

The trustworthiness of the Gospel \* 2 Peter 1:12-21  
April 30, 2023 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Last summer, when we were away on vacation, we decided as a family that we would try 'Treetop Trekking.' Have you ever heard of that? We were up in the Muskokas and so I figured 'oh, that will be nice. They must have a wooden walkway built up in the trees and it will be a good time going for a nice leisurely stroll in the canopy.

I soon discovered that I did not understand Treetop Trekking. You get there and immediately they put you into a helmet and a safety harness that I think is specifically designed to give you a wedgie. And then they walk you back into the forest to do a lesson on how to hook into their safety lines with a big carabiner type thing and then transfer around from one walkway to the next. And then they send you up twenty – thirty feet into the air to walk across one foot planks spaced three feet apart and over bridges that wobble like JELLO when you step on them. It was quite the adventure.

But I will give them credit. Before you got up into the trees, they walked you through this 'training course' about five feet up where you learned how to manoeuvre around on these things so that your harness never actually came free of the safety wires. The whole time you are strapped tightly in with a line to catch you. And they actually insisted that you practice falling off the wire just to prove to you that you could trust it all – the harness, the wire – they wanted you to be absolutely certain that you would not fall.

That's what Peter is doing with the Gospel in the passage of Scripture for today. He knows that rightly understood, following Jesus is a big commitment. Jesus says 'deny yourself, take up your Cross, follow Me' and I will lead you into life;' can we trust Him to do that? Is the Gospel trustworthy enough to give your life to?

To answer that question, Peter is going to give us three lines of evidence that testify to the truthfulness and thus trustworthiness of the Gospel – the testimony of eyewitness, the testimony of the prophets and the testimony of God Himself – so let's look together at 2 Peter 1, starting in verse 12 to see why we can trust the Gospel. 2 Peter 1, starting in verse 12.

2 Peter 1:12 actually picks up from what we talked about last week, so just as a quick refresher, let me recap the first eleven verses for you. 2 Peter 1-11, Peter explains the Gospel, the 'Good News' about Jesus. Peter says that because of what Jesus did on the Cross, God makes us right with Him on the basis of faith. He makes us holy and gives us everything we need to live holy lives. And when we grow our faith we are guaranteed an extravagant welcome into the eternal Kingdom of God. That's the good news about Jesus – the cluster of ideas that we call the Gospel – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the way we receive their benefits, by grace, through faith.

Peter now picks this up in verse 12 and says:

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.

Peter knows that we understand the Gospel, he know that we are rooted in the Gospel, and yet even so, he says, I want to you remind you of it again and again so that it will always be front and centre in your mind.

And Peter actually has a pressing reason to do so here. Look at verse 13 -

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.

This is something really unique about Second Peter. This letter is essentially the last will and testimony of the apostle Peter. These are his final words, his deathbed confession and so they carry great weight because of it. Peter is choosing his words very carefully so that every word he writes will continue to speak to us even after he's gone.

Evidently, Peter had some sense that he was not long for this world. It looks like Jesus somehow let him know that he would soon be packing up the tent which was his body and moving on to a better and more permanent abode and so Peter put pen to paper so that 'after his departure we would always be able to remember these things.'

And here in the next five verses, Peter lays out his evidence for the trustworthiness of the Gospel. He knows that he's not going to be around much longer and so he wants to drive home the point that we can trust what he's told us to remember. He's reminded us of Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins; he's reminded us how we are made right with God by faith and grow that faith; here he lays out the evidence that shows that that Gospel is true.

First line of evidence, verse 16 -

16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

This is the first line of evidence that Peter presents – the testimony of eyewitnesses.

As we're all too aware, it's possible for people to make up stories in order to make a point. Politicians, podcasters, conspiracy theorists make up cleverly invented stories to sway their audiences so much that we've learned as a culture how important fact checking is. Check your sources. Always check your sources.

That's what Peter is telling us to do here regarding the Gospel. Verse 16, he says 'we're not making up fairy tales when we talk about Jesus; we have seen Him with our own eyes, touched Him with our own hands and felt the radiance of His glory on our own faces.'

And to back that up, he refers to an event that we talked about not long ago, an event that clearly had a lasting impression on him – the Transfiguration. Verse 17 -

17 For he received honor 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.

Back in Mark 9, we talked about this. Peter, James and John were up on the mountain with Jesus when all of a sudden, Jesus was transformed before their eyes. His clothing became a vibrant white and His person glowed with heavenly glory. Moses and Elijah appeared and then to cap it all off, the voice of God spoke from the clouds to say 'This is my Son, whom I love; listen to Him.'

Clearly this moment stuck with Peter and it is just one example of the many miraculous things that Peter saw Jesus do with his own eyes. And he uses it here to drive home the point that this is not just 'something he's made up' but something that he *and other witnesses* have seen with their own eyes!<sup>i</sup>

But here's the question – why is it important that Peter saw these things with his own eyes?

An expert on eyewitnesses in the Gospel, Richard Bauckham, puts it like this: "...for Greek and Roman historians, the ideal eyewitness was not the dispassionate observer but one who, as a participant had been closest to the events and whose direct experience enabled him to understand and interpret the significance of what he had seen... Involvement was not an obstacle to a correct understanding of what they perceived as historical truth. It was rather the essential means to a correct understanding of what had really happened."<sup>ii</sup>

The fact that Peter saw Jesus' life and miracles with his own eyes establishes the truthfulness of the Gospel. Certainly, people's memories can play tricks on them and we need to take that into account when relying on eyewitness testimonies, but Peter wasn't the only eyewitness, was he? James and John were there at the Transfiguration, they were all there after the Resurrection; that's what lies behind Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

He's saying – 'what I'm saying is true; you can go ask any one of those five hundred people who saw with their own eyes.'

The fact that Peter saw Jesus with his own eyes goes a long way to establishing the truthfulness of the Gospel. But it's not just what he saw; it's what he DID with what he saw!

He lived and acted on the conviction that these things truly happened. People don't usually leave their jobs and become itinerant preachers unless they're sure of what they've seen and Peter sure acted like someone who'd seen something spectacular.

The testimony of eyewitnesses gives us confidence that the Gospel is true. That's the first line of evidence that Peter gives us.

Second, the testimony of the prophets gives us confidence that the Gospel is true. Verse 19:

19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, 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.

If you're using a different Bible, you'll notice that verse starts differently, like 'we have something more sure.' It's hard to translate but I think the New Living Translation gets at the heart of it:

2 Peter 1:19 Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets.

As Jewish people, Peter and the other disciples would have known the things that the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel wrote about in the OT and they would have known the things that God had said would happen.

Without any confirmation though, those prophecies may as well have just been words on a page. I could write on my Facebook page I can bench-press a car but unless you see it happening, you're not going to believe it.

That may very well have been Peter's experience of those Old Testament prophecies. Oh, there's going to be a suffering servant who dies to free his people from the power of sin? Sure. The Son of Man is going to come with clouds of Glory? Ok, fine, but unless I see it with my own eyes, I'm not going to believe it.

But then one day Jesus showed up and started doing the things that the prophets foretold. Day after day, walking with Jesus, Peter saw Jesus fulfilling the words of the prophets; this would have inevitably convinced him that Jesus' actions really and truly had salvation significance. They weren't happening out of the blue. God had already said through His prophets that these things were going to happen – Jesus wasn't just some nut job off in the back country of Judea – He was healing the sick and raising the dead and preaching good news to the poor – all things that God had said His Messiah would do.

The fulfilled prophecies of the prophets testify to the truthfulness of the Gospel.

Which is why Peter says that we should pay attention to the prophetic word "...as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Peter says, using fairly poetic language, that the world around us can be a dark place, but following the word of the prophets, the Bible generally, we can safely make our way in the world.

So, second line of evidence: the testimony of the prophets, the fact that they anticipated Jesus, gives us confidence that the Gospel is true.

And finally, third, the testimony of God Himself gives us confidence that the Gospel is true. And here we get to look at one of the most important verses in all of the Bible *about the Bible*.

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.

21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Now let's talk about this because in the popular imagination, prophecy is 'foretelling.' It's predicting things that will happen. In the Bible though, prophecy is speaking on God's behalf. Sometimes that means predicting things that will happen; other times it's communicating God's word to His people. And

so when Peter says ‘prophecy’ here, he doesn’t just mean ‘predictions,’ he means all the ways that God has spoken to His people, especially through the Bible, Old and New Testaments.

And look at what he says – verse 20 - No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. Nothing in here began in the minds of men. Everything that’s written here comes from the mind of God. Certainly, the authors of the Bible wrote freely in their own way – they didn’t just take dictation from God – but God worked through them to ensure that they recorded everything that we need to know. God’s own testimony recorded in His Word gives us confidence that the Gospel is true.

So let’s think about this. A lot of people think about the Bible as a strictly human document. *People* wrote it. Peter, James, John, Moses, Paul, Daniel – they WROTE the books of the Bible in a particular time and a particular place, reflecting the particular prejudices of that time and place. And so there are a lot of people who will consequently say ‘it’s just people who wrote it down so it’s not worth listening too.’ I mean, there was a time when reading my Bible, I really didn’t like Paul; he just seemed like a bit of a grouch in a few places.

But what does Peter say? No word of Scripture comes from the mind of the writer but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. That ‘carried along’ word is the word you’d use to describe a sailboat ‘carried along’ by the wind. The people on board are doing their own thing, but the energy and the direction of that boat is set by the wind; same with Peter and Paul and the rest as they wrote the Bible. They wrote their own words, but as they did that, it was God Himself carrying them along to ensure that what they wrote ultimately accurately reflected His own testimony in written word to the world.

That means that there’s not one word in here that doesn’t originate in the mind of God; there’s not a single idea that God didn’t sign off on. Now absolutely, Peter and Paul and John and Daniel wrote their own words, using the literary genres of their time, reflecting the issues of their age, which means that we have to be carefully interpreting it. But as those people wrote, God Himself carried them along to ensure that what they wrote ultimately accurately reflected His own testimony in written word to the world.

One of the commentaries that I read this week puts it like this: “People who, like the apostle Peter, were prophets, were moved to write the Bible as God carried them along, so that what you have in your hands is exactly what God wanted written. Although Peter authored the letter, God is the power, inspiration, and source behind it, and therefore it is God speaking to us.”<sup>iii</sup>

We can trust that the Gospel is true because the book that explains it is authored by God Himself.

The testimony of God is evidence that the Gospel is trustworthy.

So let’s think about this. Actually, let’s think about THIS: if you knew you were going to die soon, what would you write down so that your loved ones could remember it when you are gone? Not to bring things down here, but that’s what Peter’s doing. He’s writing the things that we absolutely need to know for when he’s gone. And he’s given about a sixth of his final letter here to laying out why we can trust the claims of the Gospel.

And this is what he says:

Eyewitness testimony authenticates the Gospel.  
The lived experience of fulfilled prophecy authenticates the Gospel.  
And God Himself, through His Word, affirms the truthfulness of the Gospel.

**You can trust the Gospel.** You can trust that Jesus lived and died and rose again to restore you to God, to give you energy and life to live for Him. You can trust that when you are wrapped in the righteousness of Jesus by faith and grow in that faith, you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal Kingdom of God. You can trust that it is worth denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Jesus all the days of your life.

Peter wants you to know, I want you to know that you can trust the Gospel. I want you to have confidence in the Bible, in the story it tells of the creating, redeeming, sustaining work of God. And I think Peter gives us good reasons to have that confidence.

But here's the thing. I don't just want you to know that you can trust the Gospel; I want you to be able to live in light of it. Knowing that the Gospel is true, I want it to shape your life. Remember what Peter said in verse 19: And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place (2Pe 1:19 NIV).

The Bible tells us all about the Gospel and it also tells us how to live in light of it. It's like Psalm 119:105: 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. God authored Scripture to light our way and so as Peter says 'we would do well to pay attention to it.'

I did a little looking around online this week and I found these maps online of the trenches and No Man's Land during the First World War. I've heard that they exist and sure enough, they're there online. Soldiers in the trenches would make maps of the trenches to help them get around the miles long looping and turn dugouts that they found themselves in. And then out in no man's land, they had maps to show 'here's the barbed wire, here's where we think the enemy is stationed, here's where we think land mines are...'<sup>iv</sup> A person making their way through No Man's Land with a map would do well to pay attention to it.

Likewise, we would do well to pay attention to God's Word as we make our way through the world, letting it lead us away from dangers and into life. How do we do that? We spend time in the Word, reading it and thinking about it. Actually take the time to sit with God's Word, chew on it and think about what it means for the way you live. Take the Bible seriously for all of life, not just religious stuff, so that it shapes the way that you think of everything else in the world around you.

You can trust the Gospel and let it light your way! Let's pray.

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<sup>i</sup> (Why does Peter use this one as the example here instead of the raising of Lazarus or the resurrection or something? Well, you'll see later in the letter that there were some people doubting that Jesus would return; Peter here points to the Transfiguration and says 'that event foreshadows His return and it will be glorious!')

<sup>ii</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the eyewitnesses*, 9.

<sup>iii</sup> Jim Sarma, *James, 1&2 Peter and Jude* (Teach the Text commentary), 214.

<sup>iv</sup> For example: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/detail-of-wire-in-no-mans-land>