

## Christianity is No Myth

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2 Peter 1:16-19

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On June 30<sup>th</sup> 2009, U.S. Army Sargent Bowe Bergdahl vanished from the primitive observation post where he was stationed in Afghanistan. Shortly after going missing he was captured by Taliban insurgents and imprisoned. Tragically, 6 U.S. soldiers lost their lives in the search and recovery efforts. Fast-forward five years... In a prisoner swap between the United States and Al-Qaida on May 31<sup>st</sup> 2014, Bergdahl, America's only prisoner of the Afghan war, was released in exchange for five individuals linked to the Taliban who were being held at Guantanamo Bay. The exchange has brought a surge of political controversy and mixed feelings – joy from Bergdahl's friends and family and a sense of betrayal from soldiers he served with on the battlefield.

The reports surrounding the disappearance of Sargent Bergdahl are foggy and as you can imagine, there are no shortage of speculations. The reason that I share the story this morning is because I stumbled across a video clip this week of a preliminary hearing where a California Representative, in an attempt to couch the situation and the Administration's decision in a positive light, asked a scholar to testify about life on the frontlines in Afghanistan. Before the scholar could answer, one of Bergdahl's platoon mates interrupted and said, "You are asking [a scholar] what situation Bergdahl was in over there... I was with Bergdahl at the same location. I can give you a firsthand account of exactly what Bergdahl was going through because I went through the exact same conditions." Bergdahl's platoon mate was an eyewitness to the conditions and the circumstances surrounding his disappearance.

In our text this morning, Peter is responding to an accusation. And his response comes in the form of a defense, or an apologetic, for the authority of the word of God. Peter calls two groups of witness to the stand to corroborate the validity of God's Word and the gospel that he preached. In verses 16-18 he calls for the eyewitness testimony of the Apostles, and in verses 19-21 he calls for the enduring witness of the Old Testament Prophets (Scripture). Peter wants Christians to know that their faith is grounded both in the eyewitness testimony of the Apostles; but more than that, their faith is grounded in the authority of God's revealed Word. Peter, writing under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, pens these words:

*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 were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 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. 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. 2 Peter 1:16–19*

## **1. YOUR FAITH IS GROUNDED BY THE EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT APOSTLES. (v. 16-18)**

It seems clear from the text that Peter has been accused, most likely by the false teachers (we will learn more about them as we get into chapter 2), of teaching cleverly fabricated stories (myths). Remember, false teachers have descended upon the church and have secretly brought in destructive heresies (2:1). False teachers seek to dismantle Christianity and most often they seek to do it by attacking Scripture. They twist, distort, pervert, discredit, and misapply God's Word. In doing so, they seduce, deceive, flatter, mislead, take captive, and destroy the unassuming. Peter is writing this letter for the purpose of equipping and establishing believers in the truth so that they are not "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" Ephesians 4:14.

Peter tells us in verse 12 that these Christians know and are established in the truth. They had been exposed to both Peter and Paul's teaching. But other voices have slipped in and created confusion (Illustration: Listening to headphones with a different voice from each ear piece). I think the question that has either been asked of Peter or that he is anticipating is, "How can we be sure (Key word in verse 19) that what you are telling us is true? Your teaching sounds good, but how do we know that it's not just a fairy-tale?" In some respects, this is a fair question. In our own day, the Mormons claim to know the way; the Jehovah's Witnesses claim to know the way; Muslims claim to know the way; science claims to know the way; philosophers claim to know the way; there is no shortage of false teachers who claim to know the way. And so the question is, "Peter, with all of these competing voices, how do we know that what you are teaching us is true? How do we know that God's Word is reliable and can be trusted?"

Peter says, "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 were eyewitnesses of his majesty." The word devised here in verse 16 has the idea artfully devised, skillfully crafted, or cleverly fabricated. What is the cleverly fabricated story that Paul is being accused of teaching? Look back at the text. The cleverly fabricated myth that Peter has been accused of teaching is the power and imminent coming of Christ. This phrase "*power and coming*" is an example of a hendiadys. A hendiadys is the expression of a single idea using two independent words to represent the same thing. In other words, what Peter is saying is, we did not follow cleverly devised myths or fairy-tales when we made known to you the

“powerful coming “ of our Lord Jesus Christ. These Gnostic teachers dismissed the return of Christ; they denied a future kingdom (3:1-4); and they mocked teachers like Peter and Paul claiming that their gospel only served to pump people full of a fairy-tale future.

The return of Christ is Peter’s battle cry in both of his letters. In 1 Peter, it’s “Stand strong, be steadfast, be encouraged, endure persecution, suffer well...Jesus is coming!” Here in 2 Peter, it’s “Remember the truth, grow in grace, be diligent, don’t be carried away...Jesus is coming!” Alexander MacLaren once said, “The apostolic church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death and heaven. The early Christians were looking, not for a cleft in the ground called a grave but for a cleavage in the sky called Glory.”

Throughout the centuries, the reality of [Christ’s return] has formed the crux of Christian expectation. It is the Church’s blessed hope (Titus 2:11–14), her utmost longing (Romans 8:23), and the great climax of salvation history (Matthew 25:31–46)—a time of redemption for believers (Eph. 4:30) and a time of judgment for God’s enemies (2 Thessalonians 2:1–12). It also marks the inauguration of Christ’s earthly kingdom (Revelation 20:6), during which the saints will reign with Him in holiness (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10). The hope of bodily resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18), spiritual reward (cf. Matthew 25:21, 23), and a righteous world system (Isaiah 9:6–7) are all tied to Jesus’ return.<sup>1</sup>

But the false teachers scoffed at Peter’s teaching. And so have many other men down through history. Men have tried for ages to dismiss the return of Christ when He will rule and reign with justice, truth and might. Why? Because Jesus’ return will not only be in glory, but it will also be in judgment. Those who reject the truth have no problem with “gentle Jesus”. They have no problem with a “winks at my sin” savior. But the reality that Jesus’ return means that He will hold them morally responsible is, to them, utterly deplorable. In 1 Peter 4:5, Peter says that at the return of Christ, “They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” The false teachers, in an attempt to suppress the truth and encourage others to do the same, accuse Peter of preaching fabricated stories, myths, and fairy-tales. Glance over at chapter three verse three for a moment. Peter says:

*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder (Cf. 1:13), that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” 2 Peter 3:1–4*

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<sup>1</sup>John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2005), 126.

Let me translate their argument. The false teachers are saying, "Don't you think if Jesus were going to come back, like you Christians teach, He would have already done it? Look at the Fathers who taught about the glories of your Messiah, they are all dead and gone, and still your Jesus has yet to make an appearance. Why don't you quit clinging to your silly stories and be free (2:19). Stop ordering your life around this manipulative doctrine and take pleasure in life." Peter is going to take the false teachers to task. As a matter of fact, he spends the next two chapters exposing and refuting their egregious heresy. But before Peter turns his attention to the false teachers, his primary desire is to be a faithful shepherd – to establish the believers in the truth (v.12). In these verses Peter is both defending and teaching. Peter wants the Christians to know that their faith doesn't rest on a cleverly fabricated story, so He calls to the witness stand the eyewitness account of the Apostles.

Peter says, "We were eyewitness of His majesty. 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." Think about the importance of eyewitness testimony. It is foundational to our legal system. In a courtroom, charts and graphs are helpful, pictures are helpful, DNA testing is helpful, second hand testimony is helpful, but bring in an eyewitness and the defense is made more sure. John, who was also an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus, said:

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:1–3*

What is Peter referring to when he says, "We were eyewitnesses to His majesty? He is referring to Jesus' transfiguration. The importance of this event is summed up in its inclusion in all three of the synoptic gospels (Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-9, Luke 9:28-36). John refers to the transfiguration in John 1:14 when he says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

What was the purpose of the transfiguration? The transfiguration was a preview of Jesus' second coming. The Jesus who had been living for over thirty years in ordinary human form was now partially seen in the blazing effulgence of God (cf. Heb. 1:1-3). From within Himself, in a way that defies full description, much less full explanation, Jesus' divine glory was manifested before Peter, James, and John. These men were eyewitnesses, at least in preview form, of what the powerful return of Christ will look like. So to answer the question, "How do we know that Jesus really is returning in splendor and majestic power?" Peter says, "I was there... I saw it with my own eyes and heard it with my own ears." Turn over to Matthew 17 for a moment.

*And after six days Jesus 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, "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 came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." Matthew 17:1-9*

"This is my Son" – Jesus publically received the Father's commissioning for the work which lay ahead of him. God was affirming, "this is the One who would pay redemptions cost".

#### THE TRANSFIGURATION AFFIRMS:

##### 1. The deity of Christ.

God spoke audibly... "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased..." Matthew 17:5  
These words serve as the Father's affirmation that the Son is both of identical nature and essence with Him.

##### 2. The victorious work of Christ

Luke writes, "And behold, two men were talking with Him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His departure (exodus), which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" Luke 9:30-31.

##### 3. The truth of the Scriptures.

Moses (Law) and Elijah (Prophets). By their presence together, they affirmed, in effect: "This is the One of whom we testified, the One in whose power we ministered, and the One in whom everything we said and did has meaning. Everything we spoke, accomplished, and hoped for is fulfilled in Him." In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Matthew 5:17

##### 4. The reality of a future kingdom.

The very next chapter, Matthew 18, opens with a discussion of the coming Kingdom. Matthew writes, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" Matthew 18:1-4.

Remember, it was Peter and John who were brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin in Acts 4 and charged to no longer speak in the name of Christ. The Apostles responded, “Judge for yourselves whether it right for us to obey you rather than God, for we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” Acts 4:20. These men walked with Jesus, talked with Jesus, ministered with Jesus, and were eyewitness of His glory. But even though Peter had experienced the transfiguration by sight and sound, He lays his experience at the feet of God’s inspired, written revelation.

## **2. YOUR FAITH IS GROUNDED BY THE ENDURING TESTIMONY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS. (v. 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.*

Peter says, “We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed (more sure).” What does he mean here? Peter is saying there is a higher authority than his own experience. There is something “more sure” than what he saw and heard on the mountainside as Jesus was transfigured in brilliant light. What he saw and heard on the mountain was confirmation of what the Scriptures have all been pointing to. In verse 19 Peter moves beyond the Apostles’ own eyewitness account and now calls to the witness stand the testimony of Scripture. Throughout redemptive history, God Himself has repeatedly emphasized that His inspired Word is inerrant, infallible, and the all-sufficient source of truth, which does not require human confirmation.<sup>2</sup>

“Sure”

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. Psalms 19:7

While I think it’s certain that Peter assumes the entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures when he speaks of the “prophetic word” here in verse 19, it’s possible that he is specifically referencing Psalm 2. In verse 17 Peter said, “And the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Similarly to the Transfiguration, Psalm 2 includes a voice from heaven declaring, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (v.7-8). While this was a coronation Psalm for a king, in its greater context, it finds it’s fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>2</sup>John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2005), 66.

Psalm 2, like the transfiguration, is a *family scene* between a Father and Son in which the Son is promised a global inheritance that encompasses “all nations” (v.8). But no king of Israel ever ruled over such an expansive land. What Peter James and John saw in Jesus’ transfiguration was a glimpse of the universal reign of Christ. Psalm 2, like the transfiguration, is also a *royal scene* between the One “enthroned in heaven” (v.4) and the one on earth whom he calls “my King,” (v.6) presumably because he rules in God’s place on the earth. His authority is awesome, for he will “rule them with an iron scepter,” and will “dash them into pieces like pottery” (v.9). Jesus was known as a carpenter and a teacher, but Peter knows that the one who willingly walked to the cross was King. Peter saw his majesty! Lastly, Psalm 2 is a conflict scene between “the nations,” “peoples,” “kings of the earth” opposing the Lord and his “Anointed One” (v.2). Jesus was despised and rejected during His earthy ministry. His right to rule was not universally accepted. There has always been a desire to escape His jurisdiction like the people who cried, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us” (v.3). This sentiment is exemplified in the false teachers of Peter’s day. And Peter warns such people to take refuge in the Son before He comes to judge (v. 12).<sup>3</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS FROM THE TEXT:

1. All of the Old Testament Scriptures point forward to their fulfillment in Christ. God has graciously given us a “sure” word. The fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy strengthens our faith both in Scriptures’ subject (Jesus Christ) and its origin (Divinely inspired by God).
2. You will do well to pay attention to the Word. Don't neglect the Old Testament, pay attention to it, it points to Christ!
3. We live in a dark world, but God’s Word shines like a bright light.

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalms 119:105*

*The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” Matthew 4:16*

*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:14–16*

*Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine*

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<sup>3</sup> Dick Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude: The Promise of His Coming* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 78.

*as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Philippians 2:14–16*

4. When that day dawns, Christ will terminate the temporary earthly night of sin and spiritual darkness, returning in glory to establish His kingdom. As believers, we are looking forward to that day when Jesus returns and makes all things new. John wrote, “And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” He also said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true” Revelation 21:5.
  
5. On that day, He will be adored by the hearts of all who have longed for His appearing. Paul, at the close of his life, said, “There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” 2 Timothy 4:8.