

Be Attentive to the Message

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Date: 18 April 1999

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 18th of April 1999.

The preacher is Gavin Ward. His subject is entitled Be Attentive to the Message and is from 2 Peter 1.12-21.

Heavenly Father, may the words that I speak this morning and may the thoughts of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight. In Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

Thank you.

What will work on the 1st of January and what won't work? Do I store up cans of food, containers of water, packets of candles and matches, tins of petrol?

[1 : 25] What do I have to accumulate so I can survive on the 1st of January? Some say don't worry. Others say worry. It's all very uncertain about what's going to take place.

And part of the reason for the uncertainty is because we're ignorant. We don't know enough about it. So in our ignorance we'll either charge or stumble through the 31st of December and into the 1st of January, the end of this year.

It's all very uncertain. Life's full of many of these uncertainties. What does the future hold? What will become of my children? What will become of my grandchildren?

How can I be sure about anything? Is there a God? And if there is, how can I be sure about him? How can I be sure about my faith if I'm a Christian?

We're uncertain about some of these things because we lack assurance. The passage to us today that was read to us by Ben from 2 Peter addresses a situation of some uncertainty.

[2 : 29] And if you'd like to follow with me, it's on page 987 of the Bible's passage from 2 Peter. The letter of 2 Peter was written, obviously, by Peter the Apostle.

And he wrote it about 30 years after Jesus was on earth. And it's a farewell speech. Peter's in Rome, we think, and it's a farewell speech that he's writing, which was common in those days.

But when someone was about to die, they wanted to let people know of their thoughts so they could be retained after they died. And this is written just before his death.

And we know that Peter was executed in Rome because he refused to give up saying and professing and proclaiming that Jesus is God and his saviour. And so he was executed in Rome because that wasn't a popular thing to say in Rome at the time.

And he's writing to Christians, and we know that from verse 1 of 2 Peter, where he says he's writing to those who have received the faith as precious as ours. So this letter from 2 Peter is written to Christians.

[3 : 32] But those Christians are having their faith undermined by false teachers who have infiltrated the church. And those teachers are twisting the interpretation of the Bible.

They're undermining church leadership. They're exploiting people with greed and immorality. They're sceptical about Christ's return, and they're putting big question marks over a number of things. There's uncertainty about their faith.

Well, Peter opens the letter and combats this situation in the first part of the letter, which we haven't read to us this morning. But he basically says to sum up the argument, you can be sure of your faith, because as God has given you all you need in verse 3, he says, including your knowledge of him.

And on top of this base of faith, this foundation, you can build the qualities of Christian living, which are listed then in verses 5 through to 8.

And then he summarises his argument to this point by saying, if you do these things, you will never fall away from God, and you will receive a warm welcome into God's eternal kingdom.

[4 : 37] But then, in the passage that's read to us this morning, he broadens the discussion about assurance. And he says three things that we need to keep in mind as he talks to these people.

He says three things they need to keep in mind for assurance, to keep assurance in their faith. And Peter does this with a passionate plea. He's talking or writing with passion.

He's writing from Rome to people far off. He will never see these people again. And he desperately wants them to understand the message that he's saying.

It's a bit like a parent corresponding with a child who's far away, or a friend that we're corresponding with from afar off. And we want them to understand what we're trying to tell them.

And short of going up and shaking them by the shoulders, we're actually writing to them. And it's with that passion and that urgency that Peter is trying to get his message through.

[5 : 33] And we'll find that as we explore the passage this morning. So what are the three things? The first thing, he says, is something to do. The second two things, support that with some knowledge.

The first thing is to always remember. And that's in verses 12 to 15. Verse 15, he says, always remember these things. These things are the things mentioned earlier.

The basis of our faith, the basics of our Christian faith. The gospel message that Christ died for our rebellion against God. That he was resurrected again.

And by that, he's defeated death. And we can have eternal life by trusting him. But he has a writer on it, an additional comment as well. He says, always remember these things in verse 12.

Although you know them already and are established in the truth. You've already understood and heard the gospel message. And even though you understand it and have it ingrained in you and have it in your heart, you still need to remind yourselves of these truths.

[6 : 35] Always remind yourselves of these truths. Now, I wonder whether you've had to learn something new in life. Maybe you've tried to learn a musical instrument.

Or maybe you've tried to learn a new language. Or maybe one of the most complex things I reckon any of us can ever learn to do is try to tune the VCR to the TV. It's just about impossible.

You do it once. Or maybe you've got chords all over the place and instructions. And you're trying to flick the switches. And I mean, I generally have a go at it for about two hours and give up. And my brother comes around and does it in five minutes.

So I should learn. And I should always ask him to come around to do it. But you need to go through those instructions. And you wrestle with it. And you finally get there. And you've tuned it in. And then everything works okay for about two or three or four years or whatever until the video breaks down or whatever.

And you've got to get another one. And then you're back to square one again. How do I tune this new one into the television? I've got no idea. We need to go back to the instructions, don't we?

[7 : 37] And because we haven't been regularly tuning videos into televisions over the intervening period of five years, the instructions become lost in our head and we forget. Even though we perhaps knew them once, we've forgotten about it all.

That's the sort of message Peter is saying. He's saying he knows the value of remembering and refreshing our memory in things. And he says it with a passion.

In verse 12 he says, Therefore I intend to keep on reminding you of these things. In verse 13 he says, I will refresh your memory. And in verse 15 he says, I will make every effort for you to remember or to recall the truth.

There's a real passion about what he's wanting to know, to remember, to remember, even though they are firmly established in the truth. The Old Testament is full of the prophets reminding the people of Israel about the promises made to Abraham, about the exodus, the way that he rescued them, the people of Israel from Egypt, from slavery, and with Moses brought them out from slavery.

These reminders were meant to remind them of the foundations of their faith. And Peter's saying the same things here. Why? To withstand the false teaching that's undermining the church at that time.

[8 : 57] Paul's pleading with them. He will do all he can. He wants them to know how important it is to know the basics of their truth. So they won't be led astray. So they will have assurance.

The act of remembering brings with it assurance amid uncertainty. He supports this by two other things. And the second thing he says is that Christ's glory has been seen.

And we read that in verses 16 to 18, where we read of the account of the transfiguration. He says, We, the apostles, didn't invent any of these sorts of things.

They're not cleverly devised myths by us. The things we've been telling you about Jesus and his glory. We didn't make any of these sorts of things up. Maybe the false teachers were saying, Well, these guys, Peter, etc., have made these stories up.

He says, No, we didn't make any of them up because we were witnesses. We saw the glory of Christ on that mount of transfiguration. And you can be sure of what we say because we haven't made it up.

[9 : 55] We are eyewitnesses of his glory and majesty. Verse 17. For Peter, he says, You can believe me because I've seen it.

Peter's speeches in Acts are full of him talking about Christ's glory, of what he saw with Jesus, and of talking about Jesus returning again.

And the transfiguration was when Peter, James and John, Jesus took them up onto a mountain, and he was transfigured. We don't really understand what that completely was. It's recorded in the Gospels.

But we do understand that it was for a glimpse in a moment that they caught the full glory of this person, Jesus. And the inference is that the disciples have seen this glory, which is the glory that everybody in this building will see one day.

Whether you believe it or not, you will see Christ's glory one day, as those disciples did when he returns again. And the words that are written there in verse 17, This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased, are an allusion to a psalm from the Old Testament in the early part of the Bible, where a king is appointed to judge and to rule.

[11 : 14] And God here is appointing Jesus as a ruler and a judge. Though the words that read out to us also that were recorded at Jesus' baptism, as well as his transfiguration.

Jesus will be a future ruler and a future judge. And we can be sure of this because the glory which those disciples saw is still to come.

We can be sure because Peter is talking about the fact that it's still to come. Assurance because of Christ's glory as witnessed, as seen by the apostles. The third thing that helps us with our assurance that we need that Peter is talking to his people about is the certainty of Scripture.

The certainty of Scripture. He says in verse 19, So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. And the prophetic message in this case refers to all of Scripture, the Old Testament.

And that's all they would have had at that stage. Although there are some hints in Peter's letters about the New Testament. He talks about Paul's letters in chapter 3. And also in verse 15, there's perhaps an allusion to the fact that he was involved in putting together Mark's Gospel as well with Mark.

[12 : 31] Once again, the passion of Peter comes through. In verse 19 he says, You will do well to be attentive. And in verse 20, First of all, you must understand these things.

You must understand that you can trust God's word, the Bible. And in verse 19 it says that these things have been made more certain because of what we saw in the transfiguration.

At that point, a word came from heaven. God's word came to heaven saying, This is my son, my beloved. And the words of the prophets in verse 21 are also come from God.

Not made up by men. Not people making up their own things. But words from God coming through people who put together the Scriptures, the Bible for us.

So we can be sure of the certainty of the Scriptures. Hebrews 1 also talks about the fact that God spoke through the prophets of old. So verse 19 then goes on to talk about the Scriptures.

[13 : 34] And it said, God's word is like a light shining in a dark place or a lamp shining in a dark place. It's like a torch lighting up a dark path. You're going down, you rely on the torch because it lights up the path, the darkness that's there in front of you.

God's word, the Bible, lights up a dark path. In an age of uncertainty, God's word provides assurance for us. And this will all occur until, it says there, until the day dawning, which is the second coming when Christ comes again.

When he returns and the morning star rises, Jesus identifies himself as the morning star in Revelation. And the morning star will rise in your hearts means that when he returns, as I said earlier, everybody will see him.

Everybody who's ever lived, everybody in this building today, in this church today, will see him and will realise, not only with their eyes, but in their hearts, who this Jesus really is.

He is the Son of God. So Peter says to his readers, you can have assurance, not only because of what we've seen, but because of God's word.

[14 : 42] So what does that mean for us here today? Well, today we're celebrating the baptisms of Hamish and John and Christine and Isabella.

And it's a great day. And we're baptising them into the church family here today, which believes in these truths. But what of our responsibility as parents and as godparents and as a church family as we care for these youngsters?

As we care for their spiritual growth? And as we care to ensure that they understand the truths of the Christian faith? If we're to take our responsibilities seriously, we need to be assured of our own faith.

How can we have this assurance? Well, Peter says to those people with a passion, and he says it today to us with a passion, that we firstly he's seen Christ's glory, which we will all one day see in the future.

This has already been witnessed by the apostles. Secondly, that we can be certain of what's written in the Bible, because it's not made up by men, but it's inspired by God.

[16 : 00] And thirdly, by reminding ourselves of these basic truths and refreshing ourselves of them. This morning, if you don't know the fundamental truths of Christianity, if you haven't even had it explained to you, if you don't understand the great hope that's offered by Jesus in a world of despair, can I encourage you today to ask someone about it?

Maybe this is the first time you've been in a church for a while. Don't let the opportunities like this, don't let these sorts of opportunities go past without actually asking someone about what these truths are that this person is talking about.

You can talk to me afterwards, you can talk to Paul afterwards, or someone else, but don't let opportunities like this go past. And if you do know the truths of Christianity, you've accepted Christ into your heart, you realise what he did for you on the cross, and you're fair dinkum about serving him in your lives.

Can I encourage you today to remind yourselves of the basics of your faith? And some of the suggestions I have, perhaps you could read a gospel once a year.

We did the classes with the parents over the last four weeks, and we read Mark's gospel over four weeks. It's not that hard to do, but it reminds us of the basic truths of our faith.

[17 : 28] Perhaps you could then read a book like Romans, which is a wonderful book talking about faith. And can I encourage you to even do that once a year? Have a regular time of Bible reading and prayer each day.

Take the opportunity to do a course. Paul talked about the discipleship course coming up. Alpha course is coming up as well, starting shortly. Take these opportunities to refresh yourselves and remind yourselves of the basic truths of your faith.

Discuss your faith with other Christians on a regular basis. faith with faith. Let me conclude with an experience I had recently. As I mentioned, I've been working with the parents of the four children to be baptised today in classes.

And part of the preparation was that we had to look at what Jesus did on the cross in removing our condemnation and taking it on himself, an innocent party, taking on that condemnation himself on the cross.

And when we did that, we focused on the words of Jesus on the cross. My God, my God, why have you deserted me? Now, I've been a Christian for many years.

[18 : 41] But as we looked at those words as a group, I realised with an own fresh emphasis in my own heart the enormity of Jesus' pain and suffering for me and for all of us.

I realised that he was cut off completely from God. And this is something that I will never have to experience and none of us have experienced this today because God's active in this world.

We've never been cut off from God. When Jesus died on the cross, he was cut off completely and utterly from God. And I thank him for doing that.

He's gone where I never, ever have to go. Suffered what I never, ever have to suffer. By taking a fresh look and reading Mark's Gospel and taking a fresh look at those words, I was able to be further assured absolutely in my own faith.

We all need to take a fresh look at the basics of our faith. And when we do, we can get some delightful surprises. As you step into the next millennium on the 1st of January 2000, maybe you're not sure about what will work or what won't work in your own home.

[20 : 02] But you can step into the next millennium certain and assured about your faith. In an age of uncertainty, be assured of your faith.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word to us today. Thank you for the assurance that we can have because of the witness of people like Peter, because of the way you've inspired your word for us.

Help us to be disciplined, encourage us to remember these things and to refocus on the basics as we serve you. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. For Judaism, to be un bonne peace.

For Judaism, to be