

Do you think that when Jesus took Peter, James and John up on that mountain they had any idea what they were in for? I can't imagine they had any real clue. I mean sure, you never *really* knew what Jesus might be up to next, but this wasn't the first time he retreated to the mountains for some privacy. But then they saw something that very few humans ever saw while on earth, they saw the glory of God revealed to them. They saw the shining light of their creator God and they knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, who he was. Jesus had a dual purpose in revealing himself to these select disciples this way. First of all, he knew that in the days ahead, it wasn't going to look like he was in control, it wasn't going to look like he was as powerful as he really is. He showed the disciples the truth of the matter ahead of time so they would have that to hold on to in the darkness to come. That if things looked bad, it was because Jesus was choosing it, because he was allowing it to happen.

But secondly, Jesus wanted witnesses, just as he wanted witnesses to all of his ministry. He wanted men who would see what he had done and later, guided by the Holy Spirit, write about what they had seen with their own eyes so that the truth of the events could be passed down through the generations to come. So that all who came later would know that this Jesus who died was truly God and went to the cross of his own free will. He wanted the truth of his mission to save mankind to be recorded in a way that left no uncertainty or doubt in the minds of those who read and believed it. And it is the certainty of these records to which Peter speaks in our reading today: <read text: 2 Peter 1:16-21>.

Peter tells us about the certainty of what is recorded in Scripture and says that we should "**pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place,**" (v19). And if you think about the role Scripture plays in our lives, that not only good advice, but also a good analogy on a number of levels. The word of our God recorded for us in the Bible is a light that shines in a dark place and it is something that we should stand up and take note of, pay attention to. I mean, just imagine the short scenario Peter describes here. Imagine you were stuck in a place that was really dark. Imagine you'd been there for a long time, that this darkness was all you ever really knew. Now imagine that suddenly a bright light was shining into that darkness! It was something unusual, completely out of the ordinary for you. And maybe perhaps to eyes that weren't used to it, the light might be a little painful, but it's certainly something you just can't ignore, it's something that you need to look at closer! What is it? Where does it come from? How can I know more about it?

And that is much like how the light of Scripture operates. This world is spiritual darkness. Since the time of the first sin a shadow hangs over this life that cannot simply be lifted. It is the sinful selfishness that exists in each of us, that drives each of us and keeps this world plunged in darkness. It is a darkness within. The evil of ourselves that we try to keep hidden from the people around us because...if they only ever knew. In fact, for many it is an evil they try to keep hidden from themselves. It's there, gnawing at the edges of the civilized person they believe themselves to be, but beneath it all is the beast who wants nothing more than to lash out, to strike at those who offend it and to take from others whatever it wants.

It prowls in the darkness of our hearts, and on our own, the best of us are aware it is there on some level, but not really understanding where it comes from, why it is there. After all, our schools and our parents tell us how good we are, how proud they are of us, what good jobs we do and what good people we are but all the while there is this darkness within us we do not understand. We don't know why it is there and the messages from our culture confuse us. We are told by the world that we can be good people, and everyone else seems to be doing it with little to no effort; so why the turmoil within, why is this beast there? Our own understanding of ourselves is veiled by the darkness that covers the whole world.

The light of our God shines in this darkness. And like a piercing beam of light cutting into thick darkness, it can be painful at first. The light shines on us and shows us the truth of ourselves. The light of Scripture tells us the law of the universe: love. Love your God before everything else and love those around you with a selfless love. But in the darkness the beast has only ever loved itself. Only ever cared about itself. Only done for others when it got something back in return. Never cared about God, but thought it was strong enough to deal with anything. But the light doesn't stop there with the revelations, the worst of it is that this beast within us hiding in the darkness, that is us. It's not some part of us we don't recognize, it is who we are by nature. It has its claws in everything we think and say and do. It is evil and as the light shows us, it deserves to die.

But the light does not exist merely to scare us with the truth, rather it needs us to understand this truth about ourselves before we can accept the most important part of the light. The gift it brings. It is here not to show us how evil we are but to change who we are. The light of Scripture makes us understand who we are so we fall before our God in desperation, knowing that we are doomed unless he intervenes. And his message teaches us how he did exactly that.

How he lived our perfect life to earn it for us. How he took the punishment that belonged to us for our crimes and suffered through it on the cross. How he died and was raised to life to assure us that the same will happen to us. The light of this truth shines in the darkness of our heart and drives the darkness back. It fills us up from within until it becomes who we are. The beast is still there, on the edges, in the shadows, but the light heals what it has done to us and the light keeps the beast at bay.

The light of this truth creates an entirely new person within us. Not linked to the beast in the darkness but created in light, to be the person God created you to always be. To be the person you will be after this life has passed and all the darkness is left behind. And this new person, created by God to be holy like him, this new person can now see in this world of darkness because of the light of God's word. This creation of light, which is who you are, can look at the world and see how it really works. Rather than stumbling around in the dark, heads down and ignoring the big picture, you can see the truth of this world. That this life is immaterial. That this world is doomed. That so much of what we spend time chasing after is time and energy wasted on things that will be thrown out when we are gone and on experiences that can't even compare to what we get when this time is over.

Because we know, by the light shown to us, that this life is not all there is. In fact, this life is barely anything compared to what is coming. The light gives us a glimpse, a foretaste of what is coming; the eternal joys of heaven. With that in the forefront of our mind, so many priorities and perspectives shift. The light from God that grows within us shines out in this life and enables us to live according to his will for us, according to the way that really is best for us.

But most importantly is the security we have in the light of this truth. It is a light we can rest on with absolute certainty. There is no doubt about having the correct truth or not, because it is not our truth or human truth, it is God's truth. God has chosen to pass this truth on to us through a very simple means; the written word. Have you ever stopped to think about what an amazing blessing that is for us? It is written down for us, so we don't have to just take someone's word for it, we can read it ourselves and see the truth of it ourselves. Imagine if this message had to be passed by oral tradition, how quickly it would be corrupted. But no, we have God's word written for us, each and every word preserved in the original languages which are diligently studied so they are properly understood.

It is certain and yet so simple. Imagine instead if God asked for some elaborate ceremony or trial or spell to be completed before he gave you his light. No, instead he gave it to us in a simple means that could be brought to anybody. It is simply a message, and that message can be shared by any one of us in words as simple as "For God so loved the world...", etc.

We know what we read is true. This is the basis for our faith and the basis for our trust. For those of you who've attended our look at other religions in Bible Study lately, what have you noticed about all the other groups we've studied who have error? Not one of them begin with the simple premise that the Bible is God's Word, in its entirety and is to be understood as it is read with no additions or subtractions. They all add or subtract from its plain meaning and all of their errors come from this. The Bible itself tells us how we are to understand it. Peter says that here. These are not cleverly invented stories that we have to peer around to try to find nuggets of truth. These are the very words of God, recorded by men as the Holy Spirit carried them along. To say that the Bible contains errors or contradictions that we need to weed through or to say that it is beyond the average human reader is to say that God didn't have the power or wisdom to properly write to us! To say that we need to apply reason over what God writes in the Bible is to say that we humans can possibly understand everything about God. To say that there is more God wants us to know than is recorded in the Bible is to say that somehow John 3:16 isn't quite clear and needs some explanation! It's ludicrous, and as we've seen in our mid-week studies, it leads down some very dark paths.

This means that when we start from this basic principle; again that the Bible is God's word in its entirety, that it is written down in words that have been faithfully transmitted to us and that we can take God's word in its simplest and most literal sense, then we can be certain of the truth we read in it and the truth we learn from it. There is no such thing as "interpretations" of the Bible. There is what the Bible says, period. If you take the Bible as the Word of God then there is only one right way to take it, we can be sure of that.

These are the words of the prophets made more certain, as Peter says, because we can see the pattern throughout the book of God's promises and fulfillment. Here is recorded history over thousands of years and God always did what he promised no matter how outlandish that promise was! This is our certainty and our comfort as we hold to the truth that God shows us through his word. This is what we rest secure in. The word of God is a light shining in a dark place. Take notice of it, pay attention to it. That light is the key to the truth of eternal life. Build your life around that with full certainty that the message it tells us is truth. The message that Jesus died to pay for your sins and you are God's child, make righteous in the blood of the lamb, worthy to inherit eternal life. Amen.