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MINISTRIES

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Confirm Your Calling: Christ’s Glory and the Prophetic Word (2 Peter 1:16-21)

Welcome back to our verse-by-verse study through 2 Peter. In this teaching, we will be going through 2 Peter 1:16-21.

But before we get there, here’s a quick summary of what we discussed last time.

1. Peter explained that God has already given us everything we need for spiritual growth. For instance, he has given us the Scriptures by which we learn about his character and will for our lives. He has given us the community of believers so that we can be encouraged and helped in our walk. Our spiritual growth comes as a result of growing in our knowledge of God.
2. Because of God’s provision and promises, we should make every effort to live righteously. Peter says to supplement our faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. Our good character will be the proof that we are genuine followers of Messiah—our good character confirms our calling and election.
3. Peter remarks that he knows his days are short and wants to make the best use of the time he has left by reminding his readers of some significant teachings.

In this section of his letter, Peter focuses on an important biblical teaching: Yeshua’s Second Coming and the judgment at the end of the age. This issue comes up again toward the end of his letter (2 Peter 3:1-13). Apparently, certain false teachers were attacking the idea that the Messiah will return. Peter issues a warning that “scoffers” will ridicule the idea of Messiah’s return (2 Peter 3:3-4). Peter seems to be addressing the scoffers’ characterization of this biblical teaching as he begins his response. Here is what he says:

2 Peter 1:16

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua], but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Again, Peter is likely addressing the false teachers' characterization of the apostles' teaching here. These scoffers, who mock the Second Coming (2 Peter 3:3-4), claim that such a teaching is merely a cleverly devised myth. In this context, the Greek word translated myth, *mythos*, basically means a fictional tale or legend (BDAG, μῦθος, 585). Philo and Josephus use this word to describe the myths about the supposed activities of pagan gods (Philo, *On the Creation* 1; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.22).

Peter begins his response by outright denying that the Messiah's return is a myth. The apostles' teaching about the Messiah's second coming is *not* some made-up fable. Peter goes on to explain that this teaching is based on his and the other apostles' own experience. They witnessed Yeshua's majesty with their own eyes. Let's continue:

2 Peter 1:17-18

For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

Here, Peter refers to the Messiah's transfiguration on the mountain. This event happens right after Yeshua states that some of his disciples would not taste death until they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom (Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). The most natural reading is to interpret the Transfiguration event as the fulfillment of this statement. Here's Matthew's account of this powerful event:

Matthew 17:1-8

And after six days Jesus [Yeshua] took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus [Yeshua], "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus [Yeshua] came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus [Yeshua] only.

Peter says this event is where the Messiah "received honor and glory" (2 Peter 1:17). These words are likely meant to describe the Messiah's majestic appearance on the mountain. As we just read, Matthew says that Yeshua's face "shone like the sun" and his clothes "became white as light" (Matthew 17:2).

In verse 18, Peter says they were with Yeshua on "the holy mountain." He says that a voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my beloved son." Now these are direct allusions to Psalm 2:4-7, which uses these same phrases in reference to the Messianic king in the Psalm:

Psalm 2:4-7

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The LORD [YHWH] said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you."

The Second part of what the voice from heaven spoke—“with whom I am well pleased”—is taken from Isaiah 42:

Isaiah 42:1

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

In this verse, the author is speaking of a figure in Isaiah known as the “servant.” This servant is a remarkable figure whom Isaiah describes as someone who will establish justice in the earth (Isaiah 42:1-4), regather Israel to the land (Isaiah 49:5), and bring God’s salvation to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6). Isaiah says that this servant will be highly exalted (Isaiah 52:13), but first will endure intense suffering (Isaiah 53). The servant’s suffering is described as bringing healing to the people (Isaiah 53:4). The servant bears the punishment that the people deserved for *their* sins. The servant is innocent, and yet he suffers for the unrighteous so that forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation with God could be granted to them. In his first letter, Peter explicitly identified this servant figure with Yeshua (1 Peter 2:24-25).

So, the voice from heaven connects Yeshua to prophecies concerning the servant figure of Isaiah as well as the Messianic king of Psalm 2. Yeshua is the servant referred to in Isaiah who came and suffered for our sins (1 Peter 3:18) but will return as a conquering king (Revelation 19:12-16), regather Israel back to the land, and bring God’s salvation to the Gentiles.

Now, why does Peter appeal to the transfiguration in defense of his teaching about the Messiah’s Second Coming? Because, to Peter, this event was a foretaste—or a preview—of Yeshua’s return. Peter knew about these prophecies of a coming Messianic king, and a literal voice from Heaven confirmed that Yeshua is that Messianic king who will come in power and glory. During this event, Peter got a glimpse of that power and glory. He saw what Yeshua will look like as the Messianic king when he returns. So, it makes complete sense that Peter would use this event to argue in favor of a Second Coming of Yeshua.

As Terrance Callan writes:

Perhaps people have denied that Jesus will come again in glory by arguing that Jesus’s earthly life was incompatible with such an expectation. If so, the story of Jesus’s transfiguration might be an effective counterargument. Jesus’s temporary transformation and the words of the voice reveal a dimension of Jesus that is otherwise hidden.

—Duane F. Watson & Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2012), 174

In addition to the transfiguration event, Peter says that biblical prophecy also testifies to the Messiah’s glorious return. Here is what he says:

2 Peter 1:19

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

So, Peter appeals not only to his personal experience but also to “the prophetic word more fully confirmed.” The ESV rendering of this verse gives the impression that the prophetic word was “fully

confirmed” by the transfiguration event. But this is not accurate. “More fully confirmed” can be more simply translated as “more secure” (Watson & Callan, *First and Second Peter*, 176). The word order of this statement in Greek is literally “and we have the more secure prophetic word” (καὶ ἔχομεν βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον). Peter is not saying that the transfiguration validates the prophetic word. He is saying that “we”—that is, he and his readers—have something more reliable or secure than even the transfiguration event that he was an eyewitness to. We have “the prophetic word.”

So what is “the prophetic word”? Well, verse 20 makes it clear that Peter is referring to the Scriptures: “**no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation.**” Peter’s concept of “Scripture” primarily consisted of the Tanakh, or what is often called the Old Testament, but also includes prophecies from Paul’s letters, as we will see in chapter 3 of Peter’s second epistle (2 Peter 3:16).

This is a significant statement from Peter. Because while his experience on the holy mountain was profound, ultimately Peter grounds his doctrine in the Scriptures. Peter considers the authority of the Scriptures to be *more reliable* than his personal experience. He admonishes his readers to “**pay attention**” to what is written in the Scriptures. He uses the analogy of “**a lamp shining in a dark place**” to describe how his readers ought to let the Scriptures be their guide. Old Testament writers use this same metaphor to describe God’s word:

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Proverbs 6:23

For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.

So, Peter compares the Scriptures to a lamp shining in a dark place. The “dark place” refers to the present world (cf. Psalm 74:20; Watson & Callan, *First and Second Peter*, 176). Peter says that his readers will need to rely on the Scriptures as their guide “**until the day dawns and the morning star rises in [their] hearts.**” That is, until the coming of Messiah. The present world is “dark” because this coming “day” has not yet dawned.

The dawning of the day is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe the coming Day of Judgment (e.g., Malachi 4:2). The word “**morning star**” (*phosphoros*) is used here as an image for Messiah and is probably better translated as “light-bringer” (Douglas Moo, *2 Peter-Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 76).

So, according to Peter, we will need the prophetic Scriptures as our guide until the day of Messiah’s return, when the Messiah “**rises in [our] hearts.**” What does Peter mean when he says the light-bringer, the Messiah, will rise in the hearts of believers at the Second Coming? The scholar J. N. D. Kelly has some good insight into this phrase:

The clause must be a pictorial description of the way in which, at His Coming, Christ will dissipate the doubt and uncertainty by which [believers’] hearts are meanwhile beclouded and will fill them with a marvellous illumination. As such the expression finds parallels in 1st cent. Hellenistic Judaism. Philo, e.g., describes in remarkably similar terms (Ebr. 44) how the pure rays of ‘the divine morning star’, i.e. God, ‘flash on the eye of the soul’; in much the same way, too, he considers (Decal. 49) the oracles of God as ‘stars which usher in the dawn

(*phosphorountas*) in the soul'...The Parousia is conceived of as having a transforming effect in the hearts of faithful believers.

—J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1969), 323

In other words, when Messiah returns, the glory of Messiah will have a profound effect on believers' inner selves. All doubts will be removed, and they will know in their hearts that he is Messiah and Lord. Meanwhile, we can rely upon the authority of the Scriptures to be our light as we navigate this dark world.

Let's continue:

2 Peter 1:20

...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

What does Peter mean when he says that “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation”? He means that the prophets, the authors of Scripture, spoke for God. Their writings were not their own ideas. As Peter goes on to say:

2 Peter 1:21

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

No genuine prophecy could be contrived by man. God is the source of the prophetic revelation given in the Scriptures. That is because “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The authors of Scripture were the Holy Spirit's instruments when writing down the words of God. In other words, according to Peter, God spoke his words *through* the authors of Scripture. Paul expresses a similar idea:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is **breathed out by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

What does Peter mean when he describes the biblical authors as speaking for God and being carried along by the Holy Spirit? Were the authors of Scripture like court reporters, writing down, word-for-word, things that God said to them? Certainly not. Rather, the Holy Spirit moved upon the human authors of Scripture who all had their own styles and personalities. The Holy Spirit guided these authors and spoke to them so that the words they wrote properly expressed God's revelation to them. Theologian Christopher Morgan gives a good summary of how we might think about the divine and human aspects of Scripture:

Scripture is human and divine. Its humanity is evident. The writers have different vocabularies, styles, and emphases. They study (Luke 1:1-4) and write of their experiences (1 John 1:1-3; 2 Cor 11:21-33). God graciously uses humans to communicate to humans. We reject the idea that the writers get their ideas from their own minds, apart from God. God uses their minds, but they never get their information merely from themselves, since “no prophecy of Scripture comes from

the prophet's own interpretation" (2 Pet 1:20). Likewise, we affirm that God providentially guides in giving Scripture. He uses Moses's education and background as he writes the Pentateuch; he uses Paul's rabbinical training as he writes his letters. But we affirm that God does more than exercise his providence in preparing the writers. He not only guides; he speaks. He works in a special way when the writers write.

—Christopher W. Morgan, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and our Faith* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 70-71

It is difficult to fully grasp how this divine-human partnership actually works in the production of Scripture. Nevertheless, we must humbly accept what the Scriptures plainly state about themselves, even if we aren't able to fully understand the mechanics of it. The fact is that the Scriptures are the very words of God embodied in human language. The words of Scripture are not a product of human imagination but were breathed out by God, and they express the thoughts God wanted to be expressed. While God used humans to produce Scripture, God is the ultimate author of Scripture.

So, what have we seen in 2 Peter 1:16-21? Peter confronts the charge that his teaching on the Second Coming and God's judgment is merely a cleverly devised myth. He denies that charge and says that his teaching is based on his own experience of witnessing Yeshua's majesty with his own eyes. During the transfiguration event, Peter got a glimpse of the Messiah's power and glory that will be fully revealed at the Second Coming. But in addition to Peter's experience, biblical prophecy also testifies to the Messiah's glorious return. The Scriptures are a more reliable source of revelation that we can use as a light to navigate the dark world until the Day dawns and Messiah returns. The words of Scripture are not contrived by men but are the very words of God.

Scripture > Experience

Let's talk a little bit more about Scripture and experience.

Religious experiences can be quite profound and impactful. But religious experiences alone cannot be the basis for our beliefs. This is not to diminish the value of religious experiences, but there must be a standard by which to measure them. After all, many people in other religions—Mormons, Muslims, and so forth—they also claim to have had profound religious experiences. How do we know that the teachings of Mormonism and Islam are false? By the Scriptures, the word of God. The Scriptures are the authoritative standard of truth by which we can properly evaluate experiences, teachings, and prophecies.

As the apostle John writes:

1 John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

How do we "test the spirits to see whether they are from God"? By examining the Scriptures to see if someone's teachings or prophecies line up with the word of God (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).

Indeed, while Peter appealed to his religious experience of seeing Yeshua's majesty and glory on the mountain (2 Peter 1:17-18), he did not expect his readers to believe him based on his experience alone. He also appealed to the Scriptures as the basis for his teachings.

When Paul testified of Yeshua in the synagogues, he argued on the basis of the Scriptures (Acts 17:2). He did not expect people just to believe him on the basis of his miraculous conversion story. Luke praises the Bereans for not just believing Paul at his word but examining the Scriptures themselves "to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Yeshua and the apostles constantly warned us about false prophets and teachers (Matthew 7:15-20; Luke 21:8; Romans 16:17-18; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1). A major focus of Peter's second epistle is to confront such false teachers and show how their claims are unbiblical. We must take Yeshua's, and the apostles', warnings seriously by growing in knowledge of God's word so that we are not led astray.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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