

We continue today in our series based on the letters of Peter found in the New Testament. Remember this letter is Peter's last words to the church and he is obviously aware that his time on earth is short.

If there was ever a place for Peter to talk about his succession this letter was it. Yet the silence he maintains on the subject is deafening. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reserves a unique, powerful and very exalted place for Peter. It reads:

881 *The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the "rock" of His Church. He gave him the keys of His Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock.*⁴⁰⁰ *"The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head."*⁴⁰¹ *This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the Bishops under the primacy of the Pope.*

882 *The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, "is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful."*⁴⁰² *"For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered."*

While this is a powerful statement about Peter it is also a view of apostolic succession. Even though in the previous verses to what we are going to read today Peter acknowledges his age and impending death, he does not seem at all concerned with what color of "smoke is going to come out of the chimney." There is nothing in the verses that we are going to read regarding anything about any of that. Remember Peter is giving what he believes are some of his final words. He is determined to leave behind him a healthy and vibrant church but one that is unshakeable in its belief's and foundational truth.

Interestingly enough he deals with an accusation. He presents an argument or answer back and then reminds us all of the authority of Scripture. So let's look at these words together.

*For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw His majestic splendor with our own eyes*¹⁷ *when He received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to Him, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."*¹⁸ *We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*

¹⁹ *Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts.*

²⁰ *Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding,*²¹ *or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.* 2 Peter 1:16-21 NLT

1. Peter faces a common accusation for people of faith: *Faith, fairy tales and Final Judgment*

As long as Christianity has been on this earth there have been people against it and most of the time the resistance is rooted in the area of absolutes. It has always been easy for folks who wrestle with the Bible and it's authority to do a lot of cut and pasting to make it fit their lifestyle or they have just ignored it completely. Thomas Jefferson was not the first person to randomly ignore parts of the Bible or God's authority to suit his own desires. Apparently there were people in the early church who were willing to dismiss certain aspects of the Apostles teaching as outdated and antiquated. How convenient this would be and is for many people.

Peter was facing people who apparently had accused the Apostles of making up the story of Christ or at least his connection to God and in particular Christ's promised second coming. This trend continues with the recent publication of a book detailing the life of the historical Jesus and debunking His deity as well as the Biblical account. I won't even give you the name of the book.

For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:16a NLT

The accusations seem to revolve here around the "powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Peter uses this word "coming" several times in this letter. You need to know that it is used in reference to the future return of Jesus Christ. In chapter 3:4 he writes about scoffers:

"They will say, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created."

And a few verses later he uses the word coming again in a future context:

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 2 Peter 3:11-12 NKJV

The accusation against Peter and all the other Apostle's teaching is clearly an often repeated scenario. It seems to just be a generational thing to tear apart foundational truths. Other more "enlightened" teachers have arrived on the church scene, and they have begun to question, "What is all this dark teaching about Jesus coming again to judge people?" They were using the disciples' own deaths as a sign that the hope or teaching of the second coming was surely false.

Here is what you need to know about this accusation: the rejection of the Second Coming had more to do with their desire to dismiss the notion that everyone will be held personally

responsible for moral and ethical infidelity than anything else. This really should come as no surprise.

There have always been teachers willing to tell you that you are free to do whatever you want, whenever you want without fear of divine punishment. This horribly inaccurate teaching rests on the false notion that God is so loving that he will forgive all vices that were once thought incompatible with Godly virtue. In other words, people were teaching that the Second Coming of Christ was not going to ever happen which allowed people to feel secure in living however they pleased.

We will learn much more about this in the coming weeks. Peter's response is defensive and well it should be. He says, we weren't making up fairy tales or clever stories. His views of the Second Coming were built on the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and the prophecies which talked about not only the Advent of the Messiah the first time but clearly teach the Second Advent as well.

2. Peter gives us a confrontational but confident argument

Peter is taking no prisoners in his rebuttal to this heinous teaching. He was there and he heard and saw firsthand the teaching and promises of Christ.

We saw His majestic splendor with our own eyes¹⁷ when He received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to Him, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."¹⁸ We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 2 Peter 1:16b-18 NLT

For starters he relies on what he saw and heard. He will not stay here however; he quickly moves to link his experiences with the words of the prophets from long ago. Four times he writes about what he saw and heard. He is recounting what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration. (Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9) It was an incredible event and one that Peter would never forget. It was like a "fairy-tale" kind of moment. Jesus was transformed into a glowing brilliant light. On either side of him were Moses and Elijah conversing with Him about the coming crucifixion. If that wasn't enough, those watching (Peter, James and John) claimed to have heard the voice of God coming down from heaven declaring that Jesus was greater than even Moses or Elijah – "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well please."

You can imagine how scoffers would easily try to pick apart the memory and embellishments of an old preacher about to die. But he wasn't embellishing anything. I am sure they were more than willing to roll their eyes and figure the light of Peter's experience did nothing for them. They did not see it or hear it so without faith it left them feeling as though they were in the dark.

"During World War II six Allied fighter pilots were on a mission when their aircraft carrier received orders for a blackout because enemy submarines were in the area. The fighter pilots completed their mission but were surprised to find no landing lights where the ship ought to have been. One of them radioed the ship; "Give us some light so we can land." The response came back, "Negative. We can't give you any light at this time. A full blackout has been ordered."

Again a second pilot requested, "Give us some light so we can land." "Negative. Blackout still in effect." A third pilot, dangerously low on fuel, said, "Can't you at least give us one light so we can land?" The radio operator was ordered to discontinue all contact. As a result, six fighters reportedly went down to the dark waters of the Atlantic.

Like Peter's accusers, many people today refuse to submit their life and behavior to Jesus Christ using the argument that they have "not been given enough light to land" their faith on something they don't understand and cannot see. But the light is there. You just have to find it and have faith in believing in a Savior you cannot see.

Peter is well aware that these arguments will come so he takes it to yet another level.

It's as though Peter is about to leave this world and he is desiring to lift his voice one more time to make a declaration to the church throughout time. "Listen to me. . ." he is saying.

¹⁹ Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts." 2 Peter 1:19 NLT

If you want to study the context of Peter's words make sure you look up and read Psalms 2.

The king proclaims the LORD's decree: "The LORD said to me, 'You are my son. Today I have become your Father. Psalm 2:7 NLT Pay attention also to verses 11-12 of this Psalm.

" . . . until the day dawns." There is a day coming when Christ will return. He is coming to judge our lives and the lives of everyone on this earth. One day we will be held accountable for our choices, our morality and ethical behavior. It is not a myth. It is not a fairy tale.

Charles Spurgeon said this in a sermon about Abraham obeying God's voice from heaven.

"If I heard a voice speaking from the sky I would obey it," but the form in which your call has come has been better than that, for Peter in his second epistle tells us that he himself heard a voice out of the excellent glory when he was with our Lord in the holy mount, but he adds, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy" as if the testimony which is written, the light that shineth in a dark place, which beams forth from the word of God, was more sure than even the voice which he heard from heaven. I will show you that it is so; for, if I should hear a voice, how am I to know that it is divine? Might it not, even if it were divine, be suggested to me for many reasons that I was mistaken, that it was most unlikely that God should speak to a man at all, and more unlikely still that he should speak to me?

Might not a hundred difficulties and doubts be suggested to lead me to question whether God had spoken to me at all? But the most of you believe the Bible to be inspired by the Spirit of God, and to be the voice of God. Now, in this book you have

the call—"Come ye out from among them, be ye separate, touch not the unclean thing; and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." Do not say that you would accept that call if it were spoken with a voice rather than written; you know that it is not so in daily life.

If a man receives a written letter from his father or a friend, does he attach less importance to it than he would have done to a spoken communication? By no means. I reckon that many of you in business are quite content to get written orders for goods, and when you get them you do not require a purchaser to ask you in person, you would just as soon that he should not; in fact, you commonly say that you like to have it in black and white. Is it not so? Well, then, you have your wish, here is the call in black and white; and I do but speak according to common sense when I say that if the Lord's call to you be written in the Bible, and it certainly is, you do not speak truth when you say, "I would listen to it if it were spoken, but I cannot listen to it because it is written." The call as given by the book of inspiration ought to have over your minds a masterly power, and if your hearts were right before God the word spoken in the Scriptures by the Holy Ghost would be at once obeyed."

I know it can be tough to believe in a God you can't see but I encourage you to push past your doubts and by faith grasp onto God through His Son Jesus Christ.

He is coming back. It is not a fable or a fairy tale. It is not a creative story made up by men. When He comes back our lives will be reduced to two options.

Hell, it would seem, has fallen on rather lean times. It used to be that the vast majority of Christians, regardless of denominational affiliation, believed that Hell was a real place where the wicked and the impenitent go when they died. The very thought of the pains and torments of Hell was enough to scare sinners straight. It used to be that ministers of the Gospel would preach on the horrors of Hell to persuade reprobates to repentance. But not anymore. Most American mainline and so-called Evangelical churches stopped preaching about Hell years ago. Most mainline ministers stopped believing in Hell years before that. Hell made people uncomfortable. Hell was too "old-fashioned." The topic of Hell was bad for the bottom line—attendance and income. Hell damaged people's self-esteem. Hell has been retained in our modern lexicon as a convenient curse word, and as a metaphoric description of our worst experiences—as in "war is hell"—but hardly anyone today believes that the word "hell" corresponds to any objective reality.

I assure you heaven and hell are a reality and who we live in this life effects everything about eternity.

3. Peter assures us with comforting authority

He now places his entire rebuttal on the authority of God's word and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which allowed men to write beyond their own understanding. Our lives must be

surrendered to God but also must surrender to the authority of His word or we will never get it right. We will never truly follow Christ until and unless we let His word live inside of us and obey it as though it was the inspired word of a Holy God given as a manual for us to live out our lives on this earth.

²⁰ *Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding,²¹ or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.* 2 Peter 1:16-21 NLT

What's it mean? It means simply that the Bible is true from front to back. I realize that in "Christian" Universities and especially seminaries right now that it is in vogue to question everything. We have fallen to a new low in academic circles and succumbed to science above faith. We don't want to look foolish. We don't want to be embarrassed by stories that you can't explain in some practical way.

Maybe you've never read these verses: *Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.*" 1 Corinthians 1:21 NLT

¹⁶ *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" 2 Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV

Peter says it like this: ". . . the prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit and they spoke from God." The Greek word was *pharoe*, which is the word we know as ferry. These writers were ferried along by God by the power of the Spirit.

When you believe this you will live your life as though you believe it.

This is a true story. Two guys in a church, Paul and William decided that they really wanted to become godly men. So they started meeting with one another to pray and encourage one another; they even set goals for themselves and their behavior, and then were accountable to the other one.

Paul decided he wanted to break his habit of using profanity. He decided he was going to put five dollars in the offering for every time he swore during the week. In order to stay accountable, he would tell William how many times he'd failed.

The first week cost Paul \$100.

Now, Paul must've been doing ok financially, because that didn't stop his swearing. In fact, while he improved somewhat over the next couple weeks, he really wasn't having the success he wanted and was losing a lot of hard-earned cash.

After the fourth week, William told Paul he had decided that the deal needed to be changed for the coming week, but he wasn't going to tell Paul how it would change. He just said, Trust me. It will cost you both less and more!"

When they met the following Sunday before worship, Paul admitted he'd failed again. William put a hand on his shoulder and said, "Paul, I told you this was going to cost you both less and more. It's called grace."

William took out his checkbook, and made out a check to the church, leaving the amount blank. He gave the check to Paul and said, "Your sin still costs, but for you it's free. Just fill in the numbers. And next week there will be more grace."

William's grace cost him \$55 the first week; the second only cost him \$20. There was no third week. Paul couldn't bear to see what his sin was costing his friend, so he quit sinning.

In a few moments we are going to stand and declare our faith in God by singing. You may want to pray or you may need to pray. If so, you should always know that praying at the altar is always acceptable.

Prayer