

BETTER THAN AN EYEWITNESS – 2 PETER 1:16-21

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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 eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ 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. 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. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. 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.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

In 2010, a book hit Christian bookstores across the nation. It became a New York Times best-selling Christian book that year. The book was titled, *Heaven is for Real*. Perhaps you have heard about it, perhaps you have even read it. I have not read the book, but the main summary I have heard is a four year old boy in Nebraska named Colton, during surgery, had an out-of-body experience is taken to heaven to see what it is like. It became so popular among Christians that they even made a movie out of it. Based on Colton’s out-of-body eyewitness testimony, that book has convinced many Christians (and perhaps even non-Christians) about the certainty of heaven.

Saint Peter also had eyewitness testimony he wanted to share. It was eyewitness testimony of the event we heard about in our gospel for this morning – the transfiguration of Jesus. When Jesus was changed before their very eyes and pulled back the cloak on his majestic deity. Peter used his eye witness testimony as a reassurance to Christians that Jesus was coming back in power and majesty. But his eye witness testimony wasn’t the only arrow Peter had in his quiver. He had something BETTER THAN AN EYEWITNESS testimony. What could be BETTER THAN EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY?

1. He had a voice from heaven
2. He had the prophet’s sure message

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Peter wrote his letter to encourage believers in the truth of his message. His message was not just something that was made up. He begins, “**we did not follow cleverly devised stories.**” Paul also wrote in his letter to the Corinthians about the implications of the message if it were made up. They would be liars and there would be no use believing. And so Peter sought to reaffirm his readers of the truth of this message. What better way could he do that than by recounting some of his time with Jesus. And what better time was there to remember, save the resurrection, than the time when Jesus shone like lightning, just before he would begin his journey to the cross.

I can just imagine Peter penning the words of this letter we have before us, and harkening back to that amazing time when he, James and John followed Jesus up the mountain. Who knows if they were expecting anything spectacular to come? They had been with Jesus for about two years at that time, and they had been with Jesus before as he separated himself from the crowds to take time for prayer. As they climbed up higher and higher, they may have wondered where they were going. But it is at the most solemn times in God's history where he selected only a small number to witness greatness.

They reached the appropriate spot, and Jesus got down on his knees to pray. Peter, James and John knew better than to disturb Jesus when he was praying, and so they got down on their knees also, imitating their teacher. But then before long, they became distracted. But they weren't distracted by the birds chirping, or the wind blowing. They were distracted by an unnatural light, a light that was not coming from the setting sun, but from Jesus himself. At first it was just his face, then his hands, then his clothes. Before long they could not even bear to look at Jesus face to face. Then they had to do a double take – for they saw two more figures there, similar in appearance, but not as majestic. It was revealed to them that these two figures were Moses and Elijah, two great prophets from the Old Testament. And what a conversation they were having with Jesus.

The conversation centered around Jesus going to Jerusalem to complete his mission. The details were all a little fuzzy to Peter at the time, but as he looked back on it, he knew Jesus was talking about his death on the cross, just outside the walls of Jerusalem. Then, Peter recalled, before they knew what was happening, Jesus, Moses and Elijah were enveloped in a cloud, and then they were taken back to déjà vu. A voice spoke from the cloud, there was no doubt who it was, his voice was like rushing waters, and he boomed out, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** This was the eye witness account Peter recorded. It was an account that was verified by John, and James, who was at this time dead.

An eye witness account is powerful testimony, both in ancient times and also today. When someone says they saw an event happen, especially an event of the significance of the Transfiguration, that testimony would carry a lot of weight. But Peter did not just rely on his own eyes to show Jesus' majesty, he turned people to the voice of God. God the Father himself testified of Jesus, just like he did at his baptism, that Jesus was his Son, doing the mission God the Father sent him to do. Peter was basically saying, “If you don't believe me, ask God.”

Now what makes Peter different than other people who have eyewitness testimony of a conversation with God? Shortly after Jesus' ascension into heaven, there were a number of different groups out there that claimed revelation of God. A group called the Gnostics claimed a secret knowledge from God. More recently, Joseph Smith, the founder of the Latter Day Saints movement (Mormons) said he received two golden plates from an angel which he said to be the words of God. Or so many other leaders who have received special instructions from God? But Saint Peter did not merely rely on his own testimony, he relied on the voice of God, and he had, **“the word of the Prophets made more certain.** He was saying, if you don't believe me, if you don't believe God, look to the words of the prophets, look to the Bible.

It seems like something so simple doesn't it? – Look to the Bible for your answers, look to the Bible for your truth, look to the Bible for your support. And from there you can clearly see a difference between Saint Peter and these other imposters. It usually happens around every Easter time, there is another conspiracy theory or claim brought up about a book of the Bible that the church suppressed – the gospel of Judas, the gospel of Thomas, the gospel of Mary. The simple answer is the church did suppress them, because they were not God's Word, they did not agree with **“the word of the prophets made more certain.”** The same thing goes with Joseph Smith or other leaders who have claimed revelation from God. Their testimony is not supported by **“the word of the prophets made more certain.”** Their testimony is often self-centered.

But trusting **“the word of the prophets made more certain,”** goes further than just comparing it to what others have said, but comparing it to what we have said, what we have thought. How often have you had a “strong feeling” on your heart that you just knew had to be God, or a sign that had to be God? These can range anywhere from what color car to buy, to starting a religious cult. Once again, I don't know what God may or may not have placed on your heart, but I do know what God has promised in his word, and if what was placed on your heart does not match with God's Word, it's probably not God speaking to your heart. Maybe it's your own conscience, or worse, an agent of the devil. This is why the prophet's sure message trumps the message on your heart.

Let me give you a few examples. As I said, we can look at God's Word at times and completely agree with it, we think it's good – such as when he says don't murder, repent of your sins...believe in me...and you will be saved. But then there may be places where we're not so sure: don't sleep with someone who's not your spouse, wives submit to your husbands, give to the Lord offerings in line with your income, children honor your parents, respect the governing authorities, don't gossip. And unfortunately at these times, instead of lining ourselves up with God and his Word, we make excuses for ourselves, we conveniently ignore those passages, or explain away the meaning of what God's Word says.

But ignoring God's Word, making excuses or changing the meaning does not change God's word. Just like ignoring the flashing sirens in your rear view mirror won't stop the police officer from pulling you over. God's Word does not change when we say it changes. Ignoring God's Word when it says you're a sinner deserving of hell, does not change the fact that you are a sinner and deserving of hell. Just because you don't believe something is a sin, doesn't make it not a sin in God's eyes. And God's punishment for sin is death and hell. Although admitting to your sin doesn't lighten the sentence, it is only the first step in repentance.

But for all of the times where we have made excuses, changed the meaning, or explained away what God says, there was one who didn't do that. And that one was the one whom Peter saw in majesty on the mount of Transfiguration. When God the Father said, **“This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased,”** he was talking about the perfect life Jesus lived in our place, and his impending death he would die in our place.

Because you see, if we are able to somehow convince ourselves that the Bible is just talking about other people's sins, other people's shortcomings, other people's faults, then that same logic would dictate Christ came for other people's sins, other people's shortcomings, and other people's faults, but not for ours. We need to put ourselves into the sinner category the Bible is talking about, so that we can be

welcomed into the saved category the Bible talks about. I cannot believe “Jesus loves me” without believing “I’m a sinner.” The Gospel message of healing has nothing to heal without knowing the crippling disease of sin revealed by the law.

This is where Peter turned. He did not turn to his own memories for what he knew about God. He turned to what the Bible said. I find it interesting that many Christians will go to a book like *Heaven is for Real* for reassurance about heaven, before they will go to the Bible. I am not in a position to say that what Colton saw was not real, but I am also not going to solidify an opinion about heaven based on his eyewitness testimony. Saint Peter was quick to point to other evidence of his eye witness testimony – James and John who were with him, the voice of God the Father on the mountain, and the voice of God through the words of the prophets found in the Bible. That was where he found his certainty.

Recent studies have actually found that eyewitnesses in criminal cases are not as reliable as they might seem – on a number of occasions they have misidentified the criminal. But this doesn’t take anything away from Peter’s eyewitness testimony. He is not identifying a criminal he may have seen a fleeting glance of, he is identifying the majesty of Jesus on the mountain as proof of his impending return. But Peter doesn’t want us to just take his word for it. He wants us to look to God’s Word – the Bible. For the God who keeps his promises spoke it. God’s Word is BETTER THAN AN EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY. Amen.