesus in the presence of the three apostles. As Luke describes it,

Luke 9:28-36

28 Now about eight days after these sayings he (Jesus) took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. **29** And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. **30** And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, **31** who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. **32** 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. **33** 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. **34** As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. **35** And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" **36** 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.

The presence of Moses and Elijah was of great importance to men who were Jews. The first five books of the Bible known as the Torah were attributed to the authorship of Moses and Elijah was the epitome of all the Old Testament prophets. Every Hebrew child was brought up to know the writings of these men. For example we read of Timothy, "*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 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 competent, equipped for every good work.*" (2 Timothy 3:14-17, ESV)

Scripture in the days of the apostles consisted of the writings of Moses and the prophets of whom Elijah was the great example. The Law and the Prophets bear abundant witness that Yeshua ha Meshiach (Jesus the Messiah) is indeed Yahweh God. That Moses and Elijah were transfigured with Christ and spoke together in the presence of Peter, John and James gave powerful witness to the fact that Jesus was who he said he was Yahweh ha Meshiach. Jesus is he of whom God the Father said, "*As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree: The Lord (Yahweh) said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord (Yahweh) with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.* (Psalm 2:6-12, ESV)

If the Transfiguration held such significance for the apostles it should be of the same great significance to us. How can we ever believe that Jesus is merely a great teacher? How can we profane his great name in our cursing? How can we continue to associate the blessed Jesus with commercialism and merchandizing. Many people profit greatly through the birth of Jesus but it appears they miss the whole point of his incarnation. They do not see Jesus as Peter, John and James saw him as the one who received glory and honor from God the Father; as the one who is God's beloved Son in whom he is well pleased. How can we continue to discredit and dishonor the Lord Jesus Christ by what we say and do knowing that he is Yahweh God?

We must remember that Peter wrote this letter as he says, "*To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*" (2 Peter 1:1, ESV) It is to the people of God that the apostles made known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and they did so with the confirmation of God the Father and Moses and Elijah. We learn that Peter's great confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God did not come from within himself. Jesus said, "*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.*" (Matthew 16:17, ESV) Neither does our confession of Christ come from within ourselves but it is a gift of God. As Paul puts it, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8-9, ESV) Because the pronoun "this" is neuter in the Greek and both grace and faith are feminine we understand that the whole work of salvation including our faith is a gift of God. Because God caused us to be born again to a living hope, we have a high regard for Scripture and we believe the promises of God are sure and certain just as Peter and the other apostles did. Because we have been converted we do not regard the Bible as myth or fable. Peter writes, "*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." (2 Peter 1:16, ESV)

Myths are manufactured stories that have no basis in fact. The Greek and Roman world abounded in stories about the gods, mere human speculations that tried to explain the world and its origin. In modern times fantasy and myth continue to be a major part of our society. Hollywood continually produces fiction and myth and our nation is entranced by it all. Some of the greatest money making movies are nothing more than myth. There is no more flagrant display of human myth than the Christmas season before us today. The world of unbelief presupposes that there is no God or if he does exist he is not active in his universe. Accordingly their approach to science and philosophy is speculative and their theories and religions are the product of human imagination. Not so with the apostle Peter for he was an eyewitness of the majesty of Christ.

Peter wrote a summary of what he saw and heard on the Mount of Transfiguration. He saw Jesus Christ robed in majestic glory, and therefore witnessed a demonstration of the "power and coming" of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ came to earth at Bethlehem, he did not display his glory openly. To be sure, he revealed his glory in his miracles, but even this was primarily for the sake of his disciples. His face did not shine, nor did he have a halo over his head. Instead as Isaiah wrote, "*-- he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*" (Isaiah 53:2, ESV) Yet Peter is a faithful witness to the majesty and deity of Jesus Christ. We have never seen Christ in his transfigured glory but Peter did and faithfully recorded what he saw and heard as he was moved by the Spirit of God. In our day just as in Peter's day there were many who teach damnable heresies. False teachers turn the word of God into myth and interpret the world around them according to their own vain imaginations. But the Bible is clear, if a person believes the truth about God and what he requires of us he will live. If he believes lies and myth, he will die in his sins and perish in hell forever. Therefore we do well to pay attention to the prophetic word. We do well to believe the truth of the word of God for his word is truth and the Christ of the word is the way, the truth and the life, and whoever believes in God's only Son will not perish but have eternal life.

In some respects, the world is getting better. We must thank God for the advances in medicine, transportation, and communication. It is possible now speak to more people in one radio broadcast than the Apostles preached to in their entire lifetimes. Books are written that can be spread far and wide and even translated into different languages. In areas of scientific achievement, the world has made great progress. But the human heart is still wicked, and all of our improvements in the way we live have not improved our lives. Medical science enables people to live longer, but there is no guarantee they will live better. Modern means of communication only enable lies to travel faster! And jet planes enable us to get places faster, but we do not have better places to go!

We should not be surprised that our world is engulfed in spiritual darkness. In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord warned that there would be false teachers who would bring their heresies into the church. Paul gave a similar warning to the elders of Ephesus, "*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.*" (Acts 20:28-30, ESV) Even John warned about antichristian teachers who would seek to destroy the church. In other words, so long as we live among pagan, unbelieving people, we must face persecution, myth and false teaching. As long as the wheat is mingled with tares even within local churches we will have to deal with issues of false doctrine and sin which will lead many people astray. We continue to live in a sin darkened world which will become better only with the light of the word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Peter tells us an amazing thing as he continues in our text. What can be more certain and sure than the testimony of Yahweh God that Jesus is his beloved Son? What can be more certain and accurate than the eyewitness testimony of three apostles? Yet Peter writes, "*And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, 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,*" (2 Peter 1:19, ESV) Is Peter suggesting that the Old Testament Scriptures are more certain than the experience he had on the Mount of Transfiguration?

The Scriptures as Peter knew them were certainly firm and sure. There is no myth in them. Given that God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in all his attributes the Bible account of creation is entirely plausible just as it stands. The infinitely powerful God created the universe and all that is in it in the space of six literal days and all very good. "*The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;*" (Psalm 19:7-8, ESV) "*The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy;*" (Psalm 111:7, ESV) "*Your decrees are very trustworthy; holiness befits your house, O Lord, forevermore.*" (Psalm 93:5, ESV)

Peter was not suggesting that the Bible is more certain than the experience he had on the Mount of Transfiguration. His experience was real and true, and the record in the Bible is dependable. As we have seen, the Transfiguration was a demonstration of the promise given in the prophetic Word; and this promise now has added certainty because of what Peter experienced. The Transfiguration experience corroborated the prophetic promises. False teachers would attempt to discredit the promise of His coming, but the Scriptures were sure. For, after all, the promise of the kingdom was reaffirmed by Moses,

Elijah, the Son of God, and the Father! And the Holy Spirit wrote the record for the church to read!

Many books foisted upon us by cultists who come to our doors claim to be based on the Bible, but the writers so twist the Scriptures that the verses quoted end up meaning only what they want them to mean. They are nothing more than cleverly devised myths and there is spiritual death between those covers to anyone who would believe those lies.

Peter calls the world "a dark place," and the word he uses means "murky." It is the picture of a dank cellar or a dismal swamp. Human history began in a lovely Garden, but that Garden today is a murky swamp. What you see when you look at this world system is an indication of the spiritual condition of your heart. We still see beauty in God's creation, but we see no beauty in what mankind is doing with God's creation. Peter did not see this world as a Garden of Eden, nor should we.

God is light and His Word is light. "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" (Psalm 119:105, ESV) When Jesus began his ministry preaching that his hearers should repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, he fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, "*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.*" (Isaiah 9:1-2, ESV) His coming into this world was the dawning of a new day. Christians are said by Christ to be the light of the world, and it is our privilege and responsibility to make disciples of all the nations teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. Thus the prophetic word becomes a lamp shining in a dark place. As believers, we must heed this Word and govern our lives by what it says. For unbelievers, things will get darker and darker, until they end up in eternal darkness; but God's people are looking for the return of Jesus Christ and the dawning of the new day of glory. The word of God brings condemnation to those who hate Christ but Peter is writing to believers who love the Lord Jesus because he first loved them. The day dawns and the morning star rises in the hearts of God's people alone. Unbelievers will never see the light of God's glorious kingdom and though they be scholars of the Bible apart from conversion the morning star of God will never rise in their hearts. What hope, what bliss, what glorious light awaits those who love the Lord. The world of unbelief is truly a dark place but we who love the Lord see the lamp of God word shining and illuminating the darkness culminating in an eternity with Christ in inconceivable beauty in the city of God. John writes, "*And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or*

false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. " (Revelation 21:22-27, ESV)

This promise is certain and sure because the Messiah has come to make propitiation for our sins as confirmed by the sure prophetic word and the witness of God the Father that Jesus is his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased. Furthermore the word of God is certain and sure because it is not based on someone's own interpretation of the world around us and of the nature of God. Peter closes our text by writing,

2 Peter 1:20-21

20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. **21** 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.

The Bible is God-breathed; it is not the invention of man. For this very reason we are confident that the promises of God in the Bible are true and are certain to come to pass. We do not base our hope in Scriptures that have been twisted by liberals and papists to mean something that they do not clearly teach. Men of God have summarized the understanding of the Scriptures in this way, "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." (Westminster Confession of Faith I:7) While it is true that anyone using ordinary means may attain an understanding of the Scriptures the Westminster divines also believed the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the **saving** understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word. Since the Spirit gave the Word, only the Spirit can teach the Word and interpret it accurately for our salvation. Of course, every false teacher claims that he is "led by the Spirit," but his handling of the Word of God soon exposes him. Since the Bible did not come by the will of man, it cannot be **savingly** understood by the will of man.

Indeed, spiritual truth is interpreted by the Spirit of God to those who have been converted. Paul writes, "*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.*" (1 Corinthians 2:14-15, ESV) Peter is not prohibiting the private study of the Bible. Some religious groups have taught that only the "spiritual leaders" may interpret Scripture. But Peter was not writing primarily about the interpretation of Scripture, but the

origin of Scripture: it came by the Holy Spirit through holy men of God. And since it came by the Spirit, it must be taught by the Spirit.

People die, but the Bible lives. Experiences fade, but the Bible remains. The world is dark with sin, but the prophetic word is a lamp shining in a dark place. The believer who is faithful in his study of the Bible, and who worships God in accord with his word is not likely to be led astray by false teachers. He will be taught by the Spirit and grounded on the sure Word of God. It has been said that a sleeping church is the devils playground. While people sleep the enemy comes in to sow his tares, so be alert. Peter would stir us up by way of reminder. He urges us to be alert; to wake up and remember. He tells us to recall the things he has said and be established in the truth that we have. May the Spirit of God move us to pay attention to the prophetic word, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our heart. Amen!