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2 Peter 1:16-21

"Can I Know It's True?"

December 27, 2015

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning - 2 Peter 1:16 - as we continue our look at this final letter that the apostle wrote from death row in Rome a couple of years - two or three years - after the first one; and at a time when he knew that any day his life would be taken from him. The saints - the church - were running from Nero who had lost his mind.

So we mentioned to you for the last several weeks this is significant for a lot of reasons but not the least of which is this is his last letter; Peter's last letter to a church that he loved and had served almost thirty-five years. And he is interested in just giving them these final instructions. He started off in the first four verses saying the ultimate goal of life, for you and me, should be that we know God well - that we should know His Person, that we should know His power, that we should be established on His promises. In verses 5 through 9, he then said but there's a part that we play. God saves, but we have to cooperate with the Lord, and, in our spiritual growth, apply ourselves; and then he uses the word "adding" a lot - "adding" or putting into practice the things that we're learning. The Holy Spirit will change us, but we've got to do the "adding." And then last week, we looked from verses 10 through 15 as Peter reminded us that in heaven there was an abundant entrance into glory waiting for those who are busy "adding" to their faith in Christ. So last week we looked, as we finished that portion, that the best way for us to live, Peter said, is living with our death in mind, knowing that life is short here, that we should live like we're camping out. This isn't our final resting place, is it? And that we should live for others and leave a legacy that will outlast us as Peter sought to do that as well.

Well this morning, in your Bibles there, from verse 16, we're going to end up at the end of the first chapter as Peter continues. And before he gets to the false teachers and then the hope of the Lord's coming (in chapter 3), he wants to say one thing that is of vital importance - not only to him but to us as well - and that is that he can be sure of believing in God that what he has believed is the right thing for him, that he can die with great hope because he is sure of God's Word and God's promises and of His victory. So Peter does a couple of things this morning. He said, "Look, I want you to know that I've seen it, and I've heard it; but more importantly, God has said it. And what I saw and what I heard have been

confirmed in the Scriptures which all of us have." We've entitled the message this morning "Can I Know It's True?" and Peter, writing to a beleaguered bunch of saints on the run, says, "Yes, you can know that it is true." Right? That Jesus is Lord. Can we know that believing Him is right, that He's God, that believing in Him will lead to eternal life? And the answer is - yes. So, he gives us two points to consider and a couple of sub-points. But the basic outline is Peter says, "Here's my personal experience. This is my subjective view of my relationship with God." And then, in verses 19-21, he said, "And here's the proof that my subjective experience is objectively supported by the clear teaching of God's Word, which said the exact same thing that I'm experiencing. The Bible confirms what I've seen and what I've heard, and it brings light to my life, and it is unerring. And so I die with great hope."

You know, you and I live in a world of relativism, skepticism. Our culture is filled with stories and ideas, and it's hard for us to settle on absolute anything because the world doesn't like that. But the Bible is absolute; doesn't really change. God has it for us. I was in line the day before yesterday with my wife, and there're all these tabloids. I usually ignore them, but I saw a headline on the tabloid that said, "Woman gives birth to a two-year old who walks and talks in three days." I thought - that's not true, is it? I said to my wife, "That's not true, is it?" She looked at me like, "Are you an idiot or what?!" Not exactly our common experience. And then the next one said, "Vegan vampire attacks trees." I thought - well, that's not so bad. There're so many of these weird stories, aren't there? And we immediately said, "That doesn't fit into our human experience at all." And many people, because of their experience, have decided there's absolutely no truth that they can hang their hat on or live out. But that's not biblically right. In light of the horror that the church was facing, one of their greatest hopes was that they knew God and knew that what they believed was right.

One of Peter's favorite words in this book is the word "to know" or "knowledge." He uses it sixteen times. That's a lot in this small little book. Verse 2, verse 5, verse 8 - just of this chapter - he brought that word out. But Peter lived at a time when the Gnostics were around. The Gnostics were a group of folks - just by the word "*gnosis*" (means to know) - who said, "We're the only ones who have all of the information. If you want to know things, you've got to come to us." And they taught that Jesus didn't come in the flesh and that Jesus wasn't God, and they were getting a lot of traction because it was an appeal to the intelligent, if you will, as opposed to those who just wanted to know the truth; that they had the secret

that they alone had. It sets, I think, the table for the myths of chapter 2. But Peter first says, "Look, the Bible is filled with absolute truth. When Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth' " (singular) " 'and the life,' that's absolute truth." Either it's absolutely true, or it's absolutely false. And if it's absolutely false, you can throw the whole Bible out by that one claim. And so Peter writes, at the end of this section, declaring, before diving into the false teachers, "Here's what you can logically go and where you can go with your faith. Let me match my personal experience with Scriptural absolutes so that your faith and mine can be made stronger" - these words coming from a dying man.

So verse 16, let's start with Peter's personal experience. He says this, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." Now Peter first talks about - in his personal experience - what he saw. And notice in verse 16 he changes the word "I," which has been what he's been saying, to "we;" because, for the next several verses, he's going to turn and speak of his friends and himself and their experience on one day that changed their lives. The "we" refers to Peter and to James and to John taken up, as we read in Matthew 17, to the Mount of Transfiguration, where they were given a taste of Jesus' second coming; not His first but His second - of His glory that was coming. And Peter says, "We, as a group of men, did not follow some cunningly devised fables." The Greek word is "**muthos**," but it literally means cleverly-invented stories or manufactured tales that have no basis in fact. Anybody can say whatever they want, but if you're going to believe things, you want those things to have some historical proof and value. But these didn't. These came from what was being taught around the church in the 1st century - for that matter, today - delivered by the cleverness of man. I don't know if you ever had a class in college where you had to read Roman or Greek mythology. Now that stuff's crazy. If you really want to go, "Really?!!!" Unbelievable describes it well. Prometheus gave the gift of fire to mankind, but Zeus was very angry. When he found out, he was so jealous that he grabbed Prometheus, and he had him chained to a rock in the Adriatic, where the vultures came and pecked out his liver. Welcome to mythology. Or Pandora, who opened her vile little vessel and released all the evils in the world. Or Medusa, who originally had gold hair, fell in love with Poseidon; but Athena cursed her, and out of her golden hair came snakes. Tell those stories to your kids and say, "Sleep well." I mean, it's nonsense, right? There's no basis in fact. They're myths, they're fables, they're ridiculous. But the Bible is filled with real people and real stories with dates and times and events and historical places. And Peter appeals,

first, to his personal experience which is vital. If you're witnessing to people, you've got to have a personal relationship with God. You can't just say, "I've read." You want to say, "Here's what I know!" Peter says, "Here's what we saw." Sitting on death row, he said, "This isn't some cunningly devised fable when we explain to you that we were there, and we saw the majesty of the Lord." "On the holy mountain, we were with him," verse 18 will say. "We saw His majesty," he says in verse 16. "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty." It was the highlight, or one of them, of Peter's life. For thirty-five years, he had shared (often) Jesus was transfigured right before his eyes. Matthew writes (17:2), "He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as the light." And Jesus pulled away the flesh, and they saw the glory of God for a moment. It was such a life-changing experience for Peter, and Peter did what Peter often does prior to being born again. He just talks too much. He wakes up, kind of half asleep, and looks at all that's going on and he said, "Oh, Lord. It's good we're here. Here's my idea. We build some condos - one for You, one for Elijah, one for Moses. We're just going to put a whole row, and we'll just stay here forever." And it says, "While he was still speaking," (Matthew 17:5), "a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud," (the Father began to speak) "saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!' " "Hey, Peter, shut up! We don't need to hear from you. We want you to hear from Him!" I don't know if "shut up" is actually in there, but that's the impression I get. "This is My beloved Son." And Peter was there, and he saw it all; and if you put him in a court trial, eyewitnesses are of great value in establishing the truth. "I was there. I saw it. I didn't make this up." And Peter saw Jesus glorified - a preview, if you will, of what was to come when He comes to rule and reign and judge. He saw the trailer. He got to see the coming attraction preview. And we know that it was what he saw, for Jesus had said six days earlier, in Matthew 16:28, to the group of men, "I want to say to you, assuredly" (one of those strong words) "there are some of you standing here with Me today who will not taste of death until you see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." It was a reference to this transfiguration, this glory, that they didn't get to see in His first coming but we will all get to see when He comes again. So Jesus, on the way down from the mountain, says to these men, "Now you just keep this to yourselves. Tell no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead" (Matthew 17:9). And Mark 9:10 records that "they kept this word to themselves. They questioned amongst themselves, 'I wonder what this whole idea of rising from the dead means.' " And Luke 9:36 records that "Jesus was found alone after the voice was gone. But they kept quiet, they told no one of any of the things they'd seen during that day."

They were just amazed and blown away by what they had seen. So Peter writes years later, verse 16, "we didn't make this up when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus. We were eyewitnesses of His majesty." So all of these years later, Peter still remembered. And this wasn't all Peter saw. He saw the Lord's compassion and His wisdom and His power over nature and His ability to heal the sick, even raise the dead. But he was here that day. It's interesting that the transfiguration is listed in Matthew 17 and in Mark 9 and in Luke 9, and none of those three guys was there. But they're the ones who wrote it down - from the testimony of those who were there: from Peter and James and John. So Peter starts by saying, "I didn't lie to you. I didn't make this up. This is what we saw."

Verse 17, "For He received from God" (speaking of Jesus) "the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain." Peter's experience is not just what Peter saw. Now he says, "And this is what I heard." Twice in the Scriptures, God the Father declares, "This is My beloved Son" - at His baptism, which began His public ministry, and here, for these three men who got to see a glimpse of what the Lord would one day come to do. So first, "Here's what we saw;" second of all, "Here's what we heard." And it's written in the emphatic voice which literally means, "We heard it. We realize not many people did." Or, "We were the only ones to hear it," if you will. That's the way it's written in Greek. "I understand that there were few of us there. Not everyone heard." Usually we worry when people start hearing voices. But Peter wants you to know that he heard this from the Lord. Now it's important because one person hearing something might be suspect. But the more people who hear it or see it, the chance of their stories being fabricated and still telling the same story becomes greatly diminished. So, "Here's what we are testifying to. Here's what we want you to know." And with all that they had seen, and with all that they had heard, they turned to Jesus with ever-growing faith. John would write in his epistle, as he started it (towards the back of your Bible), "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - that which we have seen and heard, we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3). John, at ninety years old, said, "I just

want to tell you what I've seen and what I've heard. This is my personal experience with God. This is what I heard and what I saw and what I experienced and what I went through." John had seen the lame walk. He'd heard the sermons of Jesus. He'd watched the way the Lord loved the poor, confronted the lies of the religious, offered hope to the saints and healing to the sick. "We saw it. We heard it." Though those to whom they were writing, like Peter's group here, had not seen and heard all of that, they were expected to believe it based on the testimony of the apostles and the life that was caused to be in them because of what they saw. It left a lasting impression on Peter's life. Peter wasn't just talking a good game and then walking off and living some other way. This moved him. Peter would die very soon, crucified upside down, and he wouldn't recant all of what he had been saying; which might be a temptation. If they were coming to get you, and you go, "All right. I change my mind. It's not at all.....I now believe in Caesar." And you could have walked out of prison. But he was so sure, both of what he had seen and what he had heard, that he would die for his conviction, realizing without hesitation that he was headed in the right direction. "I've seen Him. I've heard the voice from heaven." Peter was a good witness. John was a good witness. They didn't make things up. They didn't add to what they'd heard. They were just willing to tell what they had seen and what they had heard; and the readers that he was writing to - he didn't want them to be deceived. Jesus was coming again. And waiting for Him, even if it meant dying for your faith, was well worth the effort.

Well that might be good enough for some. But Peter adds now the thing that is the best for all because he takes his personal experience and he says, "But that's of little consequence if it wasn't found in the Scriptures where the Bible has objective truth;" objective meaning not your experience, it just stands on its own, and you can set your experience next to it. The objective truth - the Bible confirmed it. Verse 19, he says, "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." The second line of evidence that Peter offers his readers - who are under such duress - is to ensure their faith was objective and verified with what Peter and others had heard and seen. It was in line with the Scriptures. Look, personal experience can be faulty. If someone says, "I have a message for you - if you rub rotten bananas all over your face, your life will change," you might say, "That doesn't sound right," and, "How many other people have done that and had their lives change?" "Well, no. No one has." "That's wrong." "But that's been my experience." "Well, good for you. But it isn't reliable truth." "You will have joy if you just rub that in there. You'll have peace, and you'll

talk like a monkey." "Really?! Is there a history of those who have done that and had that happen?" "No." Yet, you and I have a historical stream in every generation that those who meet the Lord find lives that are changed, find His Word coming true, find the truth of God coming alive. We have a history of those who have done what God has said, and we have seen in their lives the work of the Holy Spirit within. All of these disciples in the Scriptures radically changed; everyone but Judas, who decided that he would rather die and deny the Lord than follow Him. But all of the rest of them said, "We're following Him even to our death." We need some objective, absolute truth in our lives if we're going to be, first, a very good witness, and, second, if we're going to have much confidence in our own walks with God. We need to know the absolutes. You and I need to be able to hang on to absolute truth. And as important and helpful as it was to know what Peter saw and what Peter heard, it was most important for Peter to set it next to what he had read for it helped establish his believing in every way. "I know it's true what I've heard because the Bible talked about it. I know it's true what I've seen because the Bible declares it." So, notice these words, "we have the prophetic word confirmed." Peter viewed his own personal experience in walking with God simply as a confirmation of what he could rely upon; the unchanging, the totally dependable Word of God. In fact, the word "confirmed" is the Greek word "*bebaios*," and "*bebaios*" means steadfast or sure or you can bank on it. "I now believe because of what I've gone through and what God has said that, indeed, His Word is true." The King James translates this, "We have a more sure word of prophecy." We are more certain than ever before that the Scripture is true because this has been my experience, and it lines up exactly with God's Word. Look, the word of the apostles was sure; it was borne out of their lives, in their writings, and, for many, in their martyred deaths. A court that operates on corroborated eyewitness testimonies, Peter would have done fine in. But Peter says, "As much as I know what I've gone through - I was there, I saw it, I heard it - there is a much more dependable source for you, and that is God's Word proves these things to be so." Spiritual experience without the foundation of the Word of God is suspect, and it holds little weight. And yet we have a Bible that can stand. And Peter, on his death bed, said, "I'm sure that God's Word is correct. Not only have I heard and seen what God has done, but it bears out for me in the Scriptures." So if you read your Bible, the nation was going to be in Egypt for four hundred years, and it was there for four hundred years; and it was going to be in captivity in Babylon for seventy years, and it says so well before it takes place - and it was; or that the Temple in Jerusalem would be leveled, and it was. And Isaiah writes in chapter 45, one hundred years before the event takes place, that

there'd be a man named Cyrus who would come along and allow them to return to Jerusalem after the captivity; and his name is written in the Bible one hundred and sixty years before he is born. And you start to say to yourself, "Gosh, God knows what He's talking about. I have a confirmed word."

Jesus, in His first coming, fulfills three hundred specific Old Testament prophecies. In His second coming, He'll fulfill 2,400 more. Twenty years ago, in a Pasadena College science class, they sought to determine the mathematical probability of one Man, Jesus, fulfilling eight very specific prophecies, and they said that in order for one man to do that, the probability would be 10 to the 17th power, or 10 followed by 17 zeros (1,000,000,000,000,000,000), which is about the number of seconds in 6 billion years. Now that's just eight prophecies. And He did three hundred. If I said to you, "All right. Pick a second. Out of all of the 6 billion years, which one did you pick?" And I say to you, "Did you pick the 33rd second of the 51st minute of the 11th hour of a Tuesday in June on the 28th and the 4,359,683rd day?" And you go, "No." I say, "Ah, you missed it. So close. What did you pick?" Almost sounds impossible. So to have that accidentally happen for eight prophecies is virtually impossible, and Jesus brought three hundred. The Bible says that the Savior to come would be born in Bethlehem. That kind of eliminates most of us from being the Savior. That He was to come from the tribe of Judah. That He was to be born of a virgin. Look, if a Messiah comes today, "I'm the Savior," and you say, "Where were you born?" and he says, "El Monte," you say, "No!" (Laughing) "That will not work."

Peter would agree that his personal subjective testimony and experience were right and real and worthy of sharing, but he would also agree they aren't enough to validate the truth. For that, you need the absolute truth of God's Word. One without the other won't work, but you need them both. Then it's verifiable. So it's important that you see your experiences through the Word of God because it is easy to allow them, otherwise, to mislead you. Eyes can mislead you. Mind can deceive you. Emotions. Quick talkers. Let the Bible be first, and then filter all that you're going through, through it.

Notice what he says in verse 19, "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place." The Bible enlightens us, right? God's Word brings light to a dark world, and the experiences and testimonies of those who believe in Him and have been saved through Him now have the opportunity we do to tell others about the light that we found in the face

of Jesus. "You would do well to take heed to that light," says Peter. The psalmist would write (Psalm 19:7-8) that, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." God's Word will bring light to your life. It'll show you the way that you should go. "Your testimonies are sure, O LORD," the psalmist writes (Psalm 93:5). Now that's quite a leap from cunningly devised fables which is why Peter says, from his death row cell, "You would be wise to take heed to the light. Pay attention to what God has said. Respond. It would be good and wise on your part to see the evidence and believe and obey and follow Jesus as your Lord 'until that day will dawn and the morning star will rise in your heart,' " or, in the context, until Jesus comes again. That's what he was talking about at the Mount of Transfiguration - until He comes to rule and reign and shine His light on the world. The words "morning star," there, King James translates it "day star." It is the Greek word for phosphorus. It is applied in Greek literature to Venus because Venus is the second closest planet to the sun, and it is seen at it's brightest usually before sunrise, reflecting the rising sun; and so they called it the morning star. And Jesus took that title for Himself. He is shining. His Word is confirming "the night is far gone, the morning is soon to come" (Romans 13:12). And when it talks about the soon coming of Jesus, you get this morning star reference; like the planet Venus shines before the sun arises. In fact, Jesus said to the Thyatira church (Revelation 2:26-28), "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' - as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star." Peter says that the Word of God is like a light shining among the darkness of the world and its false teacher fables. It's the light of His Word that'll keep you ultimately in the light of the Person of Jesus, the Bright and Morning Star. Revelation 22:16, "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." Peter says, "Look, it's getting dark, man. But there's a light, and you would do well, you would be wise to allow His Word to lead you." The world is in a dark place. Notice verse 19, "which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place." The Greek word means murky, like a cellar or like a swamp. But "the Word of God is a light to our feet" (Psalm 119:105), and when Jesus returns, He fulfills all of these prophecies of His coming. And the first time, He came and He shone for men to see. The day you get saved, the light goes on, and you find life.

So, from Peter's perspective from death row, to deny the truth of the Word of God is to blindly look the other way because the evidence is overwhelming. It's shining in your face. You can't really get away from it. And there's not to be much doubt. Jesus is the Lord. To heed Him, to follow Him, is almost to agree with the obvious. And Peter was willing to go to his death because he saw the facts, and he could never be a comfortable unbeliever again. He's a believer who has experienced and heard from God. So, "Jesus came, we saw His glory as first-person eyewitnesses. But that's not our hope. It is the fulfillment of God's Word and the rising of the Morning Star. Our hope for the future is sure. So hang in there, man. Hang in there."

And then he says in verse 20, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." There's that word "knowing" again, verse 20, that Peter loves so much. And Peter said that you should know this - that the Scriptural declarations of the things that we can count on were never written by men led of men's own private kind of whim. No. He said they were, verse 21, "holy men who were moved." "**Phero**" is the nautical term for the wind blowing over the seas and guiding a ship. He uses it to say the Holy Spirit blew in their hearts. Paul would write in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is profitable." So the Scriptures were penned by men over many generations, but they were breathed and authored and penned, if you will, by the Holy Spirit as He fell upon the hearts of men.

But notice verse 21. The Bible wasn't written because man wanted to write a book. No. This is God's book, and the Holy Spirit is the author; and every chapter and book and testament has to be interpreted together as a whole to be fully understood. So Peter ends by saying, "Look, the Bible that we have absolute confidence in is God's book, which He wrote about Himself. Man was the instrument, but the work comes from God's hand. He's the Author." In fact, if you read through the Bible, you'll see that sometimes the prophets, in writing, went, "I don't even know what I'm writing, but I'll just write it down." And they did. Other times, the prophets didn't want to speak one word out of fear, and yet God used them.

So his point will be, because we're getting to chapter 2, if you come up with some insight or definition not supported in the Bible as a whole - one you claim as uniquely your own, "Oh, I had a vision from God, I had a visit from an angel; he

brought tablets and some magic glasses," and you're the only one who teaches that deal, you're wrong. The Scriptures aren't allowed to be taken privately and somehow manipulated so that you're the only one who sees it. No. No. This is the Word of God given to all men, and it didn't come out of some private understanding. God doesn't give exclusive rights to individuals. He gives it "line upon line and precept upon precept" (Isaiah 28:13) and book by book and generation to generation so that we have a history of truth that we can believe in. Look, without a context, you can make the Bible say whatever you want. But if you're seeking the truth, the Word of God will interpret itself. Cults will often give you other books to help you come to their conclusions, and the reason they'll do that is they need those other books because you'd never come to those conclusions if you just read your Bible. "Where in the Bible is.....?" "Oh, no. This is in the other book." "Why do we need that other book?" "So it can be clear." No way. If you respond to these cult folks with their aberrant ideas, and you say to them, "Let me just read you a verse," and you just read the verse, they will say this to you, "Well, that's your interpretation." To which I reply, "I didn't interpret anything. I just read it. I just read it."

Here's what we would say to you. Go home and read your Bible and ask God to teach you, and we won't worry about what you'll end up with. You'll be just fine. You'll be just fine. God will show you His Word. It won't conflict, I don't think, with what you'll hear here on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night.

So, here's the Word of God - to believe it, to read it, to study it, to obey it and to be sure of it. So Peter cries out from death row, "Hang in there. It's true. It's all true. You can be sure of it. I've gone through it. God's Word backs it up." And your personal experience of God's Word and your sharing of the Word of God will bring salvation to many. That's how Peter lived his life thirty-five years, and that's how you should as well. But you've got to be sure of the absolutes, and then your life experiences can be substantiated and supported in what you've learned from God.

Next week, terrible chapter. I would skip the next four weeks if I were you.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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