

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3–5 ESV)*

We Were Eye Witnesses Of His Majesty or (Why You Should Trust The Apostles)

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2 Peter 1:16-21

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 2 Peter 1:16; that's on page 1018 in your pew Bibles. I mentioned last week that the emphasis in 2 Peter is slightly different than the emphasis in 1 Peter. In 1 Peter he is trying to prepare them for pressures coming from the outside. They were in the early days of persecution and Peter wanted them to stay the course and to remain in the field and to continue advancing under fire. So the enemy was OUTSIDE in 1 Peter – but here in 2 Peter the enemy is INSIDE. Here Peter is dealing with the danger posed by FALSE TEACHERS INSIDE the Christian church.

The letter itself seems to suggest that these false teachers were denying the physical return of Jesus Christ, they were denying the reality of final judgment and they were therefore advocating for a relaxed attitude toward morality and godliness. Just believe in Jesus, they said. Holiness is impossible, they said. It's all grace anyway – they said.

And Peter is having none of it.

He is nipping this problem in the bud. He is saying to his folks that they should not be listening to these false teachers – they ought to be listening TO THE APOSTLES – and in this section of the letter he gives them three reasons why they should do that. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 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 were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 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,” 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 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, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. 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. (2 Peter 1:16–21 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

The false teachers have obviously suggested or implied that Peter’s recollections of Jesus were more than a little inflated. Perhaps – as old men have been known to do – the stories got a little larger and more spectacular as the years went on.

Now remember where we are in the story. In the first generation of the Christian church – in the very early days – a worship service would have looked very different than it does today.

Christians would have gathered early on the first day of the week, they would have sung some songs and then an Apostle – perhaps Peter himself – would have sat down in the centre of the circle and told some stories about Jesus. He might have told the one about the miraculous catch of fish – or maybe the one about how Jesus healed a man born blind. Maybe he told them about how Jesus walked on the water – and then after relaying the story, the Apostle would explain what it meant about who Jesus was and what Jesus had done to secure our salvation.

Then everyone would rejoice and they would serve communion and they would pool funds for the expansion of the Gospel and the care of the poor and then they would go home – that was church in the first generation.

And here we are now at the END of the first generation. The Apostles are DYING and so they are writing things down – remember, church history suggests that 2 Peter was actually written as a cover letter for the Gospel of Mark.

But – and here is the challenge – others are CONTESTING their version of events – or maybe better, their interpretation of events. That’s what is going on here.

We have false teachers suggesting that the Apostles have EXAGGERATED the POWER of Jesus

and have INVENTED the story of his second coming.

Now, these false teachers still believed in the teaching of Jesus and the example of Jesus but they denied his power – remember they thought holiness was impossible – and they denied his coming.

They didn't think he could change people and they didn't think he would judge people – are you SEEING the contemporary relevance of this narrative?

You don't have to go very far in this town to find churches that still fondly remember the Sermon on the Mount. Oh how they love the teachings and example of Jesus! Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild. But they don't believe that people can change – that's why they fly the rainbow flag outside their church – or Centre as it were. And they don't seem to believe in his second coming – they don't believe in the Final Judgment – if they did, then they wouldn't be doing and saying the things that they are.

So this kind of false teaching has always existed and it usually begins as it does here by doubting the authority of the Apostolic interpreters of Jesus Christ. So in this section of text Peter is telling them WHY they should trust the Apostles.

Why Should We Trust The Apostles?

The first reason he gives is this:

1. Because they were eye-witnesses

That's what Apostles WERE fundamentally: the authorized, eye witness reporters of the essential events and significance of Jesus' life. Jesus said to the Apostles:

you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

When the Apostles were looking to appoint a replacement for Judas they made the criteria clear, they said that he would have to be:

one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” (Acts 1:21–22 ESV)

So an apostle is a person who saw what Jesus did and heard what Jesus said and can provide eye-witness testimony to his resurrection.

And by the way that’s why there can’t be any such people today.

And by the way that’s why the Apostle Paul was in fact qualified to that title. He was the same age as Jesus and was studying in Jerusalem during the three years of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Paul was prominent among the Pharisees – meaning, every time you see Jesus engaging with a group of Pharisees in Jerusalem – there is a decent chance that the Apostle Paul was standing in the midst of them. He heard Jesus – almost certainly – and he saw Jesus, even though he was listening and seeing CRITICALLY, at least at first.

And then after his conversion he spent time with the resurrected Jesus – so he qualified on that score as well.

An Apostle was not a second hand disciple. He was an eye-witness. A personally chosen spokesperson for the message and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The implication here of course is that the false teachers were not eye-witnesses. They were second hand interpreters. They were making a hash of what an actual Apostle – the Apostle Paul had actually said.

Why are you going to listen to second hand nonsense, Peter asks, when you could get your information straight from the horse’s mouth?

That’s the question – that’s the rebuttal that Peter offers in response to the challenge raised by the false teachers. Look at verse 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 were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16 ESV)

These false teachers want to DOWNGRADE Jesus and make him MERELY a teacher of wisdom

and kindness – but I can tell you for a FACT that he is GOD and that he is GLORIOUS. You know how I know?

I was THERE ON THE MOUNTAIN.

I was AT THE TRANSFIGURATION.

I HEARD THE VOICE OF GOD saying “This is the one. This is my Son. My beloved.”

I heard that.

I saw the shiny clothes.

I saw Moses and Elijah – deferring to him.

I said some stupid stuff – because I was completely overwhelmed – it isn’t everyday that you realize that you’ve been hanging out with the King of the Universe.

So I know for a FACT that he is powerful and I know for a FACT that he will come back and rule over all things to the glory of the Father FOREVER. I know it – because I saw the preview.

That’s what an Apostle IS – people who have SEEN the glory and the GOD-NESS of the Christ. So you should listen to them and not to their misguided, wannabe interpreters.

The second thing he says is that you should listen to the Apostles:

2. Because what they say about Jesus corresponds to what was prophesied in the OT

Look at verse 19:

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed (2 Peter 1:19 ESV)

Peter is speaking there specifically of the transfiguration. He is saying that what we SAW there, what we HEARD THERE confirmed ALL of the Old Testament Scriptures. So when we speak to

you about the power and the coming of Christ – we are speaking in line with all the Old Testament prophecies and all of what we saw and were told in our personal experiences with Jesus Christ – it is all a piece, he is saying.

Thomas Schreiner for example says here:

“The prophetic word of Scripture is made more sure by the transfiguration, for the transfiguration confirms the proper interpretation of Old Testament Scripture, that is, that there is a future coming of Christ for judgment and salvation.”¹

Listen, in street level English, what Peter is saying is that the puzzle pieces all have to fit. Whatever you are saying about Jesus has to FIT with the whole of Scripture. What we are saying about Jesus FITS what the Old Testament PREDICTS about Jesus – that’s how the Gospel goes together! That’s how your Bible goes together. That COLLECTIVE MESSAGE is the message that we stand on.

The Apostle Paul said that too. He said that the church is:

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (Ephesians 2:20–21 ESV)

So CHRIST is the centre – he is the cornerstone – he is the PIECE that all the other pieces have to connect to. He is the PIECE anticipated by the Old Testament prophets and explicated by the New Testament Apostles. He is the PIECE that all the other pieces FIT WITH to make a comprehensive whole.

But your Jesus doesn’t fit.

That’s what Peter is saying about the false teachers. Their Jesus – has no power to help people change, no power to help people live holy live and their Jesus is never coming back to rule – he wouldn’t even want to rule. He’s gentle Jesus meek and mild – but that Jesus doesn’t FIT with all the prophecies and anticipations of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament prophets PROMISED a Jesus who would FIX US. We read that promise last

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* in The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 319.

week. God himself said:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:25–27 ESV)

That is the greatest promise in the Old Testament!

In that promise God said that he would come and FIX what is wrong with us. He would HEAL US from idolatry and give us a new heart and a new Spirit and he would CAUSE US to walk in his ways and obey all his commandments.

That is the Jesus we were promised.

A Jesus who was strong enough to FIX US.

So where is that Jesus, Peter asks?

Not with the false teachers. They're giving you a Jesus who accepts you as you are and who LEAVES YOU AS YOU ARE.

Who wants that Jesus?

Not me.

That's not a helpful Jesus – and that isn't the Jesus prophesied in the BIBLE. And that isn't the Jesus we saw on the Holy Mountain. And that isn't the Jesus that we saw walking on the water. And that isn't the Jesus we saw RISE FROM THE DEAD.

Our Jesus – the real Jesus – he is powerful and he's coming back brothers and sisters, whether you want him to or not. Listen to what the prophet David said about Jesus and to Jesus – he said:

“You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.” Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:9–12 ESV)

Well that doesn't sound like a Jesus who will never reign. It sounds like a Jesus who is coming back and who is bringing a stick and whose wrath is quickly kindled – so we all better take refuge in him. We all better get on our face and kiss his feet **LEST WE PERISH IN OUR WAY.**

Listen, Peter says, the real Jesus is powerful and he's coming back. And if you want to be prepared for that day – then you better listen to us. Because our Jesus – the Christ of Scripture - is the only one who saves.

The third reason we ought to trust the Apostles is:

3. Because they were carried along by the Holy Spirit

Look at verse 20:

no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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. (2 Peter 1:20–21 ESV)

You see, real prophesy, Peter says, is not about people twisting the Scriptures to align with their own desires and preferences. Real Scripture is about people getting picked up and driven along by the Holy Spirit. These false teachers, Peter is implying, have merely **DISTORTED** things to suit their own intentions. This is Peter saying exactly what Paul says in Romans 1. In Romans 1:18 Paul says:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (Romans 1:18 ESV)

Are you hearing that? Paul is saying – as Peter is here – that some people make stuff up – stuff that denies and contradicts what God has said – not because they think it is true but because they need it to be true so as to support them in their **WICKED DESIRES AND INTENTIONS.**

Aldous Huxley admitted that in his book *Ends and Means*. He said:

"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption... For myself... the philosophy of meaningless was essentially an instrument of liberation... sexual... [and] political."²

Are you hearing that?

Huxley says, "I became a spokesperson for atheism and materialism not because I believed it but because I needed COVER for my sexual and political desires."

Wow.

That's very honest and very helpful for us to see.

We need to be reminded that there have always been and there will always be people who distort reality in order to provide cover for their wicked desires.

Peter is saying – that is what these false teachers are up to.

Why do you think they don't believe that Jesus is coming back? Why do you think they don't believe in final judgment? And why do you think that they teach that holiness is impossible?

Is it because the Bible says that?

Or is it because they NEED TO BELIEVE THAT – they WANT TO BELIEVE THAT – and they want YOU TO BELIEVE so that they can do whatever they want sexually, personally and politically?

What do you really think is going on here, Peter is asking.

Because that's not how REAL prophesy works. In fact, most of the Apostles were DRIVEN to their beliefs about Jesus. This isn't where we would have gone if left to ourselves – we were driven here by the Holy Spirit.

² Aldous Huxley, *Ends And Means*, internet citation:
https://www.archive.org/stream/endsandmeans035237mbp/endsandmeans035237mbp_djvu.txt

That's what he says – the word he uses there for “carried along” in verse 21 – is a sailing word. It's the word for how the wind DRIVES a ship before it. Again – this is the same thing that happened to the Apostle Paul. He didn't want to believe all this stuff about Jesus. He didn't drift into the Christian faith – he WAS DRIVEN THERE and apparently it was a very painful process.

Do you remember at the point of his conversion what Jesus said to him? He said:

‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ (Acts 26:14 ESV)

Do you remember that? Do you know what goads are? Goads are pointy cattle prods. Jesus is saying: Saul! Paul! What are you doing brother? You know I'm going to win! I am driving you towards something Paul – and I've got my big, pointy, electrified cattle prods and so we can do this the easy way or the hard way, but one way or the other Paul, you are going to get where I want you to go.”

That's how REAL PROPHECY WORKS, Peter says – Old Testament or Apostolic. We don't SLIDE into positions that align with our default desires and preferences – we ARE DRIVEN THERE by the UNRELENTING SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST.

So who are you going to follow?

The people distorting the Old Testament and inventing a new Jesus in order to justify their sinful and wicked lifestyles?

Or the people who were DRIVEN to acknowledge all that the Scripture says about the Christ?

That's the question; that's the message and that's the challenge of this text.

Implications And Applications:

Now in the time we have left I just want to leave you with a couple of contemporary applications. Some of these are implications – some are applications – however you want to slice it – I think these are the primary TAKE AWAYS that the text would press upon us.

First of all, if what Peter has said here is true, then there really are no “Red Letters” in your Bible.

1. There are no “Red Letters”

Sometimes people today will try and separate the Bible into three categories of authority. There is the Old Testament – which they will say is no longer authoritative – it is interesting by way of background – but not authoritative and not very useful. Then there are the Red Letters – the things Jesus actually said. Those things are of ultimate importance and absolute authority. Then there are the words of the Apostles. Which are interesting, but not as inspired or authoritative.

That is more or less precisely the heresy that is being addressed here!

It’s all a piece, Peter says. What we are saying confirms and strengthens what the Old Testament said. Jesus is the CENTRE PIECE. Jesus is the cornerstone. The Old Testament PROPHETS ANTICIPATE HIM and the New Testament Apostles EXPLICATE HIM. Therefore you can’t separate these pieces. It is ALL AUTHORITATIVE. IT IS ALL the message of the Holy Spirit.

The second implication derives from the first. Therefore:

2. Now is not the time to unhitch from the Old Testament

There is a whole school of thought out there among progressive evangelicals that we need to unhitch from the Old Testament. The Old Testament presents an angry God, they say, a judgy God, an over powering Deity really, who doesn’t seem to respect human autonomy and who can be quite severe in his judgments. It is time to let that God go and to embrace more fully Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild, as presented – or so the argument goes - in the New Testament.

But anyone who says that clearly hasn’t understood the New Testament. And they clearly haven’t understood Jesus because Jesus could sound pretty firm and judgy, couldn’t he? Consider the conclusion to the parable of the unwise servant. Jesus says:

cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
(Matthew 24:51 ESV)

That sounds a little judgy. That's firm. That sounds like a KING who will RULE over the nations with a ROD OF IRON.

And forget about what Jesus says and does in the Book of Revelation – that book is positively Old Testament in terms of what it says about the Majesty and Power of Jesus. So the argument just doesn't hold. It isn't rational and it has rightly been rejected as HERETICAL across the ages.

Listen, friends, if you are worshipping a Jesus that could never say what Jesus said in Matthew 24 or what he does in Revelation 19:11-16 then you aren't worshipping the Christ of Scripture. You are worshipping somebody's made up Jesus – some kind of mystical Jesus and that ought to concern you a great deal.

That's why Peter says in verse 19 concerning the Old Testament prophecies:

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 1:19 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

Keep reading the Old Testament until the Day of the Lord – until Jesus comes back – just to make sure that you are ACTUALLY following the Christ of Scripture.

That's good counsel right there and we would do well to heed it in our day.

And then lastly, given what Peter says here, we would do well to remember the power and the coming of the Lord.

3. Remember the power and the coming of the Lord

Let's never stop believing and preaching that people can change.

There is POWER IN THE BLOOD!

There IS POWER IN THE CROSS!

There is POWER IN THE SPIRIT – thanks be to God!

Jesus doesn't just SAVE US FROM HELL – he CHANGES US by one degree of glory into his own perfect image – this IS the work of the Spirit in us – do you still believe that church?

Because that's the Jesus that our culture needs. That the Jesus that we need – that I need. And thanks be to God – that is the Jesus of the Gospel; that is the Christ of Scripture – hallelujah.

And he's coming back – it just gets better and better! Jesus is coming again! And every eye will see him and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father forever.

Hallelujah! Thanks be to God! That's my Jesus!

And that is the hope and GLORY of the Gospel.

That is the Good News, brothers and sisters – and this is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God, let's pray together.