**February 19, 2023 2 Peter 1:16-21**

***The Power of Witness***

**Scripture:** *2 Peter 1:16-21 NRSV*

*(16) For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. (17) For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (18) We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. (19) So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (20) First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, (21) because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Peter 1:16-21 NRSV*

**Notes:**

1. The writer reminds us that ***Peter*** was there.
   1. We must be ***attentive*** to the message in Scripture.
   2. Each time you ***read*** these words, you will learn more.
   3. We will learn more if we seek new ***insights*** each day.
2. Where does the ***inspiration*** of scripture come from?
   1. The Holy Spirit spoke to the ***scribe***, and the ***scribe*** put words to paper, and it was the word of God.
   2. The writers were in ***tune*** with the Holy Spirit.
   3. We see the radiation of God’s ***inspiration***.
3. We are all ***responsible*** to ***interpret*** the words we read.
   1. Approach the scriptures with ***humility***, and yet a ***hunger***;
   2. ***Hear*** these words from the spirit of God.
   3. First task in interpreting scripture is to ***identify*** which are mountain peaks and which are dark valleys.
   4. Second task, Jesus would recite scripture; and interpret it into the ***culture*** at hand.
4. Interpret the words of God for the ***here*** and ***now***.
   1. We have the ***responsibility*** to interpret the scriptures.
   2. Before one may follow the scriptures, one must ***understand*** what they say.
5. ***Stand*** on the promises of God’s word.
   1. Get into scripture; ***read*** them, ***study*** them, ***interpret*** them.
   2. Find a small group to ***discuss*** these scriptures with.
6. ***Share*** what you learn with those who do not know,
   1. ***Invite*** others to join you in this walk with God.
   2. Allow the Lord to ***lead*** you.
   3. Allow the Lord to ***bless*** your community as you invite others to be a part of God’s kingdom

**Transcript:**

One of the oddest things I experience as a pastor is when I prepare a message, following the guidance of how the Lord is leading, and then on the day of its delivery, somebody shows up I would not expect. And as I deliver the message, I am constantly reminded of how this message may speak to the person I did not expect to be there. It has happened to me on several occasions. Many people feel that Pastor’s prepare messages to attack the weaknesses of the people in their congregation. However, at least in my case, I choose the lectionary passage that speaks to me, I read other writers and speakers comments on the passage and then I begin to write. The words are more of how God is sharing with me in the passage.

The irony is how it also speaks to those in the congregation. You see, I share what is given to me, with you. And when you feel that I am picking on you or attacking you I am only sharing the Lord’s words, and He is speaking to each of you in His own special way, teaching, admonishing, and encouraging each of you. Speaking the words the Lord wants you to hear so that He may talk with you on a personal level.

Today we look to 2 Peter 1:16-21; and the situation in which this letter was written is somewhat the same. The church had been around long enough for them to have struggles of their own. People were distorting the truth of the gospel. Many were refusing to believe in the second coming. SO the author writes this letter to encourage them to believe what they had been taught. Stand with me as we share in the reading of our passage today from 2 Peter 1:16-21.

***(16) For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. (17) For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (18) We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. (19) So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (20) First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, (21) because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Peter 1:16-21 NRSV***

Second Peter is a difficult book to preach from. Most scholars don’t believe that Peter wrote these words. Their reasoning is that Peter was Martyred around 64 AD and the book was written about 50 years later. But this writer, whether it is Peter or somebody else, speaks on Peter’s behalf, in his proxy. The writer reminds the people that Peter and the others were eyewitnesses to the events of the Gospels, they were there at the sermon on the mount and saw Jesus multiply the fish and barley loaves to feed over 5000 people. They saw Jesus command Peter to get out of the boat and walk on the water. They saw Jesus heal the lepers and the blind. They saw Jesus raise the dead back to life and even walk among them after his resurrection from the dead.

Peter and the other apostles were eyewitnesses to the events of Jesus ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Those of us in the world today struggle with these events because we do not have the eye witnesses standing among us. However, we have the history to benefit us. The history was written down and preserved and now we have these words to keep us accurate. Who among us has not wished, at one time or another, that they would have been able to see the actions of Jesus while he was alive on this earth. Who among us would not love the idea of being in his presence hearing his voice share the truth of the kingdom of God. Who among us would walk away from Jesus healing the lame and sick. If we could see it with our own eyes it would be easier for us to believe and follow His teachings. But as it is we are so far removed from Jesus life on earth, that doubt is able to creep in and distort these words.

But we are not left without help! We have the benefit of a book written by those who were there. And we have the benefit of all of Christian history to help us understand the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We can learn from the mistakes of many generations who have gone before us. We can stand on the shoulders of the greatest theologians who have written what they understood of the meaning of Jesus.

When the writer reminds them that Peter was there at the Transfiguration, he concludes in 2:19, “We have the more sure word of prophecy; and you do well that you heed it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the morning star arises in your hearts.” When we read this passage this morning, what can we gather from it, what does it mean? One could say that we must be attentive to the message in the Bible if we really want to see the light. This passage tells us that our understanding grows slowly, and each time you read these words, you will learn something more. These words cannot be read once and that is it, we learn everything that it holds. We must read it and reread it over and over again; and each time something new is revealed. We have to study the Bible all of our lives in order to understand its meaning. Many feel that they have been in Sunday school long enough to know it all, but the truth is we will always be able to learn more if we are attentive and seek new insights each day.

Perhaps the most famous and perhaps some of the most controversial words in 2 Peter are verse 20 and 21. “*(20) First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, (21) because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”* Where does the inspiration of scripture come from? There are some who believe that Godly men shared their insights and wisdom. Others believe that God himself, possessed the entire body of a man and wrote these words himself. But this passage assures us that the words of scripture did not arise out of private interpretations, but that a writer was moved by the Holy Spirit to put ink to parchment and deliver these messages to God’s intended people.

However, the writing styles of the bible vary so much that a person who was completely possessed by the Spirit of God is not plausible either. IF God inhabited a body and wrote himself the style would be the same. So as I understand it, the Holy Spirit spoke to the scribe, and the scribe put words to paper and it was the word of God. Written by individual men inspired by the Holy Spirit, and being the scribe for God; God spoke and man wrote what they were told.

Some may argue that scripture is given to us without interpretation. The writers were so close to the events and action taking place that they could not help but be in tune with the Holy Spirit. The personalities, the writing styles, and the fingerprints, of the men who wrote scripture are all over the Bible. But in the midst of the personality, writing style, and fingerprints, we see the overwhelming radiation of God’s inspiration.

We pick up the Bible and we treasure it, we read it, we listen to it, and we learn from it. It was not given through private interpretation, yet today we have no choice but to interpret its meaning for our lives. We are all responsible to interpret the words we read for our own lives; but we must be careful not to bias these interpretations for our own advantage. We must never be so arrogant as to make the stand that our interpretation is the only correct interpretation. We must approach the scriptures with humility, and yet hunger; we must make sure that we have not been guided by our own private desires but that what we hear as we read these words is from the spirit of God.

The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus using scripture, one such instance is found in Matthew 22:36-40. *(36) "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" (37) He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' (38) This is the greatest and first commandment. (39) And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (40) On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matthew 22:36-40 NRSV* I love how Jesus responds sincerely to this man of the law. Even though the intent of the question was to trap Jesus, and Jesus knew this, Jesus took the time to simply explain to those who truly listened what the greatest commandment is. But also from Jesus' response we are able to see keys to how Jesus read the scripture, and how we should read it even today.

First, Jesus accepted the question as one that is appropriate. When he is asked which is the greatest he doesn't come back with a Sunday School answer and say all of scripture is inspired by God and every word is equally important to every other word. Jesus acknowledges that there are some commandments that are more significant than others. Some parts of scripture are mountain peaks and others lead us into dark valleys. A first task in interpreting scripture is to identify which is which.

Second, Jesus was creative and imaginative when he taught. Much of what he said was not original material, many times he would recite scripture; but when he did he also would take the freedom to interpret it into the culture at hand, for his day and age. This is something we must also do, interpret the words of God for the here and now; for the situation we find ourselves in. In the sermon on the mount Jesus did this by reciting the scripture then his interpretation.

*“You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, ‘You shall not murder… But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with a brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” Matthew 5:21-22*

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you…. whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.”  Matthew 5:39*

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you” Matthew 5:43-44*

What does that mean for us today? It means we have the right and the responsibility to interpret the scriptures. In reality we do it anyway, even though many of us say we just take it as it is. These are the same people who accuse others of picking and choosing the Scripture they like. But if we look closely, we find that they do the same thing. I don’t think I have ever seen a person who has plucked out one eye because it has offended God. And which day of the week truly is the Sabbath? Even those who take the scripture at face value must interpret what they read. Interpretation does not mean that one does not believe the scriptures, but before one may follow the scriptures one must understand what they are saying to do, which means we must interpret what is said to better understand it. If we are to bring the message of scripture into the 21st century, we must understand it and be able to defend it.

As we close today, I encourage you to stand on the promises of God’s word. But in order to do this you need to know what those promises are and what they really mean for you. There is but one way to do this; get into the scriptures, read them, study them, interpret them; then find a small group of people who you might discuss these scriptures and your interpretations with, compare your ideas and how the Lord is leading each of those you meet with; and then share what you have learned with those who do not know, explain what you are learning, explain what you see going on in your community and world, invite others to join you in this walk with God. Allow the Lord to lead you as you pursue the understanding of His word. Allow the Lord to draw you into a closer relationship with Him as you read and study and learn from those around you. Allow the Lord to bless you and your community as you invite your friends, family and neighbors to be a part of God’s kingdom.