

“Witness the Majesty of Christ”

Peter had seen it. He was one of only three disciples, the others being James and John, who were invited with Jesus up on a special mountain before he began his last journey to Jerusalem. There they watched as Jesus changed before them. He was transfigured. His face shined in glory. His clothes became a dazzling white. The Old Testament heroes Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus and spoke to him. And then the glorious words of God the Father rang out: **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** Peter was an eyewitness. He had seen the majesty of Christ. He had seen the glory of God’s own Son shining forth as it so rarely did during his earthly life. And Peter never forgot.

Of course, sometimes it seemed as if Peter had forgotten. Following the events of the Transfiguration, Peter watched as Jesus made his way to Jerusalem. He saw the plots of Jesus’ enemies come together. He saw how Jesus was arrested. And even though Jesus had warned Peter about all these things, Peter not only deserted Jesus the way the other disciples did; he went so far as to disown him and to call down curses on himself insisting that he didn’t know that man.

In the dark moments afterward, when Peter wept bitterly, did he think about the Transfiguration? After he had been reinstated by Jesus with the call to feed his lambs, did Peter think back and wonder how after seeing what he had seen he could do what he had done? Perhaps he did. After all, Peter was an eyewitness of the majesty of Christ.

Peter also knew that he would once again witness the majesty of Christ. One more time Christ would return to earth, this time not as a lowly baby but as a judge in glory and majesty. Peter had heard Jesus himself make the promise that it was so. And Peter was not about to forget this promise. And he didn’t want those to whom he wrote his epistles to forget either. He told them. He warned them. He insisted that Jesus would return, that he was coming.

And all around him and all around the believers with whom he worked, were those who said, “Where is he? I don’t see him. Where’s this coming that you’ve told us so much about?” They needed proof. Words were not enough. And their insistence was enough to raise doubts in the hearts and minds of many who had been waiting for Christ’s return with hearts of faith.

So Peter wrote to them to encourage them to witness the majesty of Christ. He knew that they couldn’t go back with him to see the things that Peter had seen, like on the mountain of Transfiguration, but he knew that they could be strengthened by the truth. He could remind them that they had the words of the eyewitnesses. And his words of encouragement to them offer us a remedy for our doubts and fears.

Witness the majesty of Christ.

The Transfiguration was not a “cleverly invented story.” This was not the same as the stories that the false prophets were sharing in Peter’s day or the false teachers share with us today. We hear plenty of cleverly invented stories. We hear from scientists and instructors that God didn’t create the world and that science has proven how the world came about without him. We hear society insist that marriage can mean whatever anyone wants it to mean and that what God says it is really doesn’t matter. We hear them say that what is right for you is what feels good to you and that no one else has any right to tell you that it is wrong. But all of these claims are the clever inventions of sinful minds.

The truth is that Jesus shines with the majesty of perfect and holy God, and that God demands and expects perfection from his people. He has from the time of creation established right and wrong and defined the way that people are to behave. And the truth is that we should cower in fear to see the brightness of Christ’s glory because of the many times we have failed to acknowledge his commands and to obey his decrees, and for all the times that we have invented clever stories in our own hearts and minds and followed them instead of following Christ.

And the truth is that Jesus loves us so much that in spite of all these things, he set aside the radiant glory of heaven to be born in humility on earth. The truth is that Jesus lived a life according to the absolute truth of God's holy will and not according to human whims. And the truth is that Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross for the sake of people like us who so often doubt and are so often taken in by cleverly invented stories.

And the truth is that Peter and the other disciples were witnesses of Christ's glory again. He came and stood among them after his death, and yet he was alive. He had once again made use of his divine power and glory to raise his lifeless body from the tomb, and to appear to his disciples behind locked doors and to reassure them with his word of peace.

Why should the people listen to Peter? Because Peter was there. He was an eyewitness. He could tell them the things that he heard and that he saw. He could tell them the truth.

Of course, that's not always enough. It wasn't enough for Thomas, who now lives with the nickname Doubting Thomas. The other disciples told him what had happened, but he didn't believe. He had no real reason to doubt other than his own sinful weakness, and yet doubt is exactly what he did. And it was only after Jesus appeared again and invited Thomas personally to touch him and to feel the truth for himself that Thomas' doubts were removed. And Jesus then shared with Thomas the powerful words that "those who have not seen and yet have believed" are blessed.

So how do people believe when they have never seen? How can we possibly be called on today to witness the majesty of Christ? The answer is that words like those penned by Peter are more than merely human words. They carry with them the power of God, because they are God's words. We don't rely simply on human eyewitnesses, as credible as they may be, but we rely on God himself to teach us the truth. The same voice of God that spoke from the mountain of Transfiguration speaks to us through the words of Scripture.

This is how Peter puts it in our text: **"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."**

True prophets, true spokespeople for God, have never made up their own message. They speak for God because the Holy Spirit gives them God's word. Scripture itself came about because God moved men to write down the very words he wanted them to write, words that he promises are **"the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"** (Romans 1:16).

And because we have God's own words, we would do well to pay attention to them. God's word is like a light shining in a dark place. It illuminates for us all of our experiences, and most importantly, it illuminates for us the truth of our salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

We need this encouragement to pay attention to God's word because we so often fail in this area. Each Sunday we celebrate as so many gather together around that word, but at the same time are saddened that we have many more members who are not here. And we are saddened as we think of others who are never here. And we ought to be saddened to think of the times that we are tempted to set aside God's word for anything else, whether it be a little more sleep, a little more money to be made at work, a little more homework that needs to get done, or anything else that would hide from us the majesty of Christ.

Because the word is where we witness that majesty. The word is our light in this dark place, and the word is the means through which God strengthens us in faith until we see Christ's majesty and power for ourselves, when he will return to take us home to heaven. We have heard from the eyewitnesses. We have heard from God himself. Jesus is alive. He is coming back. We will witness his majesty with our own eyes, but in the meantime, we witness it with eyes of faith that trust truth.

Sermon Text: 2 Peter 1:16–21 (NIV84)

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. 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.

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