

What are you following?

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Date: 11 March 2018

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[0:00] 2 Peter 1, verses 16-21. That's 2 Peter 1, verses 16-21. 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 honour 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. 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 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, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

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. So we'll stand to sing our final song. 1, verses 16-21.

As we begin, I want to ask you, what are you following? What direction is leading your life? What guides your life?

[1:17] Is there anything that comes to mind? Any goals that you have? Anything where your mind rests when you're not thinking about anything else? What drives you? We all know that the way our bodies work, or indeed fail to work, is dependent a lot on what we feed it.

And our lives work in much the same way. What we feed our minds and hearts with directs how we live. So the reason I ask this question is because this is exactly the kind of question that Peter begins his defense in these verses.

So Peter begins this passage stating the importance of the resurrection, then calls for Christians to remind themselves of God's word before going on to securing Scripture as the final authority in every matter.

So as we begin, it's worth noting the context of the readers Peter's talking to. He's talking to Christians within the early church, that they can stay strong in the faith, pursue godliness, and feed their minds with the right things, and really not be taken in by false teachers, to which he devotes the second half of the letter.

If you look over at verse 14, Peter shows us that Jesus has made it known to him that he's about to die. The putting off my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus has made clear to me.

[2:50] So part of what Peter's saying through his writing is he wants something to be there when he's gone. He's written this for us, in a sense, and for the people there, so that they know what to do when he's no longer with them.

So as we go in, the first point is the importance of Christ's coming. If you could look with me at verse 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.

As I say, a fair proportion of this book is devoted to the impending judgment and destruction of false teachers, the wickedness that they commit in distorting God's truth.

And Peter, in this verse, shows the kinds of things that were being said, the kinds of doubts that were being fed into the church. And the point that Peter takes particular issue with is, and seeks to get to the bottom of as soon as he can, is their doubts over the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You might wonder why this would be the specific point he's going into. If the early church is going to have any problem, surely it would be something like the doctrine of Jesus being God, or the fact that it's by grace and not by works.

[4 : 19] But here he's honing in on the fact of Christ's second coming. Essentially, the accusation being put against Peter is that his belief in the final judgment.

You see that for false teachers, described later as slaves of corruption, as those that follow the polluted desires of their flesh, a rejection of the second coming is a rejection of the resurrection, and implicitly a rejection of the final judgment.

They're all interwoven. So the reason for pushing this away, this idea of a second coming away, is logical. When there is no final judgment, there is no accountability, and people think they can live however they like.

If you see, the logic then is the same as the logic now. I'm sure we're all familiar with this kind of thinking, because in reality it's what everyone thinks outside the church. If there's no judgment, there's no person watching everything I do, and so it means I can live however I like.

There's no idea of accountability, no one that I have to come to to declare what I've done. So the accusation against the apostles was that they're being excessive in their call to holiness, that this is just something of their imagination, that there's no such thing as final judgment, there's no such thing as these things.

[5 : 54] So Peter, just chill out a bit. This isn't something to worry about. The verse says, cleverly devised myths, as some translations put, it's deceitfully invented.

So how does Peter defend himself? By restating the proof of his apostleship. So he says, we, referring to the apostles, were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

As well as being especially set apart by Jesus, to be an eyewitness of Christ's resurrection is what made apostles apostles. He goes on to say why he can be trusted.

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.

This is, of course, talking about the transfiguration that's recorded in the Gospels, and it kind of recounts almost the ultimate spiritual experience. Peter, often known to be kind of one of the leaders of the disciples, walks with Jesus for three years.

[7 : 10] Here he's one of the three or four that went onto the mountain to see Jesus' face radiated with glory, to hear God's very voice come from heaven and declare Jesus' identity as the true Son of God.

So, Peter's point, quite simply, is that what he's saying about Christ's return and the final judgment can be trusted. He's an apostle, he's seen these amazing things, and he's heard God's very voice.

The things he's saying are indeed just what God has told him to say. So, we move on to our second point of a call to reorder our lives. In verse 19, we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, 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.

So, after establishing his own authority as an apostle, the second reason we can be sure of Christ's coming in the final judgment is because Scripture declares it.

They are more fully confirmed than these cleverly devised myths. Because Scripture is sufficient, we don't need myths about God. We don't need something from people's imaginations to tell us these things.

[8 : 32] So, returning to our question at the start, what directs our lives? Peter here is calling us to pay attention to the words of Scripture. Now, pay attention here is different from just listening.

He's not calling us to just listen to more sermons during the week or just read a little bit more. But to really embrace everything that we read. To read the words of God, to hear God's voice in that way, and to immediately want to obey and to shape our lives around that.

Anchoring our lives in the words. It's also a reference to God's words to Jesus in verse 17. As Peter calls us to pay attention to these words, God says to Jesus, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, the words that come directly after that is, listen to him. So, after God identifies Jesus, he wants us to listen to him. And this is exactly what Peter is saying.

We have the prophetic word. Listen to it. Read it. Obey it. Yeah, Peter is only saying what God has told him to say.

[9 : 50] And so the command for us to pay attention is the same. Through scripture as the written word, we see Jesus more clearly, because he is the word made flesh. He embodies what the word is.

So, how are we to pay attention to God's words? It tells us that it's as to a light shining in the dark. So, not to point out the obvious, but a light can only shine in a dark place.

And so, for Peter to liken the prophetic word, which is scripture, here to this light, it means that the world around us is dark. Peter is using this imagery of light and dark on purpose.

He wants us to think about the times where we've been in the dark and how our eyes are naturally drawn to light, how by it we seek to see everything else. Even in a setting we know really quite well, when there's no lighting at all, or even not enough lighting, we can really struggle to get by or to do things that we thought before.

In reading this, I'm reminded of times when I've been at home on a winter evening and all the lights have gone out, and I've fumbled around the house, touching every piece of furniture we have, just to get to the fuse box.

[11 : 06] So you might expect for someone to know their way around, to be able to stride confidently through the dark to get to where they need to go. But without light, without things we can see, it can often be crippling to have that vision removed.

So in exactly the same way, we as Christians can think we know enough. We know enough to get by. We don't need scripture. We don't need anything extra. But God has made it so that our path to obedience doesn't depend on us, but on him.

The way for us to go is made clear, not by sight, not by the things we see, but by faith. And that faith comes through hearing the words of God. So how does it work then, paying attention to God in this way?

If you turn to 2 Corinthians 3.18, I think Paul helps us understand this a bit more. He says, And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

In this verse, Paul helps us to see that as we behold Jesus' glory, we will be transformed from one stage of glory to glory to glory to glory to perfection.

[12 : 34] Through looking into scripture, through paying attention to the words of God, understanding these words testify to Jesus, we start to see his glory. As we've been seeing in the Wednesday Bible studies so far, people are created with an image of God, in the image of God, to worship him.

God's designed us that we become like what we worship. For us as Christians, obviously we worship Christ, and so seek to become like him. And so through hearing from God in his word, we're able to know Jesus intimately, for again, he is the word made flesh.

So back in 2 Peter 1, the end of 19, makes it clear to us that we should pay close attention to these words, as to a light shining in the dark, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

That's talking of the resurrection. Do we have a need for scripture forever? Clearly no, because one day we'll be with God in his presence.

There will be no darkness, there'll be no need for the lamp. Jesus will be the lamp in that sense. So on to our final point. Scripture as the final authority.

[13 : 53] As we make sure to pay attention to scripture, we should know that, first of all, that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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.

And it's here that Peter deals with the question behind the question. After you know to follow scripture, why are you following that? How is it sure? So Peter assures us that the words of scripture do not come about as someone's own interpretation, not just gentle musing.

The words here are not someone just recording their experiences, but these are the very words of God. This is God's voice written down. The fact that the prophet led by God is littered throughout the Bible.

At this point, it's interesting to note what the Old Testament says about those who spoke, and it wasn't God that was said, this is what God says, and God revealed that it wasn't anything that they were saying.

The punishment for that was serious. They were to be stoned to death if that was the case. Hopefully this should, through this we should see how precious it is that we have these words written down for us as the words of God.

[15 : 13] So the words of scripture can be trusted because they are God's own words, and God by nature cannot lie. It goes on, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

When we read these words, we can quite easily think that the Bible was written by people who were given words so specific to their specific congregation that we could never use them in our own context.

Or we can think that the writers were put in some kind of trance where they had no control over what was being said. But the biblical picture of how scripture is written is really a kind of combination of these.

What helps us understand this most is Peter's use of the word carried along. The word for carried along used elsewhere in the New Testament is of a boat being carried along on the sea through the wind.

And so writers wrote their own words to their own contexts, and yet at the same time, God caused the words he wanted written to be written. So the prophets let up their sails in that sense, and the Holy Spirit directed them, carried them to write the words that they did.

[16 : 29] But still, they chose their own words in their own vocabulary to their own people. And so Peter's point is that the reason the words of the prophets can be trusted is the same reason that the apostles' words can be trusted.

The words came from the same source. These are God's, this is God himself speaking. So the whole passage, and certainly the emphasis on the way we look at scripture and how we should trust it, comes directly before Peter's quite sharp words for false teachers in all of chapter two and a lot of chapter three, actually.

The reason for this is knowing the truth fully and completely helps us to guard against false teaching. You might have heard this example that a friend of mine told me about people that are trained to identify counterfeit money.

So you might think that they look at all the top ten counterfeit creators, I don't know. The people that, all the top notes that are used and study those and be able to disregard those.

But instead, what they're given is a genuine five pound note, a genuine ten pound note. And they're told to study that for hours and days to find every wrinkle, how light it is, where exactly the silver lines up, what you can see in everything.

[17 : 54] Because when you know the genuine article truly, a falsehood you can easily dismiss. And it's exactly the same with scripture. When we know these words truly, when we know the true gospel, when someone brings about something else and they're giving us a false truth, we can immediately dismiss it.

We don't need to study it. We don't need to pay attention to any of it. And that's Peter's call here. So, as in the beginning, we don't need to wait for a special spiritual experience like Peter had before we can believe anything, because he's recorded it in a way we can trust.

We've seen that we should take care to reorder our lives so that they're guided by the sure words of God and not anything else. That we should trust it being the light that helps us to see clearly in the dark world and that we'll need this until the end when Christ eventually comes.

And lastly, we've also seen Peter deal the final blow to the false teachers accusing him of speaking just imaginative myths, concocted stories.

That through reading these words, through hearing God's voice, we can be as sure as Peter was, as sure as if we were on a mountain and heard God's very words.

[19 : 22] We can know confidently that Scripture is not this myth, that we don't need anything else to validate God's words, and instead we are to trust him, taking him at his word.

I'd like you to stand with me to sing our final hymn. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.