

2 Peter 1:16-21

¹⁶To be sure, we were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For he received honor and glory from God the Father, when the voice came to him from within the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” ¹⁸We heard this voice, which came out of heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.

¹⁹We also have the completely reliable prophetic word. You do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts, ²⁰since we know this above all else: No prophecy of Scripture comes about from someone’s own interpretation. ²¹In fact, no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Eyewitnesses

I.

Years later, the event was still as vivid in his mind as the day he saw everything happen. Years later, it was actually *clearer* than things had been that late-winter early-spring afternoon. After all, who could possibly understand in the whirlwind of events before and after that day until one had the full context.

He looked back on that very vivid event. On that particular day he saw the two most revered Old Testament figures appear, as if out of thin air, to meet with his best friend. He saw his best friend glowing. His clothing was one thing—perhaps one could find some strange way to explain that—but his face had glowed too. The sight of such great glory made him not want this event to end. He thought it would be cool if they could just stay up there forever. It was beyond wonderful.

As wonderful as the beginning of the event had been, he could look back and remember the terror, too. A voice spoke from the clouds; he and the other two there with his best friend fell face down, because it was impossible for mere humans to fully process what they were seeing and hearing.

Then Jesus came up to them. He touched them; he told them they didn’t have to be afraid. Jesus said it was time to go down the mountain. There were matters that were left undone; it was time for Jesus to finish what he had come to do.

No, Peter hadn’t fully understood back then. Days before Peter had made a great confession of faith: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16, EHV). But then Jesus had said he was going to be killed by the Jewish officials. Peter tried to wave off such a preposterous idea, saying that such a thing would surely never happen. The same Peter with that beautiful confession of who Jesus really was had to be rebuked by Jesus: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23, EHV).

Jesus had been preparing them for what was going to happen. With all that was happening before and after the transfiguration where they saw Jesus in all his glory, they still didn’t understand him as they were coming down the mountain. “Do not tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead” (Matthew 17:9, EHV). It just didn’t make sense to them that day.

Then, a short time later, the same Peter who had wanted to stay on the mountain forever gazing at the glory of Jesus was so overwhelmed with fear at being identified as a disciples that he denied even knowing Jesus three times, just as predicted. Even what he and two others witnessed up on the mountain wasn't able to bolster his courage. Had the great glory of that day already faded in Peter's mind?

Perhaps in those moments it had, but not now. Not as he wrote his letter to others who had come to know Jesus because of his preaching and that of other followers of Jesus.

Now he could put the event on the Mount of Transfiguration into context. He could use his personal experience as an object lesson. This had not been some dream; he hadn't just been hallucinating. What he reported wasn't just some story concocted out of whole cloth, the way the rabbis made up stories and fables about Bible figures from the Old Testament. "To be sure, we were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16, EHV).

II.

Stories. Fables. That's what so many people think the Bible is. The opiate of the masses, Carl Marx called it. Oh, I know he said that about religion in general, but that's how many very smart people today think of Christianity. They call the history God has given to us a collection of myths. The creation myth; the myth of the world-wide flood and Noah's ark; the plagues in Egypt were just naturally occurring events that Moses and others wove into a good story. Maybe Moses himself is just a myth.

Certainly, many things recorded in Scripture are not normal—they are unbelievable at face value. Worldly people like to rub the anomalies in your face and snicker when you profess to believe it.

Like Peter, we tend to go back and forth a lot. We make that same firm confession Peter had days before the transfiguration and profess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the One sent by God to be the Savior of the world. Days or hours later, we insist that Jesus ought to behave the way we want him to behave; that he ought to do for us exactly what we want him to do for us in this life. We stress certain things about this Jesus while minimizing the one thing he really came to accomplish.

III.

Peter said in the Gospel reading: "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matthew 17:4, EHV). It is good for us, for you and me, to be here today, listening again to the good news about what Jesus really came to do.

It is also good for us that Peter, James, and John were up on that mountaintop with Jesus that day to witness his face light up and his clothing shine brightly. It is good for us because Peter, James and John: "Were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16, EHV).

They saw it. Looking back years later, Peter must have thought about his fright that day. "For he received honor and glory from God the Father, when the voice came to him from within the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'¹⁸We heard this voice, which came out of heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain" (2 Peter 1:17-18, EHV). The fright on that day was real, but when Peter looked back he could put it all into context. He knew now that the voice from heaven was the Heavenly Father who had sent Jesus to carry out the most important mission in history.

Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for sins. It was because of Jesus that Peter knew he had the sure hope of eternal life.

“We also have the completely reliable prophetic word. You do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19, EHV). Remember Christmas? It wasn’t that long ago. At Christmas we examine so many prophecies and note how completely they were fulfilled at the coming of Jesus in Bethlehem. The same is true of the fulfillment of prophecy we have seen during the Epiphany season. As we walk with Jesus toward the cross during the upcoming season of Lent, we will note still more prophecies and their fulfillment by Jesus.

Myths and fables are not what we have in the history of God’s saving activity in Jesus. Prophecy and fulfillment is what we can see. We do well to pay attention to it. It is good for us to be here, reflecting on what Peter saw and came to understand. It is good to look back at all the prophecies and their perfect fulfillment in Jesus.

IV.

It is good for us to be here. This whole letter of Peter was written to encourage Christians who were being ridiculed for believing in the coming of Christ. False teachers were a huge problem.

“We know this above all else: No prophecy of Scripture comes about from someone’s own interpretation. ²¹In fact, no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21, EHV). It is good to hear and read Peter’s eyewitness account which he wrote down as he, himself, was carried along by the Holy Spirit to give us these words that were written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing we might have life in his name.

There are many study Bibles with notes that twist Scripture into something it doesn’t actually say. Martin Luther, writing about these very verses, said: “The Holy Spirit Himself must expound Scripture. Otherwise it must remain un-expounded” (LW 30:166). In other words, we are to let Scripture interpret Scripture. If there is a passage that is unclear to us, look for another passage that explains it more fully. Pastors or church leaders who explain what Scripture means or is saying are to use the very words of Scripture to prove their point.

It is good for us to be here. It is good for us to see what Peter saw through his eyes. By faith you are transformed into the same kind of eyewitnesses to Christ’s glory that Peter was.

Peter called God’s Word a lamp shining in a dark place. As an eyewitness of what Jesus has done for all, live as a lamp shining in the dark place of society. As an eyewitness, refresh your memory every day about all the things you have heard and seen by faith, studying yet again the Word of God’s truth. Every day use the eyewitness accounts in God’s Word to remind yourself yet again that Jesus did what he did for *you*; he brought salvation not just to the world, but for you.

You are an eyewitness. Be an eyewitness. Amen.