

Passing it on ... not making it up

2 Peter 1:12-2:3

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based on a message by Pastor Eugene Boe

This past week, Appleton police officers responded to a report of an attempted armed robbery occurring inside a business. Officers began to search the area for the alleged suspect. As video from the store was being reviewed, it became apparent the claim of an attempted robbery was false. The man later admitted making up the story.

There are a lot of made up stories these days, aren't there? What's real and what's not? It's hard to know in our world sometimes, isn't it? What about in the church? Are we to believe everything we hear at church, or on Christian radio, or in Christian media, or books, or podcasts? What's true, and what's not? How do you tell? Ours is not the first generation to struggle with such questions.

In his first letter, Peter writes to those being persecuted from the *outside*. What does he say? Suffering for the follower of Jesus is normal. Expect it. Rejoice in it even! In Peter's second letter he warns followers of Jesus about the dangers on the *inside* - false teaching - that would lead them *away* from Jesus.

Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. What are these things he's reminding us of? May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence ...

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue ... and knowledge, and self-control, and steadfastness, and godliness, and brotherly affection, and love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ... Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Learning to say "no" to self, and "yes" to a higher calling. Pursing the One who pursues you.

Why is Peter so insistent about reminding them of the truth about Christ? Well in verses 13-14 he gives a personal reason – his death is near. Peter reveals to them that his time with them is short. Jesus has revealed to Peter that his death is near. *And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.*

Jesus had even told him in John 21:18-19, *"I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."* Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

If you knew your time here was coming to an end, what would you do? What would be your focus? What would be your main concern? What would you tell your friends and loved ones? What would you want to pass along to them? Peter's concern, is to promote the knowledge of the truth of the gospel amongst the believers. Peter devotes himself to this end, because he knows the time is coming when he will leave this 'tent' (body) and go to be with Christ.

He then reiterates his purpose in writing to them. *And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind.* He wants them to remember the truth of the gospel in which they have become established. Why? Because his fear is that if they forget the truth of the gospel, they will stumble in their faith, and fall from grace, and never make it to the Promised Land, their permanent dwelling with the Lord.

Fill in the blank. Little Red _____ Snow White _____ Goldilocks _____ Sleeping _____ You know them. Fairy tails. Myths. Tabloid journalism. The latest best-selling book about a supposed new revelation from God. What's real and what's not? It's hard to know in our world sometimes, isn't it? What are we to believe? What's true and what's not? How do we know, especially claims made in the church, by those in the church?

Peter writes, *For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" - and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*

Should the church believe what Peter's saying? How do they know if it's true or not? How do they know he's not just making it up? On what basis did Peter teach them the truth of the gospel? Peter goes to great pains to point out that his are not man-made stories, something the apostles dreamed up all on their own, that they shared with them, but 'eyewitness' accounts.

In these verses Peter talking about what account? What incident? Jesus' Transfiguration. Peter, James and John were there, eyewitnesses to Jesus' transfiguration, and they each heard the voice of God speaking approval of Jesus Christ. Notice, Peter says 'we' - it was not Peter alone who could testify to what happened on the 'sacred mountain.' Peter, along with James and John, saw the glory and majesty of Christ when He was transfigured before their eyes. Peter told them about Jesus, who lived and died and rose, not some mythical creation of man's imagination.

There was no mythology about what he shared with them - just historical facts, of which he himself was one of the eyewitnesses. Nothing speculative. No stretching of the truth, but eyewitness testimony of the actual events. So, the truth to which he is calling them back to remember after he has gone, which will keep them from falling away into doubt and unbelief, is attested to by God in the account of the Transfiguration ... not to mention the full three years he had seen Jesus heal multitudes of sick people with simply a word - seen Jesus walk on water and still the storm and raise the dead and appear in locked rooms after His crucifixion.

And so, we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

Peter now goes on to speak of the witness of Scripture, to the truth of Christ, to which he is calling them back, and to remember long after he is gone. Look at what he writes to them in these verses. Verse 19 - the Word of the prophets was fulfilled in the coming of Christ, the Messiah - it was made more certain by His coming. There is no question, but that the Scriptures are true, and truly the Word of God.

Therefore, they should pay attention to it, just as in a dark place you do what? You look to the light for guidance and direction - because there is another coming of Christ, the Second Coming. And on that day, the word spoken through the prophets will be vindicated and brought to completion.

The "day dawns" is speaking of the second coming. The "morning star" is speaking of Christ as the Messiah. "A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel". (Numbers 24.17) "*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.*" (Rev. 22.16)

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The Scriptures are not merely the words of men, but the very Words of God. He also speaks a word of *warning* to them - namely that it's not about their own interpretation. *They* are not, nor are *we*, at liberty to interpret Scripture any way we choose to suit our liking. That's called "isogesis" - reading our meaning into the text, instead of "exogesis", getting the meaning out of the text. As we interpret Scripture, Scripture interprets us, examines us, reveals what's in our hearts, does its work on us.

Scripture has meaning and purpose, all on its own. And we must be diligent, and disciplined, in searching it out. We must also humble ourselves, and submit to its authority, and seek the Spirit to aid us in this. Peter wants us to be established, grounded in the truth of the gospel, which we already know. For this to happen, we must be disciplined in listening to Scripture. And this requires that we *search out* its meaning - not apply our own meaning to it. Like the Bereans in Acts 17:11, who "*received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*"

And the core of what the Scriptures teach is about what? As Jesus said to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*" (Luke 24:27)

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. He continues in chapter two ... *But false prophets also arose*

among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed, they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Note who Peter's speaking of here. All these expressions - their shameful ways, their greed, later, their following the corrupt desire of the sinful nature, their being like brute beasts, with eyes full of adultery, slaves of depravity - are used as referring, not to the world, but to *leaders within the church*. It's a sorry picture.

You might think this was an isolated phenomenon in the early church, but this is far from the case. Of the 22 New Testament letters (including Rev. 2,3), at least 17 contain explicit warnings against people like this. No sooner did the Christian movement begin, then false teachers started popping up all over the place. From the beginning, the world and the devil had succeeded in making heavy onslaughts on the purity of the church. Then followed the long centuries of corruption.

And even now, in our own age, in many sections of the church, the Gospel of Christ in its original beauty and simplicity and purity is still buried and hid from view. Jesus predicted that the entire Church Age would be plagued by false teachers, and that it will get worse as we get closer to his return (see Matt. 24:4,5,10,11,24,25).

"That would never happen to me", right? Don't be so sure. Many have thought the same thing. Whole denominations, started by great Christian leaders, have been let astray.

False teaching/myths/and made-up stories are nothing new. We find it in the prophets' day, in Peter's day, in our day. So much of what passes for prophecy has its origin where? In the prophet's own head, their own imagination. Like a fairy tale, it's made up. True prophets never sought it, never made a show of it. They went kicking and screaming! They spoke as God directed them, and got in a lot of trouble for it. They were rarely praised. It wasn't a life of fame and fortune, but of suffering. They were often killed.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thess 2:13)

What's real and what's not? It's hard to know in our world sometimes, isn't it? Surrounded by all kinds of voices, all kinds of made up stories, all kinds of spiritual fairytales, all kinds of opinions about God, Peter leaves us a sticky note, a reminder of God's Word to us about His Son - backed up by the Old Testament, by true stories, eye witness accounts. The gospel is no man-made myth, but the eternal truth of God and the revelation of salvation for us and for the world.

True prophets pass it on. False prophets make it up. True prophets pursue the One who's pursuing them. False prophets pursue their own sinful desires.

Peter's time on earth was coming to an end. His concern is that after he's gone, those following Christ will be enabled to stand firm, because they *know* the truth, are *established* in the truth and are *obedient* to the truth - as attested to by God and the Scriptures. May we today, hear his warning, remembering the truth of the gospel of Christ, and pass it on.