

2 Peter 1:16-21

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[0 : 01] Before I begin this afternoon, I want to give a special word, personal word of thanksgiving to those of you who helped the church move yesterday.

Ours is a unique church. We are a nomadic band. And yesterday, we closed down our offices here on the south side.

And as we've now expanded to four congregations, we consolidated the offices from here downtown. And we trust that that would be a beneficial thing for the church as a whole.

But I'm firmly aware that that meant a number of you, over a dozen from what I hear, had to haul my entire library, three nearly immovable filing cabinets, and a desk that weighed something close to 2,000 pounds all downtown.

So I just want to express my personal gratitude to you. This is probably the fourth or fifth move that we have made in now entering our 12th year as a church.

[1 : 17] And God continues to surprise us. But thank you to all of you who helped so greatly. Well, we're nearly through with our summer series on the gospel life.

Celebrating life in the gospel. We spent the opening four weeks of the summer defining the nature of the gospel.

What is it? And then we spent four weeks looking together at what were almost necessary implications of the gospel, such as being born into a new family.

And for the final seven weeks, we've been exploring commitments that we make in light of the gospel. There are two yet to be spoken of this summer.

Today, a commitment to God's word. And next week, a commitment to personal and corporate prayer.

[2 : 30] So I'm going to ask you to open to the second letter of Peter. And I would like to give this afternoon what might amount to an exhortation as much as an exposition.

From 2 Peter chapter 1, verses 16 to 21. This is our scripture reading for the day. 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. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

We ourselves heard this very voice, born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you do well to pay attention.

As a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the morning star rises in your hearts. Knowing this, first of all, that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

[3 : 57] 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 the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, if you had been in our living room this past Wednesday evening, you would have been present for a time of praise and prayer, singing and celebration as we look to the Lord for the ministry of this church.

And during that time, I said a tidbit of what God has been impressing upon my heart these summer months. I'd like to open this exhortation to be committed to the word of God from the experience of what he is teaching me in these summer days.

You see, very little in this world is firmly fixed for any length of time at all. As soon as you think you are settled, you won't be.

Ours is an ever-changing world. And it is filled with citizens who long for unchanging circumstances.

[5 : 33] It's interesting. In a city, it's concrete and steel. But its citizenry is ever-fluid.

Never secure. Never planted. Some of you are brand new to the city of Chicago, still unpacking boxes of your own.

Some of you are wondering when you will emerge into that long period of space you perceive others have that is fixed and stable.

And I'm here to tell you that those days, never come. God's been teaching me that this summer, I suppose it's been heightened even with the nature of another move.

Now, for the first time in 11 plus years, we in the Hyde Park congregation are without a fixed daily dwelling place. we have a weekly dwelling place.

[6 : 46] We are on the move. And I want you to know that this is consistent with biblical life in general and certainly Christian experience in particular.

Adam and Eve were not in the garden long before they had to move. and we are asked to move for a number of reasons. They were under God's displeasure. Genesis 3, at the end, God forced the man out.

And out he went. Abraham, these hundreds of years later, however long it was, surprisingly, we find that the church, the people of God, were still limited to the confines of one family in the world.

And this small gathering of Abraham's clan was asked to go to the land that I will show you. And he went.

Interestingly, when he arrived in the place that God had promised and prepared for him, at least on two occasions of record, he had to leave for he couldn't make his own livelihood in that promised land.

[8 : 06] A famine came and he was forced to pull up tent pegs out from under the oaks of Mamre and go to Egypt.

I've often looked back in our years here and in my own prayers, said to the Lord, O Lord, give us the oaks of Mamre.

Some place that is consistent over a long period of time, but even there, it was not so for Abraham. I think of Moses where God called him to go.

I think of the 40 wilderness years of God's people in which they were ever landing and then alighting again according to the movement of the cloud and the pillar.

Imagine the Levites seeing the cloud begin to move. Oh no, here it goes. The tent pegs are pulled up.

[9 : 13] The tabernacle is stored. The rolls are made. The tithes have come. The shoulders are ready. The people are going.

Interestingly, when you get to the apocalyptic literature of Revelation where we spent last year together as a congregation, the New Testament writers provide this wilderness motif as the paradigmatic norm for Christian life.

So we live in a world that is ever-changing with a heart that is longing for something stable and the scriptures have said your experience in Christ is nomadic.

It will always be wilderness-like. That's a good thing to know, isn't it? Because everywhere else other than a church like this will tell you to continue to long for stability and a solidification of life, a completion of your duties so you can get on with your life work from one place.

Now, Peter actually says in his first epistle when he defines for himself the audience of God's people, he says they are the elect ones, the ones chosen out of all the world by God and yet what?

[10 : 36] They are the elect exiles. Nomadic. I think of the days of Joshua who we are going to study in two weeks' time.

We'll pick up a fall series through the first eight chapters of the book of Joshua. That opening chapter where he says, go and cross this Jordan and enter into the land.

They were a generation constantly moving, constantly on their way, never having arrived.

I think of Joseph and Mary when after giving birth to the Christ child, the one who will bring eternal security to all of humanity, the one to whom we would think would have the immeasurable riches of God that would throw down upon him protections of every kind and even in his infancy, Joseph has a dream.

God has told him to arise with the child and flee. Imagine, Jesus himself in his adulthood says, the foxes even have holes.

[11 : 56] The son of man has no place to lay his head. I mention these things because we have succumbed to an implicit lie, a human desire to be secure in the world.

Very little in this world remains firmly fixed for long. Ours is an ever-changing world. Concrete and steal, but citizens always in flux.

And so today I say to you very simply and clearly, in an ever-changing world, I want you to know one of my unchanging commitments.

And it is a commitment to the word of God. God. The word of God birthed this congregation. The word of God strengthens this congregation.

This congregation will live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. God. There are times when people look back upon Billy Graham's early experience where he was wrestling with the historicity of the scriptures, the intellectual capacity of the scriptures, and he tells the story of going out in the woods and in prayer and on some stump, saying, I don't know how to handle all these things, but God, I want you to know that I believe in this word, that this word that you have given to us in the scriptures is authoritative and I will live the rest of my life upon these.

[14 : 01] There's an element, of course, at that where in a context like our own, it seems a bit simplistic for indeed the questions are great and the closer reading of the text you give and the questions only increase and yet there's something beautiful about his commitment.

In his heart of heart, in his soul, deep down he says, I will commit myself to the authority of these words. These words are God's words.

We say weekly, this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. This is a great solace to me, this commitment, a commitment to the scriptures, and I hope that it will be a great solace to you.

That when we have a commitment to God's word, we ought to know that it should remain fixed. It is fundamental. It is a primary commitment.

If you're new to Holy Trinity, this will become obvious over time. Interestingly, my second just went off to college. her last Sunday at Holy Trinity.

[15 : 18] She said, well, that was an interesting day. Two sermons, one on the west side and one in the south side. The west side congregation, the sermon was from 2 Timothy on preach the word.

And she said, and then I came to the south side and the sermon was on live under the word. And I said, Joanna, in one day you've seen it all. That is Holy Trinity.

We may not understand everything concerning the scriptures. Indeed, how would we? We may disagree concerning certain aspects of the scriptures. Indeed, would we expect anything less in such a vibrant congregation as this?

But we are fundamentally fixed on this, that God's word must be preached and lived under. And this is a commitment that I make to you for the next 12 years in our midst.

And that Pastor Jay does as well. On this we will not change or waver. Now I know this is a little different because normally when you hear sermons about a commitment to God's word, it moves immediately to your quiet time.

[16 : 39] And whether you're reading the Bible regularly. I'm not going to concern myself with those questions at all today. I want to make three simple points of emphasis from this text concerning this personal, deep, abiding commitment to the word.

First, my commitment to God's word on your behalf as a congregation will supersede all other external authorities that might be brought to bear upon it.

Indeed, this is an interesting point in the letter. Peter has said in verses 12 through 15 that he is writing by way of reminder.

Verse 12, I intend always to remind you. He moves there, of course, to his preceding context. And then he says in verse 13, I think it is 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 the Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

He knows in a sense in verse 15 that the time of his departure has come, that even under the apostolic age, it was only in this world for a fleeting moment, and that the church would go well beyond them.

[18 : 07] And so while everything is changing, everything is in flux, the apostles themselves are now dying. He reminds them of what will hold them in a post-apostolic age.

And at this very moment then, if ever there was a moment in the scriptures, verse 16 and following were the big entry way for him to introduce an external authority that would hold the congregants after his demise.

I'm going the way of the flesh, all the apostles are going, and it is here that he has a window to introduce an external authority after his departure, whether it be apostolic succession as the Roman Catholic Church would hold, or any other authority that would hold them beyond his demise.

But what he does in 16 to 21 is interesting not only for what it does, but for what it doesn't do. It doesn't give you any other external authority under which to give your life to than the written word of God, to the apostolic witness.

And so we can have all the battles we want over the Bible, but there should be a fundamental agreement that this is our final and fixed authority.

[19 : 49] And that is the way that we will learn to grow with one another in the future. This is why at Holy Trinity we have a value called the centrality of the word.

Perhaps you're new to the area and you're looking for what kind of church you're going to bed down in, what kind of people you want to be with over the next years. Well, you probably came on a pretty decent day to get a good understanding of who we are, for better and worse.

The word of God. We envision at Holy Trinity that the word of God is always central. We don't make our appeals to any other external authority as a final arbiter.

Secondly, this commitment to God's word must surpass all internal impressions. Take a look at the text.

Obviously, Peter had some detractors. I mean, a close reading of the text begins this way, for we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 05] You see, the interesting thing was that as he was about to go the way of all flesh, there was an emergence of teaching within the church that would displace the apostolic witness concerning certain aspects of their message.

that certain things they taught came by the way of internal impression. They were things that they thought but that weren't true.

And so the word became that, well, that's kind of an apostolic myth. That's kind of a cleverly devised thing that they all felt, having walked with Jesus, would hold the day, but it hasn't, in effect, actually happened.

And what does it concern? concern? It concerns the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now you have to ask yourself contextually, what does that mean? What was the nature of the accusation against Peter that in certain aspects of his teaching concerning the power and coming of the Lord, he had been ruled by an internal impression rather than an objective truth?

Well, I think it's the power and coming of his return. If you read the letter as a whole, almost the entire weight of the letter is eschatological in nature.

[22 : 27] Even the word coming is twice else used in this very letter, each time referring to his second coming, at which time he will judge the living and the dead.

Chapter 3, verse 4, where is the promise of his coming? Chapter 3, verse 12, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.

That the letter is throwing this idea of an apostolic teaching about the coming of the Lord, signifying his return and that with that return he will hold everyone accountable for what they've done.

that notion of the coming judgment was now being relegated by the detractors during Peter's old age as an internal impression that should not hold the church after he dies.

In other words, they're saying, you know, first of all, the apostles said he was returning imminently and he hasn't. second of all, they're all dying.

[23 : 39] Third, they proclaimed that he would return and hold us all accountable for deeds done in the flesh. Guess what? That was an impression of their inward spirit and was not the teaching that should hold the church going forward.

And what Peter will do in this letter, and we don't have time to do it today, is in chapter 2, is to dismantle their desire to, in a sense, reveal they did not want a doctrinal truth about Christ's return and judgment because it would restrict their ability to live sensually according to the desires of their flesh and with greed in the context of the community.

So he says in this letter, let me tell you why they want to dismantle my teaching about Christ's return, his coming, in power, it's because they want to make their living off of you, and they want to live in sexual ways, in ways that we have commanded you are outside the confines of scripture.

That's what happens in 2 Peter chapter 2. And what Peter wants to say is that his commitment to the word of God is based not on some internal impression.

I want to make a comment here. Because one thing I've learned living here for nearly 12 years now is that the closer we give ourselves to the reading of the biblical text, ironically, there are moments when we can end up in such a quandary that we kind of say, that's got to sit over here to the side and I will live according to some internal impression of what I think should guide me.

[25 : 40] In other words, this temptation is a temptation right within our midst. God's impression of this can happen.

What I want to tell you today is to again commit yourself to God's word in ways that it will surpass any internal impression as the final arbiter.

Indeed, he goes to the voice that came from the majestic glory. He says concerning the transfiguration event that he heard a voice from heaven say, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

And Peter would have made the referent of that word to Psalm 2, where in Psalm 2 we have this is my beloved son.

And in that context of Psalm 2, God's son comes to reign and to rule and to return in judgment over all the earth.

[27 : 04] And so he says to the people, as the apostolic age is drawing to a close, my conviction that Christ will return to judge the living and the dead is rooted from the voice that was born from heaven, revealed in Psalm 2, concerning the Messiah who would come and return and reign.

Third, our commitment to the word of God should supersede our personal experience. I hope you're as as tired as I am of living in America in this hour where our personal experiences become the final arbiter for everything.

Even Peter doesn't allow his personal experience at the transfiguration to be a final arbiter. Look what he says in verse 19.

After that great personal experience, what does he say? Ultimately, finally, he says, and we have something more sure, 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.

! Well, I know this. The coming year will bring a sea of continual change.

[28 : 48] And there will be times for you personally and privately in the midst of the night where you will feel not quite secure, never quite stable, not yet standing in the place that you feel, ah, at long last, this is where I will stay and rest a while.

God. And in those moments, remember that you belong to a community of faith that has an unchanging commitment to God's word.

And that as we gather together in ways to understand it to the best of our ability, we will hold fast to the apostolic gospel, the only one that provides sure footing into the kingdom, come what may.

Our heavenly father, as we celebrate our life in the gospel, we redouble our efforts to be an exilic citizenry that studies your word well and lives under it humbly.

and so we again refresh our minds and our hearts to be committed to your word. Grow us in it, we pray.

[30 : 26] In Christ's name, amen. I want to encourage you to stand and sing our closing hymn together. We will glorify the kingdom kings, we will glorify all the land, through each