

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
March 6, 2011**

2 Peter 1:16-21

Are You Certain We Have The Truth?

Consider that we have:

- 1. Eyewitness accounts*
- 2. God's own account*

**Hymns: 95 – “Jesus, Take Us to The Mountain”
– Distribution: 96, 379 – 760**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

2 Peter 1:16-21 –

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. 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.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

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

Before Christmas, we had a joint Bible Class with the teens and adults. It was intended to bring the two groups together, who usually do not have Bible Class corporately, to enjoy fellowship and spiritual growth for a Sunday. As we were planning what to do that Sunday, Mr. Fischer (our Youth Leader) suggested that teens and adults could submit religious questions a couple weeks before that Sunday, and the pastor could lead a discussion that would answer those questions. Good idea!

I received the slips of paper with the suggested questions. It was quite interesting to see the difference between the two groups. The youths submitted questions like these:

- Explain the Bible's teaching on predestination. How did God choose us?
- What does the Bible say about the teaching of the Trinity? How can we explain this teaching?

Deep questions!

Here were a couple of the questions from adults:

- How do we know if the Bible is true?
- How can we be sure there is a God?

These are questions that a pastor hears often; however, I was surprised that the more basic questions about the basis of our faith came from the adults! It seems that people – even believers for a long time – might wonder about the validity of where our teachings come from: The Scriptures.

Can we be certain that we have the truth?

If you have wondered this yourself, today we have a Scripture text that you will be very interested in. The Apostle Peter discusses the background of the Bible. Let's ask how we can be certain that we have the truth. As we do this, we don't do it to cast doubt on your faith, but to solidify what God has told us about his proclamations to the world in his Word. The Lord will tell us two facts about how we can be assured we do have the truth.

1 – At the beginning of our text, Peter writes, *“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. 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.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him*

on the sacred mountain. 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.”

Let's set the context of these words first. Peter was near the end of his life at this time. He wrote just before our reading: *“I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.”* (1:14)

As Peter knows the end of his life was near, his thoughts drift back to the people he had written to in his first letter, the congregations in Asia Minor, today known as Turkey. Peter himself was in Rome. He knew that there was trouble in those congregations. Scoffers and critics had become quite vocal toward those early Christians in those churches. Later in this book he wrote in chapter 3: *“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”* Scoffers had arisen and would become more vocal, especially against the teaching that Jesus Christ would come again on the Last Day to judge the world. This would cast doubt on where these teachings had come from in the first place, God’s apostles and God’s Word.

How does Peter address this? He says three things. First, he tells them, *“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Literally, Peter says that they did not follow “wise myths.” There were those saying that the Old Testament and the apostle’s

preaching contained myths. Myths were nothing new to the Greek world. They prized and treasured their myths and legends. Do you remember what the current Greek religion was based on? Legends and stories about gods – Many gods! They spun fanciful stories about Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Poseidon, and more. That’s what the pagan religion of the time was based on: Myths!

Even Jewish rabbis were fond of spinning yarns in their commentaries on the Old Testament, which some people had compiled. But what does Peter say? **We are not teaching myths!**

Peter makes a second point: *“We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 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.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”* Peter points back to a concrete experience in his life that struck him deeply, the Transfiguration, which we read in the Gospel reading. He testifies that he saw the majestic glory of God himself. He testifies that he was with Jesus when this happened. He testifies that he heard the voice of God the Father speaking. **He saw all this as an eyewitness!**

Can you imagine his difficulty trying to explain what happened? Have you ever seen something so strange, so amazing, so wonderful, so odd, that you had a hard time explaining what happened to a friend? Think back to some musical performance or sporting event you saw. You struggled with the words and concepts in describing this, and then gave up saying, “You had to be there.” That’s what Peter is struggling with. He saw something amazing. He saw the Lord shine as brightly as the sun. He saw Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest prophets of the OT, appear and talk to the Lord Jesus about how he was going to suffer and die. He heard a voice from heaven say, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” **He is telling these churches in Asia Minor, “I saw this myself!”**

It's interesting that the Apostle John, who was also there on the mountain, says much the same thing in his writings. In the first chapter of his Gospel he writes, "*We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" In chapter 19 he wrote (after seeing Jesus put to death on the cross and the earthquake and signs in nature), "*The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.*" In his first epistle he writes, "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.*" **"I saw it myself!" John is crying out to us.**

Peter makes one more initial comment about his witnessing of these events. He writes, "*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.*" What does he mean by saying we have the word of the prophets more certain? Can you ever make God's Word more certain? Peter means that **the sights he saw as an eyewitness confirm what the OT prophets had written and predicted.**

Moses, who had gone up on another mountain, Mt. Sinai, and received the laws of God and who also revealed prophecies about the Savior that was to come was validated by what Peter saw, even seeing Moses himself talking with Jesus at the Transfiguration. All those Psalms that talk about the King, the Messiah, who was to come into the world, who was to suffer and die, and who would triumph over our spiritual enemies, are validated by what Peter saw on the mountain as Jesus spoke of these things with Moses and Elijah. Isaiah's prophecies of the suffering Servant that God the Father would send into the world were validated by what Peter saw.

This was the plan of God fulfilled. This was the culmination of his plan to save sinners. This was the evidence that his love had indeed sent Jesus Christ into the world to suffer and die for your sins and pay the price for your salvation so you could live in heaven with him, glorified as he was. Can we be certain we have the truth? Peter tells us, **"Yes! I am an eyewitness of it!"**

2 – Dear Christians, there's even more. Peter continues, "*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 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.*"

We certainly are glad that God has blessed us with eyewitnesses who confirmed the message of the prophets of the OT. Yet do you see what Peter adds in these verses? He says that someone else is adding his own witness, not an eyewitness, but the author himself. God is validating his plan by inspiring the writing of his Word that reveals it to us!

When we use the word "inspired" to describe a piece of writing, what do we usually mean? We usually mean that the poet or author was "moved" to write it by some feeling or inspiration. The word "inspiration" means more than that for the writers of the Bible. Peter testifies that "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." The word for "carried" here is the same word for what the wind did for a boat with sails back in Peter's day. The wind carried the boat where it went. The boat did not decide!

Another place that we hear this same concept is in 2 Timothy 3: "*All Scripture is God-breathed.*" The picture there is that God was "breathing" his words through the writers as his instrument. They produced the results and sounds that he wanted them to produce. How exactly did this work? Some teachers have pictured this like a musical instrument making sound produced by the musician. Others have compared it to dictation. Someone else has

compared it to a stream that carries precious gold flecks along from the mother lode. Illustrations may help, but each one limps, for it's remarkable that **God is the ultimate author of Scripture, yet allowed the writers to use their own styles and even research at times to produce exactly what he wanted written!**

Was this a new idea Peter was promoting, as he taught about the certainly we can have in the Word? Hardly.

- During Moses' ministry in the OT that God told him to write down what was happening, so it could be recorded.
- Toward the end of David's life, after he had penned many of the Psalms, he said in 2 Samuel 23, "*The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his Word was on my tongue.*"
- Jesus told his disciples in John 14, "*The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*"
- Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2, "*This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*"

Can we be assured we have the truth? God testifies that he has given us his own inspired account of the truth!

It's interesting that the Bible has endured attacks against its truth down through the ages. Many scholars have questioned facts the Bible tells us concerning events, kings, and kingdoms. For example, for centuries critics attacked the account of Jericho in the Old Testament. You probably remember the details of how the "walls came tumbling down." Many "learned" theologians dismissed this story as a myth and legend. Yet what did they find in the middle of

the 1900's? Excavations revealed the ancient city of Jericho with the collapsed walls. Oh, it must be true! (sarcasm) It's interesting that no geographical or historical fact in Scripture has ever been proven false. Truly, "God's Word is truth!"

It's unfortunate that the Word still remains under attack and criticism today. Many have discounted the clear accounts of the Flood, the sun standing still in the book of Joshua, or Jonah being in the fish for three days. Criticism can come on a couple different levels.

It can come from individuals who have a hard time believing the Word and who call such fundamental faith a "Sunday School" type of faith (critically). Perhaps they feel too enlightened to have to submit to a book written long ago. Perhaps they feel God's laws infringe on their personal freedoms to act and live however they want, so they criticize the book altogether. Perhaps pride causes them to do the same.

Criticism can also come from church bodies. For example, listen to what a seminary professor from the largest Lutheran church body (which we are not affiliated with) says about Adam and Eve: "In previous ages there was no problem in understanding Adam and Eve as historical figures... We recognize today in the story of the fall a particular literary genre, which theologians generally call myth... In theology a myth expresses a profound truth about the structures of human life and our relation to God by means of an imaginative story involving God in interaction with human beings... This means that the story of Adam and Eve is not an account of a historical event occurring sometime in the primordial past. They are representative figures, standing for you and me."

("Invitation to Faith," by Dr. Paul Jersild, Academic Dean, Director of Admissions, and professor of ethics at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary [ELCA], Columbia SC)

Is it important to know and believe that God's entire Word is the truth and not a myth? Listen:

- “(Jesus) answered, “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.” (Mt. 12)
- “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3)
- “In (Noah’s Ark) only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also.” (1 Peter 3)

Does it matter? Does it matter whether Jonah lived or whether the account of the bronze serpent is true? Our salvation hinges on the truth, the entire truth, of Scripture!

Therefore, what will this mean for the Scripture’s role in our lives? How will we treat it? If you have a brand new, shiny car you could do two things with it. Either you could park it away in a secure garage somewhere with a cover on it and never drive it for fear of injuring it, or you could use it as it was meant to be used. Drive it! Use it! In the same way, how will we treat God’s Word?

1. We will believe it
2. We will obey it
3. We will not change it
4. We will read it and grow in
5. We will witness about it

Finally, we could ask the question, have we successfully “argued” or “debated” faith into you today? Strange question, because of the way God the Holy Spirit operates. Your pastors can put together persuasive sermons on the validity of God’s Word and passionately reason with you

why you should believe. But even the faith that is in our hearts is to God’s credit as well.

Thank God we can be certain! Although we do not see and hear what Peter did long ago, he gave us comforting assurances for today:

1. We have eyewitness accounts of God’s truth
2. We have God’s inspired account of the truth

May God continue to strengthen us in the truth of his Word and the Savior that he has revealed in it! Amen.