

# EYEWITNESSES OF HIS MAJESTY

2 Peter 1:16-18

## INTRODUCTION

- *We know they are lying.  
They know they are lying.  
They know that we know they are lying.  
We know that they know we know they are lying.  
And still they continue to lie.*  
(attributed to Alexander Solzhenitsyn)
- In a fallen world under the dominion of Satan, lies have been at the foundation of human societies for the last 6000 years, beginning at the Garden of Eden
- The great cosmic war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan is a war between the truth and error
- God has made his truth manifest to mankind through the creation and through the Scriptures, but unregenerate man actually prefers lies to truth – they “hold [restrain/suppress] the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18)
- In order to be saved, God’s grace must work in the heart that we “receive the love of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11)
- The truth is found in Jesus Christ, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)

- In our generation, the truth of the gospel is under severe attack, both from the world, and from apostates within churches
- The apostle Peter experienced the opposition of false teachers in his day, promoting their lies as the truth, while denouncing God's truth as lies
- He wrote this epistle to establish the saints in the truth and to warn them against error
- In the closing verses of chapter 1, Peter shows us how we can be sure that the doctrine he preached really is the truth
  - ✓ Because it is attested by eye witness apostolic testimony (vv.16-18)
  - ✓ Because it is attested by the Scriptures (vv.19-21)
- While this applies to the whole of the truth concerning Christ and the gospel, Peter focusses on one particular truth and event concerning Christ – the transfiguration

## **I. THE EMPHATIC DECLARATION OF THE APOSTLE (16)**

### **A. Peter did not follow fables**

1. It seems that this was an accusation being levelled at the apostles and their doctrine
2. The word for “fables” is *muthos* and the only other usages of it are found in the pastoral epistles (1 Timothy 1:4; 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:4; Titus 1:14)

3. The false religions of the time propagated fables and myths – Jewish, Greek and Gnostic
4. Such myths are “cunningly devised”, elaborate, deceptive, appealing to the carnal heart
5. Ironically, the followers of fables accuse Peter of following fables (cf. 2 Peter 2:19)
6. The apostles were not “followers” of other men’s fables, but were the (human) originators of the divine revelation

B. The apostles declared the Second Coming

1. Note that Peter does not speak only for himself, but says “we”, referring to the other apostles also who were witnesses
2. Throughout Acts, the apostles repeatedly preached the Second Coming of Christ (Acts 3:20; 10:42; 17:31)
3. Peter’s reference to his making known to his readers of the power and coming of Christ may be to his first epistle
4. The “power and coming” (*dunamin kai parousian*) clearly refers to the Second Coming
5. *Parousia* (coming, arrival, presence) was used in Greek literature for the arrival of a king, and in the New Testament it invariably refers to Christ’s Second Coming (cf. 3:4,12)

### C. The apostles were eyewitnesses of his majesty

1. “Eyewitnesses” (*epoptes*) was used by the Greeks for initiates to the mystery religions who, after lengthy instruction, were permitted to witness a play enacting the rites of the cult, thereby attaining to the level of *epoptes*
2. In contrast to the imagined enlightenment of these idolators, Peter takes this word and uses it to describe a *true* eyewitness – one who has received direct revelation from the true God
3. In a court of law, multiple corroborating eyewitnesses make the strongest weight of evidence
4. Hence, Peter shows that far from being a fable passed from person to person, his testimony of Christ is an entirely trustworthy reality, as he is an eyewitness of it
5. Note Peter doesn’t use his personal subjective experience to prove the veracity of his doctrine, but a factual, objective, historical event (cf. 1 John 1:1-2)

## **II. THE EFFULGENT TRANSFIGURATION OF THE SON** (16-17)

- A. The transfiguration was a prefigure of the Second Coming of Christ in its glorious appearance

1. It is found in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36) with Luke giving the fullest account
2. John alludes to it when he writes, “we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14)
3. It took place about four months before Christ’s death on one of the mountains of Galilee (perhaps Tabor or Hermon)
4. In each of the three accounts of the transfiguration in the Gospels, it is prefaced by the Lord Jesus saying that “There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” (Matthew 16:28)
5. And Peter in this epistle confirms that what he saw was a revelation of Christ’s coming in glory
6. The “majesty” (*megaleiotes*) is greatness and magnificence, and refers to the visible, dazzling splendour of Christ in his transfiguration
  - a. Christ is “the true Light” (John 1:9) and dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16), and his coming will be with the brightness of the sun (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 1:13-17)
7. The “excellent glory” refers to God himself and his glory that was manifest by the “bright cloud” that overshadowed them in the mount

- a. This “shekinah” glory is the visible manifestation of God’s presence which descended on the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-12)
8. While Christ in his first coming “emptied himself” (see Philippians 2:6), laying aside his glory to come as a Man in the form of a servant, for that moment on the mount, his eternal glory was revealed – that glory which he had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5); the glory he now has at the right hand of the Father (Revelation 1:13-17); and the glory that will be displayed to all creation when he comes to reign
- B. The transfiguration was a prefigure of the Second Coming of Christ in its blessed participants
1. Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets that both bear witness to Christ; but there is also prophetic significance to their appearance
  2. Moses, who died (Deuteronomy 34:5), represents the dead in Christ who shall rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16)
  3. Elijah, who was translated to heaven without dying (2 Kings 2), represents those who are alive and remain at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
  4. Peter, James, John represent believers who survive the tribulation and enter the kingdom in mortal bodies (Matthew 25:34)

### **III. THE EXPRESSED AUTHENTICATION OF THE FATHER (17-18)**

- A. There were three occasions during Christ's earthly ministry that the Father spoke audibly from heaven
  - 1. At his baptism (Matthew 3:17)
  - 2. At the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5)
  - 3. In the temple, prior to his death (John 12:27-28)
- B. The Second Coming of Christ will be the moment when God the Father demonstrates to the universe his favour and blessing upon his beloved Son by giving him all the kingdoms of the world (Psalm 2:7-8; 110:1-2; Daniel 7:13-14; Philippians 2:9-11)
- C. The words of the Father at the transfiguration reveal to us approval of the Son, and instruct us as to how we are to receive him
  - 1. They show Christ's deity – "this is my beloved Son"
  - 2. They show Christ's righteousness – "in whom I am well pleased"
  - 3. They show Christ's authority – "hear ye him"

### **CONCLUSION**

- 1. The truths of the gospel are absolutely certain – we have the eyewitness testimony of them

2. Can you say you have complete certainty of these truths, or are you harbouring sinful doubts in your heart?
3. Those who possess such assurance of the truth will manifest it as the apostles did, by a bold and fearless proclamation of it to the world
4. When Christ comes, for some it will be mourning and wailing as they are destroyed by his brightness
5. For others it will be the greatest joy possible
6. Do you love his appearing? (2 Timothy 4:8)
7. Peter's response to witnessing Christ's Second Coming in the transfiguration serves as a pattern for us
8. Like Peter:
  - ✓ Let us awake from sleep to look to Jesus
  - ✓ Let us fall on our faces before the Lord in fear and reverence
  - ✓ Let us attend to the voice of God that calls us to obedience to Christ
  - ✓ Let us desire to dwell and remain in that place where we are consumed with the reality of Christ's coming in glory, and say, "It is good for us to be here"
  - ✓ Let us see fix our eyes heavenward, away from all the allurements and entanglements of the world and "see Jesus only"