

Experiencing Scripture

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 June 2024

Preacher: Nick Freestone

[0 : 0 0] Good morning and welcome church, welcome online, good to see you. My name is Nick, I'm the pastor for discipleship here at St. Paul's. Lovely to see you. What did we just experience?

Today we're taking our final step in our season called Your Word is Truth. And if you're new today or you've missed a week or two, let me catch you up real quick on what we've heard from God's Word in preaching this term.

Joseph, you might want to turn this down. I do tend to get a little emotional and louder than that. There we go, caught me just in time. Here's where we've been. The Bible is the truth that interprets the world.

We ought to take it seriously. It needs nothing added to it. We need it to discover God. It's how we see God's glory.

It's clear enough for anyone to see God. For a child and a university professor. It reveals eternal past to future reality with complete finality.

[1 : 1 1] And all of it, every word of it, in history and promise and song and poem and wisdom and prophecy, all intertwined with the journeys of real, broken, fallible children, women and men, is gathered for us to point us toward one person, Jesus, who was God and is God.

Jesus is the embodiment of the Bible, called the Word himself, as the only true, worthy, capable, certain, majestic, authentic, climactic, reigning king over the kingdom of God that has been forever planned through him and established for him.

So it's not just another book, right? The Bible is all of that. And it's a completely new experience that you must have.

And you can't get that experience any other way. Experiencing the Bible as God intends really matters. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Lord God, you made the world and all that is in it. You gave us testimony through the Holy Spirit from witnesses and prophets who wrote down your works and your words for all people to experience.

[2 : 4 2] Would you help us to see in these words as your spirit carries us along in them? Help us to see Jesus in Scripture today and light our life by him to guide us on our journey.

Amen. As a child, my family went on one big holiday to Canada. I could tell you stories about a bald eagle that flew just over our heads.

It was so big and terrifying. I felt like cowering, even though it was nowhere near me at the time. I saw a bear catching a salmon in a river.

I had hot chocolate by a waterfall beside a glacier. After canoeing across a lake. A pod of orcas swam along beside our boat.

It was amazing. And we had a camera with us. It was one of those old film cameras where you don't ever know if a photo was going to turn out. You just have the guess of capturing that moment.

[3 : 47] But the photos that we caught, even though many of them are very good, they don't tell the whole story of just experiencing the awe and wonder of that place. Each picture helps tell the story of our trip.

But to truly experience it, you had to be there. You had to be there. It's this little phrase that in English that we use to truly experience what happened, you need more than a story.

You need more than a photo. You'd have to be physically there. Hearing you had to be there when someone's telling you a story, it's quite isolating. Often people are using it to say, you weren't there.

The joy or the shock or the gravity of what someone's trying to tell you about that event, it can't be shared in a way that brings us into that experience.

But the Bible is not like that. As you read its words, even over and over and over again, you experience something that according to 2 Peter is even better than witnessing the history in person.

[5 : 06] It's even better than being there. Because God's speaking these words as we read them. These words will never leave you empty.

Just fearing that you'd have to be there. Today's passage is a letter from Peter. It's his second letter that we have.

And Peter was one of Jesus' closest 12 disciples. And he wrote this letter to Christians around about 65 AD. Now, I don't know much about history, but I know that was a really bad guy running Rome at about this time called Emperor Nero.

And he loved killing Christians. Eyewitnesses to Jesus were being killed and they were dying out. And in verses 13 to 14, Peter tells us that he fully expected to die soon.

And he would. He was crucified. It is said he was hung upside down on a cross for his faith.

[6 : 17] And as Peter is writing this, he knows it's going to be his last letter in all likelihood. It's like his last will in Testament. So what's in Peter's will?

What does Peter want to communicate to Christians as one last final word? Is he going to tell a grand story? Like, ah, you had to be there.

All right, bye. No, Peter instead is going to explain why we don't need him around. As we have the scriptures as our eyewitness to the power and majesty of Jesus.

Because in experiencing scripture, we are made to see what Peter saw. We become eyewitnesses of Jesus ourselves through scripture's words.

Peter is going to explain this to us by, figuratively, he's going to get out one old photo. One story that his readers would have already heard him tell.

[7 : 25] And he's going to say this. One last time. Let me just point to this and say, you know what? This incredible experience that I had is what you'll experience.

And I'm sure of it. When you open scripture. So let's see how Peter shares this memory with us.

This little Polaroid from his journey. Have a look in your Bibles of verse 16. And if I haven't convinced you or the last few weeks haven't convinced you, make sure you've got your Bible in your hand in this moment.

Check with me that this is what God says. Don't just rely on the screen. I type mistakes all the time. Verse 16 of 2 Peter chapter 1 says, For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Peter must have been surrounded by sceptical people challenging his stories about Jesus, even as he shared them as eyewitness testimony, as his proof.

[8 : 39] Peter is said to have been the main source for Mark's gospel, which is one of the four consistent histories of Jesus that we have gathered from many eyewitnesses here in the Bible.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They're not myths. And as those gospels will attest to, and Mark as well, Peter is not clever at all.

He almost laughed. I imagine Peter laughing in that verse that we just read. At the idea that he would be clever enough to make up everything that he said happened.

How could he make up something so wonderful? So he one last time testifies to the power and majesty of Jesus.

And Peter shares the testimony of God himself. So let's have a look at the next verse there. Verse 17. If you've ever read the gospels, you might be aware of the little photo that Peter's pulled out here.

[10 : 17] Do you know what memory he's pointing us to? He wants us to remember a moment, as if we've already heard it, because he's already told the people who he's writing to, about what we now call the transfiguration, which is recorded in three of the four gospels.

And one is in Mark chapter 9. So I'm going to actually show you what this photo is. I'm going to describe this memory to you, as Peter told it to Mark. Here's what happened.

Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led him up a high mountain where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before him.

His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Then a cloud appeared and covered them. And a voice came from the cloud. This is my son, whom I love. Listen to him.

[11 : 26] Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone except Jesus. The Lord God himself, and Moses and Elijah, and Peter, James and John, and Jesus together testify that Jesus is God's son, the Messiah.

So here's why I think Peter shares with us, and with everyone who reads this, that one memory. Jesus was witnessed to by Moses and Elijah.

The Old Testament was summarized in Jewish tradition as the law and the prophets. The law and the prophets.

The champions, or the main characters, or the most memorable characters of those two sections were Moses and Elijah. And in this moment, Peter was showing us that their presence on the mountain of transfiguration confirmed Jesus is the Messiah, the man those two men had personally written about and hoped for.

And figuratively, the law and the prophets that they represent, the whole Old Testament, is there, figuratively, witnessing to Jesus in that moment.

[12 : 53] All the fulfillment of the promises of the entire Old Testament, pointing to Jesus and saying, listen to him as you've listened to us.

It is their witness, their original prophetic message, that has led Peter to share this memory in his last will with us in particular.

So let's have a look at verse 19. Again, we also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it.

It is as if Peter's held up this photo, this memory, and he's taken you through it. He's pointed you one more time, just last thing, just remember this thing that happened to me. And then he says this, as I put this photo down, pick your Bible up.

As I leave, pick up Scripture. In here is a clearer moment, a clearer picture of what I've just described, what I got to see with my own eyes.

- [14 : 13] It's clearer in there. The original language is even stronger, and I've highlighted it on the screen for you, because a better translation of verse 19, which happens to be in the ESV and some of the other translations, Peter actually says, we have something more sure, the prophetic word.

More sure than even being there, or hearing from Peter, is what God does through the prophetic word. Now, Peter here is talking about part of the Old Testament, talking about the Old Testament Scripture, when he explains how God worked to create it.

In the past, God never left people to create their own interpretation of him, based on the world around them, in verse 20.

Have a look there in verse 20, you might see that there. Or by their own thought or will, in verse 21. But these more sure Scriptures came directly from God himself.

Peter is connecting God's own testimony that he heard from heaven about Jesus with God's words spoken through the pages of the law and the prophets.

- [15 : 30] These are one continuous testimony. God testified through the Old Testament this way. In verse 21, Peter says, prophets, though human, spoke from God, as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

I read this week that we can think of this like sailing. Ever been sailing? Ever been at the beach and had the urge to go sail?

Let me try and put you in that place. Imagine a calm ocean beside a small town. You look out to the ocean and you see the water surface darken and shiver, showing where the wind is moving.

There's a boat on the shore with a mast. It's begging you to push it out into the ocean. As you break through the waves with it, you see an island out to sea.

You're kicking a snorkel around in the bottom of the boat. And then as you look, you see dolphins just turning the corner around the point ahead of you and away out of sight.

- [16 : 52] What do you need to do to experience sailing in this moment? Because frankly, that boat's not going to move you. Once you get in it, you're just going to sit there and it's going to be a real dull experience.

What do you need? You need to set a sail. If you raised a sail on that mast, turned it to catch some breeze, the boat would move along against the current and you'd steer it on by the strongest wind and you'd sail wherever that wind might send you and go with it where you could not go without it.

Scripture is like sailing. People wrote what the wind, figuratively, but the wind of the Spirit gave them.

As they were blown along, carried by the Holy Spirit, they yielded their sail, themselves, to its direction. They didn't swim. They didn't get out there with their hands and try and push themselves along.

They yielded to the wind of the Holy Spirit. Because they wrote God's words for us in this way, our experience in reading those same words, in our experience, we're blown along by the same Spirit.

- [18 : 11] It's like we've caught the same breeze. We're carried along as sailors towards God's destination for us and as we've heard this season, all the wind blows toward Jesus.

Peter is more sure that God will speak to readers of Scripture through the Holy Spirit than having to be there to witness Jesus.

Does that make you think of anyone? It makes me think of doubting Thomas. Does anyone remember Thomas, the poor guy who has doubting forever in front of his name? He was a disciple who wasn't there when Jesus first appeared to the disciples.

And when they told him about it, he didn't believe it. But when Jesus did appear to him, immediately he says, my Lord and my God.

Seeing was believing. Then Jesus says, because you have seen me, you have believed. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

[19 : 16] Peter is saying this morning, if you open this, you get to see. the blessing of God is received by those who open Scripture and see Jesus revealed.

Lord and God, powerful and majestic. Even though we did not see him like Peter and Thomas in Scripture, we really can see. And Scripture does not stop with the law and the prophets.

Peter is not just talking about an Old Testament experience. and here's how I know that. Peter wrote later in this letter in chapter 3.

We were in chapter 3 as a community group this week of 2 Peter. He writes actually there about Paul's letters. Because people around Peter and Paul both at the time, they were twisting their words to try and prove them as wrong or try and prove Jesus as just another man.

And people were doubting and twisting Paul's words as they were doing that. They were denying Jesus' power and majesty. And Peter says something amazing here.

[20 : 33] He says in verse 16 that those who twist Paul's words also twist the other Scriptures. Did you just catch that?

Peter just equates the Old Testament, the Scriptures of God with Paul's letters. Even the earliest teaching of the church that was coming from the mouths of the apostles in these letters was expected to be as powerful to Christians as the Old Testament, as eyewitness testimony, as all the Scriptures.

He applies in our passage today, verse 21, to Paul as one who spoke from God as if they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Testimony validates Jesus. The prophetic word witnesses Jesus. Scriptures validate other Scriptures. It's the testimony of the apostles too that were part of the Holy Spirit's work.

They were all inspired by the Spirit of God. They are trustworthy. And likewise, as they were inspired, as their sails were filled, so are ours as we experience the Bible.

[21 : 56] That experience as we see Jesus through Peter's testimony and Mark, his reminders in his letters and Paul's letters and the other Gospels and the Old Testament and everything in here changes life for us.

And Peter says that opening Scripture in verse 19 is like is the experience. Here's why I said when Merle had finished her reading, what have we just experienced?

This is what Peter thinks we've just experienced. A light shining in a dark place. To truly be ever in the dark, pitch dark, is terrifying.

I heard a true story this week. There were war planes coming back from a dog fight in a world war and they were flying back over the Atlantic Ocean trying to land on their aircraft carrier but they couldn't see it.

They knew where it was but they couldn't see it in the pitch dark of the night. and they radioed down to try and tell the aircraft carrier hey can you put the lights on we don't know where to land.

[23 : 01] And the aircraft carrier said no we can't. We've got intel that there's threats above and below that if we are seen they'll shoot us and we'll sink.

So we can't put our lights on. They had nowhere to land and they perished in the dark waves of the Atlantic Ocean. Peter says that to not open scripture or pay attention to it is to keep our eyes shut to the light that we need to see in the darkness of our world.

Jesus says in John 8 12 I am the light of the world. Imagery of light in the Bible usually is pointing us to Jesus.

If you're a Christian you might have had a moment of seeing that light for the first time. When you see Jesus as Lord and God like a dawn of the most wonderful day you've ever experienced.

Light exploding over the horizon into the darkness of your life and your mind and your heart receive it and remember it. Friends every time Christians open scripture they return to that source of light to enjoy what they first eyewitnessed through the Holy Spirit in its pages.

[24 : 34] And then the next verse of John 8 is just astonishing. It's on the screen verse 13 the Pharisees challenged him here you are appearing as your own witness your testimony is not valid.

Oh how wrong they were. The Holy Spirit testifies with Jesus to the fact that he is the light of the world. All of scripture God himself Peter, James, John they all testify that Jesus is the light of the world.

And if we didn't need light if we didn't need Jesus if we didn't need anything if you didn't need the experience of scripture then the world wouldn't need Jesus.

You wouldn't need any of this information. We wouldn't need to be here. We wouldn't need to open our Bibles. But we do need it because this world is as deep as darkness compared to a life with Jesus.

By his light we see what is in the dark and turn away and turn to him for safety by the light of the world.

[25 : 48] Jesus who said whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. He is eternally committed to every Christian to always be their light.

he stepped into our darkness to lead us into his eternal light. If we're warplanes in the dark of the night sky and there's a threat to the aircraft carrier ship that's Jesus he would turn his lights on until verse 19 says of our passage today the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts for there will be a day when Jesus who is called the morning star in the Old Testament in Isaiah 14 and in Revelation in chapter 22 when Jesus will finally come in the dawn of an unending day Jesus himself will be with us.

He will satisfy the hopes of every heart so we will no longer walk in darkness again. We will not need our Bibles then but we will experience what we now find in scripture truly face to face with Jesus but until that morning star rises until Jesus comes again the real sun rises over our city day after day after day.

Every day we have a choice to turn to the light of Jesus in scripture or not. So look back in our passage today 1 Peter let's go back to verse 13 I think it right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body because I know that I will soon put it aside as the Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me and I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

Do you see Peter's hope for you here as a Christian written in his will or as someone who doesn't yet follow Jesus watching what God is promising Christians?

[28 : 12] He would see Christians as always able to remember all he testified to and all scripture's testimony along with it so we can live life seeing in the dark.

We can only keep tiny fragments of the wonder of scripture in our mind at any one time. You might have remembered the whole of the book of Romans but there's so much more than just that.

The regular daily deliberate hopeful Bible reading was what people knew we needed for life more than we needed him even though we'd never seen a Bible.

His efforts put words in our hands. He was killed for what he put in our hands so we would always be reading and seeing the light never blind in the dark of our world.

I left out two verses on purpose from Peter's little photo. I just want to point to them as we finish off today.

[29 : 25] On the mountain when that astonishing wonderful thing is happening and blowing Peter's mind Peter piped up and said Rabbi it's good for us to be here.

Let's put up three shelters one for you one for Moses and one for Elijah. He did not know what to say. They were so frightened. Isn't Peter relatable? He always opens his mouth and says something stupid.

But do you see the word shelter there on the screen? it's tent in other translations. In the Greek original Greek it's the word tabernacle.

The same word Peter uses to describe his body in our passage today. When Peter dies he's going to cast off his temporary shelter looking forward to receiving a glorified body that he just saw Jesus take on up the mountain.

he's remembering this stupid thing that he said to Jesus in that moment about building tents for them to dwell there because he knew he missed the point on that day. Jesus had given up the glory of heaven to take up this tent dwelling of a body so we could look forward to a new life beyond our aging tents.

[30 : 55] In 2 Peter he's now well into his 60s he's facing execution for his faith and he's probably chuckling to himself as he describes his own body as a tent because he discovered that what he did in the tent of his body on earth mattered for eternity and he lived boldly in the light of his Lord Jesus and Peter would call us to do the same.

Peter wrote in this letter probably reflecting on Moses words in Deuteronomy 4 that would have been well known to those of a Jewish background.

Do not forget the things your eyes have seen. Let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Experiencing the Bible is your chance to see Jesus in a way more sure than the eyewitness Peter did.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Scripture speaks to you by that same Spirit of God. And as we read, we see light that guides our way in the darkness of this world.

And once experienced, the Bible continues to light our journey, our way every day until Jesus comes back. So what are you going to do with it?

[32 : 20] what are you going to do with your Bible? Maybe not drop it. Is experiencing this work going to matter to you?

There are so many distractions here in the dark. They want to pull your face away, to shut these pages, to even forget where your Bible is.

And I'm too often deceived, to keep this word shut and on the shelf myself. Don't listen to those distractions. If you're one who has never seen Jesus, open a gospel.

Get the word one-to-one app, which is like a guided tour through one of the gospels written by John, who's also there on the mountain with Peter, an eyewitness to Jesus.

Open the word to see the light that you need that shows Jesus for who he really is. And to you who are here this morning, who say you have seen Jesus but are not opening your Bible, ask God for the desire to see him.

[33 : 37] He will help you. Do not leave your eyes shut in the dark any longer. And ask for help. staff would love to speak to you today, anyone wearing one of these, to help you find, even though your lips are declaring that you follow Jesus, that your life shows that you are also interested and desiring to experience light in his word.

Speak to someone to help you shift that attitude today. And for those of you who are opening God's word, more often than not, four or more times a week, keep reading.

Peter would have reminded you that no matter how often your Bible is opened, to keep looking into the light, keep seeing Jesus for the sake of defending Jesus' power and majesty like he spent his life doing, for your own sake and for the sake of those you live alongside, at home and at work or wherever you are, who witness you living for Jesus, testifying to them in word and action, that he is the light of your world and theirs.

They can't see him without experiencing scripture. So, ready yourself to open the Bible with others.

God, it's how we all can witness Jesus in a way more sure than we've witnessed your changed life lived in his light.

[35 : 21] Let's ask God to help us as we experience the scripture. Let's pray. Lord God, you know us and love us. Thank you for giving us your words in the Bible to experience the wind of your spirit's guidance, that help us see Jesus as powerful, glorious, as your son, and reveal him as light that guides us to life in the darkness of our sinful world.

We are so imperfect, just like Peter was. Would you help us to come to know Jesus? Would you help us to desire to experience scripture every day?

Would you help us to share the light of scripture in our lives, so that many of the millions you love may experience seeing Jesus like Peter did on that mountain, in his glorious, gracious majesty, forevermore.

Amen.