

The Sure Scriptures

2 Peter 1:12-21

What do you trust to tell you the truth?

News outlets? NPR, Fox News?

Magazines? World, Newsweek, National Review, People?

Experience? People? Commentaries?

Our great confessions:

I believe...

We believe...

Or do we?

Traditions – the past authoritative words...

Experience – the present authoritative words...

So, what is at stake?

If we do not believe that we have a sure word from God, what is at risk? Well, just about everything. Peter locates the necessity for the sure Word between the surety of our salvation and the surety of coming false teachers. So, let's follow Peter's thinking and be gripped by his purpose and passion.

The Emergency Facing the Church (v.12-15)

Peter is writing because there is a growing perception that an emergency is facing the church. This perception was fueling fears and concerns about the future. Peter has established the surety of their salvation and the need for their transformation. Now, he begins to shift address this concern in the church.

¹² Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, ¹⁴ since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

The need for constant reminders (v.12-13)

He is going to keep reminding them of the principles and practices in which they were established. This need for reminding was not a result of forgetfulness and inattention. They knew these things and were established in them.

Then a key phrase which hints at the concern: they were established *in the truth they have*. So, what about the truth they don't have? How will they access that truth, particularly given what is happening all around them?

The dying off of the apostles (v.14-15)

This generation of Christians was reared in the faith delivered by the Apostles themselves. Now, even Peter is facing imminent death. This is neither speculation nor some self pity – this is what the Lord has shown him. He is about to die and go home to the Lord. That will bring to an end his personal apostolic ministry. What will the church do? Here appears to be the growing concern of believers.

Where will we have God's authoritative revelation and reminders if the apostles are all gone? How will we continue to grow and expand when those who had personal experience with Christ have all gone home to be with the Lord?

The Experience Shaping the Apostles (v.16-18)

Almost as though he is playing into the problem, Peter takes them to the pinnacle of their experience with Christ, the transfiguration.

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.

Their eyewitness of the transfiguration (v.16-17)

Peter reminds them that they were eyewitness of Christ and His glory. They were there. They saw it. They were on the mountain when He was transfigured. Peter well remembered what had happened. In other words, Peter, in this case, is unlike all but two of the disciples. He is one of the three who saw the transfiguration.

This idea of being an eyewitness was huge in the New Testament church. John refers to it. Paul points to others who were eyewitnesses. What they are teaching is not some fable or myth or dream vision – this is history. These things really happened.

¹ And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. [Matthew 17:1-8]

And as recorded by Luke...

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings he 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. [Luke 9:28-36]

The event here is one of great import. Matthew records this in a series of important mountain experiences of Christ and the disciples. On the mountain, Jesus was glorified before their very eyes. Elijah and Moses appeared on the mountain with him. So here are the two primary representatives of the Law and the Prophets: Moses and Elijah. They are conversing with the Lord Jesus about his coming death and resurrection.

“Exactly”, the church would say. “This is exactly what we are concerned about.” All the eyewitnesses to Jesus deeds and words are disappearing. Their experiences of Christ are irreplaceable. Jesus no longer appears to people. Paul was it. How will we know what Jesus wants us to do as we go on? Who will remind us of what we need to know? Who will call us back to living the way we ought?

Their being humbled under God's Word (v.17)

Those who know the story know that verse 17 was a correction, a humbling of the disciples under God's Word. Peter, thinking in Old Covenant terms, wants to establish three tabernacles, three tents as temporary residences for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. He wants to put them all on equal footing.

But the majestic voice ringing out from heaven silences foolish words. Moses and Elijah are not on equal footing. They have witnessed the glory of Christ. In his glory, he is conversing with Moses and Elijah. The Father, just as He did at Jesus' baptism, now approves the centrality of Christ. He is the one who is speaking and who is to be heard.

This is ever what we have now. In the New Covenant, Jesus is central in His glory, approved and affirmed by the Father. Yet there is a conversation that is going on. There is a conversation between the New and the Old. The Old points to the New. The New explains the Old. Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah about His departure soon to take place. The Greek word there is “Exodus”. The Law and Prophets are to show and serve the glory of Christ. What the Law and Prophets actually mean is determined by Christ.

Their focus shifted to the glory of God's Son (v.17-18)

Peter had a fantastic experience of God on the mountain that shifts our gaze in important ways:

- From a focus on the Old Covenant (Moses, Elijah, temporary tents);
- To a focus on Christ, His centrality and glory;
- The story is about Christ's 'exodus', His death, resurrection and glory;
- To the conversation between Christ and the Law/Prophets;
- To the affirmation of the Father.

And this conversation continues even to this day.

The Elevation Highlighting the Scriptures (v.19-21)

¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed [something more sure, NASB], 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.

The Importance of God's Word (v.19a)

We have something more sure! Do you hear it? They, Peter, the believers Peter was writing to and us – they in their day and we in ours, have something more sure.

We have something more sure – more sure than what? We have something more sure than the Apostle’s personal experiences with Christ even their being with Jesus in His transfiguration. This is surprising. This is stunning. What all believers have is more important, more sure, more reliable, more accessible and more authoritative than if Peter was standing on this platform this evening telling you exactly what had happened.¹

What is it that we have that is more sure? It is the prophetic word, the Word of God. The Scriptures, even just the Old Testament scriptures, are more sure than the personal experiences of the Apostles. Now, this is not how people naturally think. We think of the experience of people as having more weight than the Bible’s written record. After all isn’t it true that the person coming with the Scriptures is always at the mercy of the person coming with the experience? This is not only unbiblical, but also anti-Biblical. Even the experience of the apostles who walked with Christ is less sure than the written Word of God.

The Illumination of God's Word (v.19b)

Since this is so, then *you will do well to pay attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.* Stop seeking experiences. Instead, turn your attention to the Word of God.

These two phrases are alluding to Old Testament texts. First Psalm 119:105

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

And Numbers 24:17:

¹⁵ And he took up his discourse and said, “The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, ¹⁶ the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: ¹⁷ I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.

The lamp of the Word of God and the dawning light of the glory of Christ, these we must pay attention to. It is better. It is more sure. It is what we need. This exhortation is greatly needed in our day. Today, we have wolves among the sheep who are saying exactly the opposite. They say things like, “We are in greater need of the richness of our living experiences not the dead letter of a book, even the bible.” NO! What is needed today is more preaching of God’s Word that illuminates Christ.

How long should this be true? “From the dawning at His incarnation until the full sunrise at His return...” The New Testament Scriptures are carrying on a dialog with Old Covenant discussing the “exodus” of Jesus at the cross and resurrection. We are to listen to Him speaking in the Word because He has the Father’s approval. We are to keep paying attention to what is more sure until the Lord rises in our hearts and He returns in the heavens.

What does this more sure Word speak of? It speaks of the past, present, and future greatness and glory of Christ. Peter points us to the Scriptures. The Scriptures point us to Christ. When we read, hear, listen to, give attention to the Scriptures, we are in fact centering on Christ. He is the one speaking through the Word.

The Inspiration of God's Word (v.20-21)

Why is this so? Because the Word of God is given to us by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

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.

This is a statement about the origin of the Scripture. It is more sure because it is not initiated by the prophet's own desires. Rather, the prophetic word came through men who spoke borne along by the Holy Spirit. It was men who spoke through their own personalities. It was the Spirit who was the cause of their speaking. This is another of those, "both - and" of the Scripture. But the prophet did not choose when or what to say. God did.

Why does he say this? Well, Peter chose to speak up at the Transfiguration. Then he spoke at his own initiation and with his own word. He should have been listening, not talking. He needed to wait until the Holy Spirit moved him to speak. *And that is exactly what he is doing now.* The very penning of this letter is the carrying along work of the Spirit. The result of His writing is the Word of God. Now it has been inscripturated and passed down to us. God has made sure that we will recall through reading what the apostle said.

Reflect and Respond

What grabs your attention? What will make you seriously consider your sin, a truth, Christ? A compelling story of personal experience? The exposition of a passage of Scripture? Which do you tend to be more guarded against? Which do you feel more compelling? We have the more sure Word of God. We have the Scriptures. We had better pay attention to them as the lamp so that the light of Christ illuminates our hearts with a sure salvation and a grace-oriented transformation.

We will hold fast to the sure Word because it has been given by God through His Spirit to the prophets. This prophetic and apostolic deposit is the sure Word of God.

We need this because of what is coming next in chapter 2 - "false prophets arose among the people, so false teachers will arise."

We have the promises of God in the Word of God. Through believing the promises God gives His power so that we will put forth hard effort to grow in godly virtues. God's sure salvation comes to us through His sure Word. Hold fast to it.

¹ It is interesting to contrast what Peter says about this event and the record of it in the gospels for what he leaves out. This is intentional. He is showing them how the gospel record is more sure and more reliable than his own recall and reminding them of the event. He is exemplifying the limitations of personal experience.