

The Promising Life in a World that is Perishing

Part 2: 2 Peter 1:16-21

"Work out your Salvation by Paying Attention"

Preached May 13 2007

The Passage

2 Peter 1:16:21

Christ's Glory and the Prophetic Word

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.

Preliminaries:

Before we attend to the text that is before us today, I want make some general comments about 2nd Peter. We saw last week that this is a letter Peter wrote within months, or even weeks of his death. As John Calvin so aptly expressed it: "The nearness of death makes the Apostle diligent in the business of life."

Peter wants us his readers to also be diligent in the business of life. He helps us to do this by focusing on three areas of Christian Discipleship in this letter that are neatly divided according to the three chapters of 2nd Peter.

In Chapter 1 he exhorts us to work out our salvation

In Chapter 2 he warns us to watch out for false teachers.

In Chapter 3 he encourages us to wait for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Attention needs to be paid to our salvation, false teachers and the Second Coming because Peter says we are living in a world that is corrupt and dark.

He speaks about the character of the world in this way:

"The corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire"

(2 Peter 1:5)

"a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19)

These two descriptions are important for us to grasp. To say that something is corrupt is to say that it is decaying. To find oneself in a dark place means that it is without light. What will be the result? People stumbling around and in a short while ending up lost.

In chapter 1 Peter shows us how we can escape the corruption that is in the world by ascending the staircase of faith. This was our focus last Sunday. Now let's see what Peter has to teach us about paying attention to Scripture.

.....

Prayer

*Gracious Father, we thank you for the Apostle Peter. As we hear what you have to say to us through this passage, we ask that our hearts and minds will be stirred up to understand afresh how important Your Word is for our spiritual health and well being. May your Holy Spirit, who was present to Peter as he wrote these words, be present to us as we seek to understand the written word. In Jesus name we pray,
Amen.*

A Study of the Text

In a certain suburban neighborhood, there were two brothers, 8 and 10 years old, who were exceedingly mischievous. Whenever something went wrong in the neighborhood, it turned out they had a hand in it. Their parents were at their wits' end trying to control them.

Hearing about a Minister nearby who worked with delinquent boys, the mother suggested to the father that they ask the Minister to talk with the boys. The father agreed. The mother went to the Minister and made her request. He agreed, but said he wanted to see the younger boy first and alone.

So the mother sent him to the Minister. The Minister sat the boy down on the other side of his huge, impressive desk. For about five minutes they just sat and stared at each other.

Finally, the Minister pointed his forefinger at the boy and asked "Where is God?"

The boy looked under the desk, in the corners of the room, all around, but said nothing.

Again, louder, the Minister pointed at the boy and asked, "Where Is God?"

Again the boy looked all around but said nothing. A third time, in a louder, firmer voice, the Minister leaned far across the desk and put his forefinger almost to the boy's nose, and asked "WHERE IS GOD!"

The boy panicked and ran all the way home. Finding his older brother, he dragged him upstairs to their room and into the closet, where they usually plotted their mischief. He finally said, "We are in B-I-I-I-I-G trouble now!" The older boy asked, "What do you mean, B-I-I-I-I-G trouble?" His brother replied, "God is missing and they think we had something to do with it."¹

The question this story asks is implicit in our text for today. Is God missing? Or, is it us humans who are lost.

¹I am grateful to a parishioner, Liz LeMaistre, who shared this joke with me.

Peter says it isn't God who is missing. Rather it is those without the light of His Word. Please look at verse 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".

Here Peter is talking about the Old Testament, especially that part we know as the Prophetic Writings. Peter tells us how we can overcome the darkness that is in the world and know God's presence with us. It is by paying attention to Scripture. Every generation of the Church is to pay attention to the written word until "the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts." Only on that day will Holy Scripture be redundant. Why? Because the Day Peter is referring to here is the Second Coming.

Understanding this verse enables us to establish the theme of this passage. It is as follows:

Until Jesus comes again you and I are to work out our salvation by paying attention to Scripture. The more attentive we are to the word of God, the greater will be the light to illuminate our path through this dark world.

So let's see how Peter supports this theme by what he writes in verses 16-18 and 20 – 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.

It is easier to understand this passage if we divide the verses into their main and sub clauses.

Main Clause A: *16 For **we** did not follow cleverly devised myths*

Sub clause 1: when **we** made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

Sub Clause 2: but **we** were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Main Clause B: 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father,

Sub clause 1: and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,"

Main Clause C: 18 **we** ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven,

Sub clause: for **we** were with him on the holy mountain.

The argument Peter is putting forward here is that the message he is teaching is not based on:

1: Some cleverly devised myth (Main Clause A).²

Rather:

2. We received glory from God the Father (Main Clause B).

And I can verify this for you

3. because we were there (Main Clause C)

The sub clauses then fall into place.

In verse 16 he tells his readers:

"We Saw His Majesty"

In verse 17 he tells his readers

"We heard the Father declare his Majesty"

Verses 18: We can validate this because we were on the Holy Mountain.

To summarize Peter's argument. He is saying here: I was not alone when Jesus' Majesty was made known to us. James and John were with me. We both, saw and heard His Majesty made known to us.

² This is what the false teachers who will be the focus of chapter two will say about the Christian Gospel, especially the 2nd Coming.

This is such an important thing for us to understand about Scripture. In the case of the New Testament we pay attention to it because it is based on the eye-witness accounts of those who were there at the time with Jesus.

The event Peter is describing here is the Transfiguration. It is interesting that the Transfiguration and not the Resurrection or the Ascension is the historical happening he remembers. Why is that? Well think about the event and remember these words of the Gospel writers:

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.³

It was at the transfiguration that Peter, James and John witness Jesus' Glory. His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. The commentators say that this is the event Peter remembers because at the Transfiguration they had a glimpse of how Jesus will appear at His Second Coming. Peter will soon defend the apostolic teaching about the Second Coming in order to contradict the false teachers' heresies. He grounds the future glory of Jesus on a historical event that has already taken place.

But not only did Peter, James and John see Jesus glorified, they also heard the Father declare his glory as the Servant King. When the voice declares "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," the Father is quoting the Old Testament. Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42:

For the Jewish People Psalm 2 was understood as a prophetic psalm. It looked to the day when the Messiah would come to judge the nations that rage against God. The judgment theme is clearly expressed at the end of the Psalm. There we read:

*10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
11 Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
12 Kiss the Son,*

³ Mark 9:2-3

*lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

The Son is the one who is to be kissed and acknowledged at the true king. In other words, he is to be worshiped. For those who seek to live in willful rebellion to the Son, they will perish. Think back if you will to what Peter says about the unregenerate world. It is corruptible. That is, it is perishing. But for those who take refuge in the Son, they will be called "Blessed".

As Christians we understand that this judgment still awaits the world and will happen when Jesus comes again.

So do you see what is happening here? The Father, in quoting Psalm 2 is declaring that the Messiah is Jesus. This Prophetic Word finds its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth.

But not only does the Majestic Glory declare Jesus King, there is also a fragment taken from Isaiah 42 declaring him the Servant: There we read:

*1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.*

In Isaiah 40 – 55 there are four songs that speak of God's Servant. The Servant is the one who will truly represent God in the world. The verse I quoted above is the first verse of the first of four servant songs. Notice that this servant is the one in whom the Father delights (loves) because he will bring forth justice to the nations.

Please recognize that in both the Psalm and Isaiah the nations are mentioned. So the person referred to here has an influence that affects the entire world, both now and in the future.

In the Psalm text the nations are judged. In the Isaiah text God brings forth justice to the nations. The Isaiah passage has already been fulfilled completely. It was accomplished on Good Friday when the sinless Lamb of God took upon himself the Sin of the World and so opened a way for us to know the Justice of God. Since Good Friday God has brought his justice to the nations. Every person in every nation is called to respond to Jesus by kissing the Son. The judgment

theme of Psalm 2 still awaits us, because it will not happen until the time of Jesus' Second Coming.

How do I know this you ask? Well please look with me at the two verses from Acts 10:

42 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

These are also Peter's words. We will come back to them in more detail when we come to our study of chapter 3. But what I want to show you this morning is how in this sermon, preached to Cornelius in Acts chapter 10, brings together Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42.

What we have here in less than fifty words is a summary statement expressing the core message of the Christian Faith. In what precedes it Peter has finished rehearsing the events of Jesus' Ministry, Passion, Death, Burial and Resurrection. He then goes on to say that because of who Jesus is, he has commanded us (that is the Apostles) to both teach and testify to the people that Jesus is:

- 1. This is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. (Psalm 2)*
- 2. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Isaiah 42)*

So be it through his reference to the Transfiguration by quoting a Psalm and Isaiah text or be it by explicitly referring to the Second Coming in Glory as king and the First coming in humility as the Servant Peter is saying the same thing.

You will notice as well that in both Acts and 2 Peter 1 there is reference to the prophets. In Acts Peter says that all the prophets bear witness to Jesus. In 2 Peter 1:19 – 21 we are told:

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.

Here Peter is making very clear that not only is there the eye witness account that he had on the mountain but there is also something even more sure, the Prophetic Word. Peter is showing us how through the witness of the Apostles and the Witness of the Old Testament Prophets we can have all the light we need until Christ's return.

He is convinced of this because no prophecy of scripture is of human interpretation. Think back to the use of Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. Peter, James and John didn't interpret those texts. The Divine Majesty did by declaring their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Because of this we can affirm that the Old and New Testaments are not a human creation. But God carrying men along by the Spirit wrote these words.⁴

So do you see what Peter is establishing here? The world is full of darkness and in need a source of light to see our way through. That light is Holy Scripture. We can trust it's authority because its source is non other than the Divine Majesty who not only revealed Himself on the Divine Mountain. He also interpreted the Old Testament Prophets for us, showing their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Application:

Now that we understand the text let's apply it.

As a Church we are a community of disciples of Jesus Christ. It is as disciples that we are called by God to listen very closely to his word because it has authority. We are to grow in our understanding of God's written word so that we can live in this world with a gentle confidence that God's word is trustworthy.

Peter shows us here that the word is trustworthy. This is something that we need to recover within the contemporary church. There has been such a loss of confidence in scripture over the past two hundred years. God is convicting me that one of the things he is doing here at St. Augustine's is establishing a Church that is grounded in Him because I as your Rector am committed to the authority of the written word.

St. Augustine's will not be carried along by the spirit of skepticism and unbelief so prevalent in the Anglican Church today. We will not be influenced by the corrosive character of the false teachers. No we will

⁴ I do not have time know to go into more depth on Biblical Inspiration. If you would like to read more about this go to the appendix. There you will find a section taken form the NIV Application Commentary on 2 Peter that will explain it in more detail.

be preserved and guided by God's word. As we see ever more clearly what the text is saying, we will have our faith strengthened. We will work out our salvation by paying attention to the Word of God.

It is interesting that over the past number of months people within our Prophetic listening Group have had the image of St. Augustine's being a Light House. While St. Peter does not speak of a light house, he does say that by paying attention to God's word it is like paying attention to a lamp shining in a in a dark place.

If we are to be a lighthouse we have to pay attention to the Word of God both corporately and individually.

The primary way in which we corporately pay attention to the Word of God is by our weekly gathering for Eucharist, where in Word and Sacrament Jesus meets us and speaks to us. The primary way we do this individually is through our personal times of devotion as we study scripture on our own.

Our Corporate Study: A Church that takes the preaching ministry seriously is one that will be a light house. I am committed to becoming ever more diligent in my study so that together we can experience what John Wesley understood when he wrote in his journal on August 28, 1757:

I have come from God and returning to God; just hovering over a great gulf; a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, the way to heaven... God himself has condescended to teach that way; for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it; here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one book. Here I am far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone; only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book, for this end, to find the way to heaven.⁵

Peter says the Bible is like a Lamp shining in a dark place. John Wesley says it is the book through which we find our way to heaven.

Here is the Book that we need to know better and better. As I mentioned last week, I will be ordained twenty years on June the 7th. During these twenty years I have been a pastor who preaches. I know see that God is calling me to become a preacher who pastors. My

⁵ **I believe in Preaching** by John Stott; Page 32 (Hodder and Stoughton copyright 1982)

primary responsibility week by week will be to study the Word of God with greater diligence. It will be by my paying attention to the word of God that I will best serve you and be obedient to my ordination vows.

At my ordination to the priesthood the Bishop asked me:

Are you persuaded the Holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing (of required of necessity to eternal salvation) but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded by the Scripture?

To which I responded:

I am so persuaded, and have so determined by God's grace.

Dearly beloved, I believe this much more so today than I did twenty years ago. Because we are to pay attention to Scripture as to a lamp shining in a dark place, I will do everything I can to help you understand what God is saying to us through his word. This is my responsibility.

Personal Study: Your responsibility is to pray for me during the week so that I may see and hear what God is saying to us. Then when you come to church on Sunday, come expectant so that you may have a longing to hear God speak and may leave satisfied.

You have a second responsibility. That is to read the word of God for yourself. I want to ask you a question. During the last week how many times did you open the bible and study it. Seven times, six times, five times, four times, three times, two times, one time, none at all?

If you are already studying the word of God I rejoice with you and encourage you to deepen in this devotion. If you are being negligent in your study of Scripture, may I say to you as your pastor, this needs to change. You are called by God to the study of his word.

- There is a simple method that I would suggest you use. Scripture Union Notes are easily available on the internet for purchase. By using this method of Bible reading you are able to systematically read the Scriptures so that you are learning both the Old and New Testaments.

- If you would like to find out more about the notes I have some brochures that I will leave on the table at the entrance. I would suggest that if you don't have access to the internet that you take one of the brochures.
- If you do have access to the Internet go to: www.scriptureunion.ca. There you will be able to find out all you need about the various notes Scripture Union offers to understand scripture. You can choose the one you think best for you and then order on-line.
- If you would like to talk about how to read Scripture on your own, please call me and I would be pleased to sit down and talk with you about this.

Conclusion

The Book of Common Prayer defines the visible church, in part, as a congregation of faithful men and women, in which the pure word of God is preached.”⁶ We give thanks to God that we are part of his visible Church. For here at St. Augustine's we take seriously what Peter has to teach us as we work out our salvation by paying attention to Scripture.

⁶ Article 19 “Of the Church” Page 706 Common Prayer Canada