

2 PETER 1:12-21 CBC 21.2.2021am

In a world which is sceptical about Christianity, do you ever wonder, “How do I know that the Good News about Jesus is really true?”

Peter is addressing that issue in the part of the Bible we’re looking at today. He’s writing to Christians who are heading to their eternal home with God, and Peter wants them to travel well. But their journey is made difficult by people who are attacking the gospel. Some of the sceptics actually claimed to be Christian teachers, but they were false teachers, re-writing both the Christian message and Christian morality. In particular, they were attacking the idea that Jesus is the rightful Ruler of the world who will return to be our Judge. “*There’s no coming Judge,*” they said, “*so don’t worry too much about how you live*” (2Pe 3:3-4).

Peter’s response is that this teaching will NOT lead us home! It leads away from home. It leads to disaster. So what should we do? That’s what 2Pe 1:12-21 is about. Peter takes us back to the foundations of the Christian faith. First, he tells us to hold on to the gospel. Then he reminds us why we can have confidence in it.

1. HOLD ON TO THE GOSPEL! vv.12-15

12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

They used to say that the foundation of a good education is the three Rs – reading, (w)riting, and (a)rithmetic! Peter says that a good Christian education is also based on three Rs: “*remind*” (v.12); “*refresh your memory*” (v.13); and “*remember*” (v.15). It’s really one BIG ‘R’. Peter is a parent saying to his children, “*Remember what I told you!*” And note the repeated word “*always*” (vv.12, 15).

What are we to remember? “*These things*” (vv.12,15) i.e., the great truths Peter has laid out for us in vv.1-11: what God has done for us in Christ, and how to grow in Christ so that our life is fruitful and ends in a warm welcome home. Peter acknowledges that his readers are “*firmly established in the truth*” (v.12). Yet he knows that no matter how long we’ve been Christians, no matter how well established we appear to be, the danger of wobbling is always with us. We’ll only remain stable as Christians so long as we constantly return to the core truths. So Peter will go on reminding them.

But Peter is going to die shortly (vv.13-14) – what then? Jesus had commissioned Him to feed His church – to teach the gospel. Peter wants his teaching to continue to be available after his death – not only for those who knew him, but for later generations who’d never met him.

Hence v.15: I’ll make every effort to see that after my death you’ll be able to remember my teaching! He did that by writing it down. This letter is an example. So most likely is Mark’s gospel, since the early church fathers tell us that Mark recorded what Peter gave him.

That’s what Scripture is: the permanent written record of apostolic teaching. It’s a reasonable and necessary provision made by God. If God did something unique in Jesus Christ it’s inconceivable that He’d allow it to be lost in the mists of antiquity. He made provision for its preservation. And so the church through the centuries is able to constantly return to the source.

Wherever the church holds to the apostolic gospel preserved in the Scriptures, there we have authentic Christianity just as surely as if the apostles were standing among us. We have Peter

present and teaching today! And he doesn't say *"I want to bring you some new truth"* - rather *"I want to remind you of the unchanging truths that are the foundation of your faith. That's what will keep you stable and growing!"*

Do you see? We mustn't grow away from the apostolic gospel – as so many seem to think – by adopting some more contemporary views. That would be to lose all stability! Satan will always try to cut the link between the church and the apostles' teaching – then he has the church drifting all over the place (and pretty soon drifting on to the rocks).

NO: We go forward by going back to what God has said and done. If someone asks, *"What is God's message for the world today?"*, we aren't to cup our ears and wait for a voice from heaven; we must open our Bible. The message has already been given. We don't have to wait for it, we have to hold on to it.

Stability comes from staying on the foundation. Those who preach have a great responsibility here. There'll always be the temptation to try to bring something new. But Christian preachers are not called to be people who create, but people who remind.

OK, we have the original message. But how do we know the message is true? That's vv.16-21. Peter calls two sets of witnesses: the New Testament apostles and the Old Testament prophets.

2. THE MESSAGE IS VERIFIED BY THE APOSTLES vv.16-18

16 *For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. 17 He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'* **18** *We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.*

The cynic says, *"How do we know this gospel is true? In particular, how do we know that Christ will return? What if it's all been made up to keep you under control?"* v.16 is what the man in the street thinks of Christianity – cleverly devised stories. How do you know that Jesus is coming to judge and to rule the world?

Peter says: *"We're not making it up – we've seen it! We were eyewitnesses of His majesty! (v.16). Of course, we haven't yet seen His return in glory. But we've seen the preview!"*

Peter is referring to the event we call the Transfiguration of Jesus, which is what vv.17-18 are all about. It's recorded in three gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). Since Mark is probably giving us Peter's own account, you might look at Mark 8:38 – 9:7 now.

You'll see that Jesus was discussing His return in glory (Mk 8:38) and promised that some of His hearers would be given a glimpse of these things (9:1). A few days later it happened! Peter, James and John saw a stunning transformation of Jesus. It was so significant that Moses and Elijah, great figureheads from Israel's past, were called to witness it too.

But what did it mean? Peter tried to make sense of it but couldn't (Mk 9:5-6). But God spoke from heaven (Mk 9:7): *"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!"*

Note that carefully! The words, *"This is my Son"* allude to Psalm 2, a very dramatic psalm which pictures the nations of the world fighting against God and His people. And the Lord laughs and says, *"It's no use shaking your fist at me! I've installed my King! I've said to Him, 'You are my Son!'"* And the psalm ends with the nations having to submit to God's King or be destroyed. All their rebellion is futile, because God's King is coming to rule.

And what Peter is saying in His letter (2Pe 1:16-18) is simply this: We apostles were there at the Transfiguration when God identified Jesus as the King foretold in Psalm 2, the Judge and Ruler of every nation. We witnessed His enthronement! We saw His glory – we were

eyewitnesses! We heard God's voice from heaven – we were ear-witnesses! And that's how we know Jesus is coming to establish His rule. The awesome majesty the three of us saw then will one day be seen by everybody, whether they like it or not.

So who says Jesus is the coming King? We apostles do, says Peter, and with good reason. Peter wasn't an author of fiction (v.16). When he tells us astonishing things about Jesus, he's simply relating what he saw and heard. He found it astonishing too, but it was so utterly compelling that he had to spend his life bearing witness. Even on pain of death he couldn't deny what he'd seen and heard. *And God intends that we share this certainty, not through being there, but through the witness of those who were there.*

And Peter calls another set of witnesses too:

3. THE SAME MESSAGE WAS FORETOLD BY THE PROPHETS vv.19-21

The same God whom the apostles heard speak at the Transfiguration also spoke through the prophets.

19 *We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

The prophets foretold the coming of God's King. They said many things that were fulfilled to the letter in Jesus first coming. They also looked forward to the final Day of the Lord when God would come as Saviour and Judge, and His Kingdom would be all in all. And Peter's point is: The prophets *said it*, and we apostles have *seen it*, and confirm their witness. When the Old Testament and the New Testament are read together, they powerfully validate one another.

And the prophets' reliability comes as no surprise, because just like the apostles, the prophets got their message from God: **20** *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things.*

"Above all" – this is of the utmost importance: the prophets weren't offering their personal interpretation of what was happening. Nor did they simply make up their message out of their heads – that was the mark of the false prophet (Jer 23:16; Ezek 13:3).

So where did they get their message? **21** *For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* That's how Scripture came about. Not by the prophets' will, but by God's will. Isaiah and the others didn't wake up one morning and say, "I think I'll write some prophecy today!" No: they spoke from God. It was God's initiative.

Yet the prophets weren't mere word-processors! Notice the double authorship of Scripture: people were carried along by the Spirit of God, but they still did the speaking and the writing. Scripture is the Word of God through the word of human beings; God's truth through human personalities; the divine Author and the human authors working concurrently. The mechanics of that process of inspiration are nowhere explained in the Scriptures, but the result is something beautiful and unique. God's word in human words, so that we can receive it and understand it and be blessed by it.

But what Peter emphasizes here is the *origin* of this message: Where can we trace the words back to? God breathed them out. When we read our Bible, we should be asking, "Who caused this book to be?" The answer: the God of the universe. That should make us want to read it!

SO SUMMING UP: You wonder if the Good News about Jesus is true? The answer, says Peter, is YES. God has given us the gospel. He has told us that Jesus is the coming King. And He has confirmed this with a double testimony: the apostles who were eyewitnesses of Jesus'

majesty, and the prophets who foretold it – and whose other prophecies have already been fulfilled in Jesus.

And when we go back to the Scriptures which contain the words of the prophets and the eyewitness testimony of the apostles, we find the authentic Christian faith, and the solid ground on which it rests. That's why the Scriptures are the foundation and the means of all spiritual growth.

Peter's message to us then is a familiar one: Back to the Bible! Why? He tells us twice:

- At the beginning of the passage, v.12: the Scriptures will keep you established in the truth. You need your Bible for stability! So keep refreshing your memory (v.13).
- At the end of the passage, v.19: The Scriptures will shine a light on your pathway to keep you from losing your way (NB: Peter is referring to the OT Scriptures – don't ditch them, or you're throwing away the lamp God has given you!). When Christ returns, there'll be no more darkness – we'll have the full light of day! But until then, we need the light of the Scriptures.

So here's a vital key to Christian living and Christian stability. Don't read your Bible because I say so. Read it because we're in a dark place, and it's the only reliable light we've got. We need Bible illumination. Someone needs to explain what's happening or we'll be left wandering around in the story wondering what our part is. And that's why God has given us what is absolutely reasonable and necessary – His word, the Scriptures. The Bible is like God's phone calls, e-mails, Facebook to us. As Peter says (v.19): pay attention to the Scriptures!

You want to journey well through life, and at the end receive a royal welcome from Jesus who is the King? Then don't ignore His word. Don't leave your Bible unread. You say, "I'm not a reader" - but that's not true. You read things that are important to you. Nothing is more important than God's word, because it's His provision for our need.

What a wonderful thing that we've not been left to grope in the darkness, but we've been given a sure witness to the truth, and a lamp for our journey. Let's determine to use it. That's how to stay safe as we head for home, to meet King Jesus.

PRAYER: We thank you, Heavenly Father, that through the prophets and the apostles you have given us the word of truth concerning your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us by your Spirit to live in the glory of what you have revealed, and so be prepared for that day when our King returns or calls us home. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

- How can we help one another pay better attention to the Word of God?