

2 PETER

REMEMBERING THE PROMISES

2 Peter 1:16-21 - The Sure Thing

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Peter is writing to the churches, shortly before his death. And he said in

2 Peter 1:13-15 “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

So Peter is writing some things here in verse 13 to stir us up, or to rouse us from our sleep. “Stir” there is the same word that is used to describe Jesus waking up on a boat in order to calm the sea.

We have a tendency to go to sleep. To become less attentive to our faith, to the things of the Lord, and to be more awake to all of our earthly concerns than everything else.

So in the New Testament we are told by Jesus, by Peter, and Paul to stay awake.

1 Thessalonians 5:6 “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.”

And Peter here wants to wake us up from that he says (verse 13) by reminding us of some things.

What are those things?

2 Peter 1:16 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. 17 For when he received honor 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,” 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And 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, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 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.

The first thing he says in this section is that he wants to stir us up by reminding us that Christianity isn't based on mythology:

2 Peter 1:16 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.

Christianity isn't a faith based on myths and legends and fables, but based on the eyewitness testimony of events that happened in history.

The Greeks had lots of myths and legends that they passed on from generation to generation. But for the most part they knew they were just fables. They were useful stories, cleverly devised to support positive values and prompt good behavior.

It didn't really matter if they were true, behaving like they were true made you better, and that was all that mattered. We have a myth in our culture, for example, that porcupines shoot their quills at predators. They can't do that, but if you believe they can, you stay away and it works in your favor. You'll never get hurt by porcupine quills if you believe that fable.

The Greeks mostly knew those stories about their gods didn't really happen, but if you acted like they were true in some ways you'd live better, so they were useful. They were cleverly devised myths.

And Peter says, “That’s not what was at the founding of Christianity.”

Remember, Peter was an eyewitness of Jesus, God who had come in the flesh. He says it wasn’t a myth, but it was something he saw and participated in and experienced.

We’re stirred from our drowsiness by remembering that Christianity isn’t just a useful tale, but actually happened. We aren’t called to just act like the stories of Jesus are true. They actually are true. Take it from Peter, he was there.

And this matters because the Christian story’s main aim is not to first and foremost reform behavior, but to get us redeemed. And we aren’t redeemed by what we do, but by what Jesus did for us in going to the cross and rising again.

And if that didn’t really happen, there’s no Christianity. The heart of the faith is not the good we do, but the good that was done for us by Jesus. And we would urge you to believe it.

Is Christianity Just a Myth?

Now there are many today who would say Christianity is, at best, a useful myth (it holds society together like belief in the the Greek and Roman gods did.) Or they might say Christianity is fraudulent because it was just derived from other myths.

This is very common on non-believing academic circles: to believe that Christianity is just a re-telling of stories that were told in the mystery religions and other pagan religions, it’s just the latest update to religious lore.

They’d note similarities like:

Mithras, the god of the sun, was immaculately conceived and traveled with twelve disciples that were promised eternal life.¹

¹ These examples are taken from:
<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/bible-copy-other-religious-myths-and-legends.html>

Dionysus was the god of fruitfulness and merriment that turned water into wine.

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh is a king who is $\frac{2}{3}$ divine.

Osiris was the king of the underworld, killed by Seth, but resurrected to have power to judge the dead and influence the living.

Every year at Christmas we hear about the many virgin births in so many pagan religions.

So Christianity, it seems, was just the latest, jewish-influenced retelling of the same old stories. It is repackaged mythology.

What do we do with those claims?

For one, on closer examination, these stories aren't as similar to Christianity as they might sound. You have to put together many different versions of those stories and jettison strategic parts of them to make them sound like the predecessors to the Christian story. You'd really have to know the Christian story and then select parts of those stories to make them seem like they were basically the same thing.

Virgin-born mithras sprouted, full-grown, from a rock. And the other virgin births were usually the result of Zeus's lust after women.

Osiris didn't fully resurrect, but remained in the underworld (unlike Jesus who actually came back to life - very different definitions of resurrections.) Osiris stayed in the underworld, essentially resurrected spiritually and stayed dead.

So the Christian story does stand out as far more unique than they might have us believe.²

But there are certainly similarities between elements of these stories and elements of Christianity.

² <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/bible-copy-other-religious-myths-and-legends.html>

There are, in fact, similarities between elements of all great stories and elements of Christianity. From greek mythology to marvel movies, we can see the story retold again and again of an enemy defeated, a great rescue accomplished, life from death, joy from sadness.

The great stories that compel us are similar to the Christian story.

Early on, this kept C.S. Lewis (author of the chronicles of narnia) from faith. He saw all of these myths and legends and stories, and then saw Christianity as one more myth, one more story.

And all of these myths and stories are interesting, they all capture the human heart, and Christianity is just one more of these mythological stories that compels us.

But, Lewis thought, all of these myths and stories are, at their core, lies. He called them “lies breathed through silver.” They’re attractive, heart-capturing lies. They are useful, but didn’t really happen.

Odysseus didn’t blind polyphemus, even if we like the story. The frog didn’t turn into a prince. Neo didn’t conquer the matrix. And Jesus didn’t conquer death, even if it is a story that captures peoples hearts. So CS Lewis wouldn’t convert to this popular myth called Christianity.

His buddy, Tolkien, who wrote the Lord of the Rings, invested in him and spent time with him. They would get together, and seriously, talk about the mythological creatures they were inventing. Which sounds like a nerdfest beyond anything most of us will ever participate in. But it got friends together, which is where Gospel opportunities were made.

One day they were walking along a river, smoking their pipes, and talking about why Christianity sounds like such a myth. And Tolkien proposed an alternative explanation. Great stories, whether they’re old religions or myths or legends, capture our hearts for a reason.

We crave certain stories - you see it in the books we read and the movies we see - stories that depict a better world - a utopian future , stories about escaping death, stories about love that is eternal, stories about good triumphing over evil, heroes who save life when they face certain death. You might like the stories of a knight who comes in shining armor to damsel in distress, or the prince whose kiss can wake the princess from death.³

Life is usually not as good as those stories, but we have a longing to hear those stories - to tell us that good triumphs, that death can be escaped, that there is a better world that's possible and coming, that there's a love out there that can change us.

Why would people feel that way? Why do we love stories like that?

Why do we love movies like that? Why will we spend 15 bucks to go see a movie, 4 times that if you buy a popcorn?

Tolkien's explanation was that we are "made in the image of God but fallen". So we know we have to die, we know evil triumphs, we know we will lose everybody we love. But we know that it shouldn't be that way: good should triumph, love should last, the world should be fixed, that a better world is possible. Stories move us because they say that is possible.

Tolkien said that in the story of Jesus you have everything that moves you about stories: escape from death, good triumphing, love conquering. And this one is not just one more story, but the underlying reality to which all other stories point.

The resurrection is not one more story after which you drive home to the real world, it is the real thing that our craving for all of those other movies points to. Our hearts were made for that story - it meets the needs of the heart. So we like things that look like that, on a screen or in a book or even in real life.

So Tolkien called the Christian story the true myth, or the true legend.

³ I couldn't track this down, but Keller has a riff along these lines that I borrowed from heavily here.

When CS Lewis began to see other myths and legends and religions not as disproving Christianity but rather pointing to its validity as the true myth, the true religion - he put his faith in Jesus - calling himself the most reluctant convert in all of England.

Because yes, the Christian story reads like a myth. But its more accurate to say that myths read like Christian story. They are the echoes of the real thing, the shadows of the ultimate reality.

So we didn't give ourselves to myths and legends when we became Christians. If the Christian story happened, Christianity is true. If it didn't happen, Christianity is false. We are not called to believe in fables so that we act better, but to anchor ourselves in historical reality.

2 Peter 1:17 “17 For when he received honor 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,” 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.”

So Peter here is saying, “We know these aren't just myths, because I was there.” And he refers here to the transfiguration. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the story.

Mark 9:2-10 “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he

charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean”

So Peter spent about three years in person with Jesus. And this one day Jesus brought, not just one witness, but three - Peter, James, and John, up onto a high mountain. And there, he changed appearance, he glowed, and the voice of the father spoke, “This is my beloved son, listen to him.”

Peter says, “We heard this voice - we were there. We’re not just passing on a story someone else told us, we are firsthand witnesses of these things that Christians believe. We heard the voice of the father.

Incidentally - today is Father’s day and I know many of us as Christian fathers, when we hear the call on our lives that we are supposed to be involved fathers, different fathers because we’re Christian, we get overwhelmed because we don’t know what to do. The majority of us didn’t have very involved dads, and as a result we limp along, because we didn’t have an example growing up.

Some good news is that we do have a Father. And we may struggle, but if we’re looking for an example, we can look to Him. And here you have a present Father, a Father who speaks and affirms His child, a Father who expresses love, a Father who encourages. We can start by imitating that Father and that will go a long way toward helping us be better fathers to our kids.

Anyways, Peter was there, and heard the voice of the Father. And he says that being an eyewitness to all of this did something that will profoundly affect our lives and wake us from sleep:

2 Peter 1:19 And 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, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 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.

He says that seeing Jesus come in fulfillment of the OT prophecies confirmed the word of God. He says this gave the Bible (the OT that he had) even more credence, because everything it predicted came to pass.

He says, “We were eyewitnesses to Jesus, and He was just who the Bible said he would be, so trust the sure and confirmed word of God.”

Something that will rouse us from our sleep will be living in confidence in the Bible as the word of God.

And He says that the prophetic word of scripture was not just produced from the mind of people, but those people were carried along by the Spirit.

In other words people spoke, but they were being carried along in their words by God, and the Bible was written. And those people all had backgrounds, personalities, and styles that affected how that word was written, but because it is God’s word, what we have is the word of God, written in the personalities of people, without error.

One of the criticisms of the Bible is that we claim it is God’s word, but it’s clearly a human book. The different authors have different personalities and styles. You say it’s God’s word, but people wrote it.

But Christians do believe people wrote it. But they were carried along by the Spirit so that God’s perfect word was written in their personalities.

Its like going down a water slide – you're going down the slide and everybody going down reacts a little different. There are the screamers who yell the whole way down. There are the scared people who try to slow down the whole time. There are the daredevils who always try to spin around and go down a different way. But everybody ends up in the pool.

The Bible was written by men over a period of 1800 years on 3 different continents – some kings, some peasants, different races and backgrounds, but

they wrote, carried along by God and because God had designed the process, they ended up exactly where God wanted them: writing the word of God perfectly.

And Peter says, “This was all confirmed to be perfect by Jesus, so trust the word.”

How do we know this is the word of God. How do we know that what we have is inspired?

First, start with Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead, so He knows what He’s talking about. And multiple sources attested to the fact that Jesus quoted the OT a lot.

Old testament – Genesis through Malachi, were fixed before the time of Jesus and he quoted from them. They were divided into three sections, the law, the prophets, and the writings, and Jesus quoted from all three sections.

So that gives it a LOT of validity. And Jesus spoke very highly of the Bible:

Matthew 5:18 17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

He speaks so highly of the Old Testament that he says it will endure, and it will be fulfilled, and it is accurate right down to the very “dot on an i”.

Which speaks to what we believe about the Bible – in the original manuscripts, everything was written exactly as God intended, right down to the word. Every word was put there by God. We believe in verbal, plenary inspiration – the whole thing is inspired (plenary), and every word is inspired (verbal).

But the old testament clearly is not a finished book. You read it and all over it is pointing to something better coming in the future – it points to the coming of Jesus, and it makes clear that there is more of this book to come.

And around 400 BC, things went silent, and God stopped speaking his word.

(If the prophets had been making this stuff up, people could have said 'I'm the new prophet' and kept writing, but they noticed that for those 400 years, God wasn't speaking his word.) So there was a change.

And then (4BC or so), Blam – the silence is broken, and angel appears to Mary, and speaks – you're gonna have a son.

So Jesus is born, he gets crucified, dies, is buried and resurrected. That resurrection proves that Jesus is real and true and is who He says he is. It proves that His words can be trusted because He conquered death, he knows what he is talking about.

And while he was alive, he had 12 apostles. And he said this to them:

John 14:25-26 These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

So after Jesus departs, these 12 apostles are going to be given prophet-like authority.

Remember the prophets spoke as they were moved by God and wrote a book of which Jesus says every pen stroke was from God.

And the apostles will likewise be taught all things, and write the rest of this divinely inspired book in the same way the prophets did.

It would make sense that if the prophets wrote in one way – perfectly inspired, and the book wasn't done, that when it did get done it would not get done in a less authoritative way.

So the men that were entrusted with that authority were the apostles.

And we see that confirmed in the way these guys did miracles.

Acts 3:6 - a guy lame from birth is laying there -

Acts 3:6 But Peter said, I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!

That's authority we don't have. When we pray for someone to be healed, and we can and should, we say, "God, I pray for this guy, help him to rise and walk" and then if he does we're pretty surprised.

Peter just said it and he walked, so Peter had authority.

And then the new testament is the authoritative writings of guys with that kind of authority who saw and knew Jesus. It was written by the apostles who knew Jesus.

Now there are 5 books that exceptions to that and were not written by apostles:

mark

luke

acts

hebrews

jude

All five were written by men who were not apostles but walked with them and had strong relationships with them.

Mark interviewed Peter.

Luke interviewed Mary and Paul.

Jude – written by jude, a brother of jesus (that's clout).

Hebrews – which was widely accepted early on because people thought it was written by Paul.

All the rest are written by apostles, maybe James wasn't, but if it wasn't the apostle James it was James the brother of Jesus so he's pretty legit.

But let's say you don't trust those guys, the only one you trust is Peter because if anyone was Jesus' best friend, it was probably him.

So if Peter can speak with authority, let's see what Peter says about the other guys who wrote the NT:

2 Peter 3 15 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

And he uses the word graphe. Its the word that means scripture, it is used 51 times in the new testament, and everywhere but here it refers to the Old testament, which we said was inspired in every word by God.

So Peter, with all of his apostolic authority that was given by Jesus and confirmed by his power to heal, calls Paul's writings scripture.

Paul wrote 1/3 of the NT.

So if Jesus is legit, Peter is legit. If Peter is legit, Paul is legit.

And, we can't look at all of this now, but in 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes from Luke's gospel and calls it scripture.

So we have this really coherent internal picture being formed: if you trust Jesus, you can trust the NT.

How do we know we have the right books?

1) As believers, we have a high confidence in faithfulness of God – he's not gonna abandon us to just figure this thing out – Jesus dying for us shows his heart for us.

2) Activity of Holy Spirit in the word is intangibly evident through history.

Whether it's Augustine or Martin Luther or many of us, the work of the Spirit in the Bible has broken all kinds of chains we were in, we've experienced it.

3) The Bible's Authenticity

It's written to recount facts, not just make up a powerful religion – Religions paint their teachers really unrealistically with no weaknesses.

Jesus is weak in gethsemane, the apostles are depicted as petty and jealous and ridiculously stupid, Peter is bumbling in the gospels and Jesus even calls him satan at one point. Newer books like the Gospel of Thomas areas more like myths.

4) EARLY UNDERSTANDING OF THE APOSTLES AUTHORITY -

Ignatius who was killed in 110ad for his faith, probably a direct student of John the apostle. So if the apostles were church 1.0, ignatius was church2.0 – in the first generation of church fathers. And he understood that those apostles had authority to write the word unlike what he had. **“Not as peter and paul did, do I command you. They were apostles, I am a convict.”**

369 AD we have an exact list of the books of the Bible.

397 AD – carthage council adopts same books.

(So do we have the Bible? IF the holy spirit will teach the church all things, then we can have confidence that he hasn't been screwing up that job for 1600 years.)

5) Intangible – the Bible rings true. Makes sense of reality.

Sinfulness of man
Loving your enemies

You say, “But this is in English. How can you say its the word of God when the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic?” Didn’t translators butcher the original and didn’t people made mistakes copying it?

Wasn't it a big game of telephone over 2000 years and what we have now is nothing like the original.

In the game of telephone, messages get scrambled because one person says something to another person one by one and they all pass it along.

But the Bible had MANY copies made of the originals from generation 1. So if I write out a note and put it up on the screen and tell you all to write it down, we can take the 50 copies and look at them and a few might have errors, but it would be easy to tell which ones.

And that is what has happened as the Bible has been passed down – we have so many copies that its fairly easy to detect the 1 out of 50 that has something wrong.

What about translations?

It is hard to translate things from one language to another, and translators can go wrong. That's why in seminary most students have to take some greek and hebrew, so we can look at the manuscripts and see some of those places.

But I can tell you that if you take an english translation that tries to be faithful to the original, you can say with confidence you are reading the word of God.

There are tons of English translations. We use the ESV mostly because its very literal and consistent in how it translates, but very readable. The King James and NKJV are good, the New American Standard, the NIV is good.

There are some like the New World translation that deliberately changes things.

But outside of that, your problem is probably not that your translation is not a good one, it is probably that you don't read what you have and believe and obey.

Its that you totally underestimate the power of the word in your life.

And Peter's application is that we should pay attention to that word until we see Jesus:

2 Peter 1:19 “19 And 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,

The scriptures show us Jesus.

Sometimes we hear that we should love Jesus centers lives as opposed to biblical lives. But the Bible points us to Jesus. Read rightly, it tells us about Him.

So Peter says, “wake up, pay attention to the sure word.”

And we can take our eyes off of them when we put our eyes on Him. When we see Him, when the day star rises, faith will be sight. And the word will remain, but our eyes then will be fixed on Him.

He has given us not only his spoken word to give Jesus to us, but confirmed that word and made that word visible through the Lord's Supper.

We are weak and struggling, and we want to see something, touch something, experience something, and God gave us some bread and wine as visible signs and seals of his grace.

These elements of the Lord's Supper physically display what the bible teaches. In the Gospel of Jesus God promises us forgiveness for our sins, everlasting life,

pardon from all that we've done. He tells us that He was our substitute when he died on the cross to pay the price for us. And then he demonstrates it and confirms it with the Lord's supper, which is sometimes called "the word made visible."

Time of silent confession

Father, we confess today that we've failed to fix our minds on the word and allowed it to fix our minds on Jesus. We've attached our gaze to so many goals and ambitions and hopes, but we've forgotten the one Sure thing. Forgive us.

Jesus, thank you for your perfect love for and obedience to the word of God that is counted as ours. Thank you for being our substitute.

And Spirit, we pray that you'd wake us up to the realities we've found in you. Help us to believe again that we do not believe myths, and to believe again in your word.

Assurance of pardon

**Proverbs 28:13 "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."**