

Theme: An Eyewitness Reminds You of the Transfiguration

Picture yourself about to embark on a brave new journey. You're venturing out of the nest into the great unknown, to your first day of college, where secular professors loom like hawks ready to swoop down and sink their claws into their favorite prey, fledgling Christians just learning to fly. Or you're heading off to your first day on a new job, on a workforce now devoted to affirming any and every lifestyle that anyone can possibly dream up. Or maybe this isn't a new journey at all, but the well-worn path you walk every day into a world that now thinks your beliefs are either naive and misguided myths or judgmental and bigoted attacks on other people.

Taking the first steps of your respective journey's is no small task. The birds of prey are already flying overhead ready to strike and when they start swooping down, you'll be forced to answer a question that maybe you never thought you'd ask yourself, *"Am I sure that it's all true?"* And then the flurry of doubts and questions follows, *"Am I sure that what the Bible says is true or am I as naive as they think? Are my beliefs about the miracles of Jesus just cleverly devised stories told to me by my parents as bedtime stories to put me to sleep? Am I a bigot? Am I judgmental, like they say I am, and all because I've been drinking somebody else's religious Kool-Aid?"* It may be questions and doubts like those that plague you every day and make it impossible to want to take the first steps of your journey. It maybe looming attacks from the outside world that makes you want to bury your light deep under a bushel and not let it shine.

Jesus, Peter, James, and John, the characters from the Transfiguration story, were going to need to embark on a similar kind of journey. It was a journey to follow Jesus back down the mountain, after the most wonderful mountain-top experience they could've ever imagined. They got to see Jesus, in all his glory, and they got to watch as God the Father looked down from heaven in approval and turned the flashlight on to light up his Son. **"This is my beloved Son."** It was a foretaste of heaven that made Peter want to set up some tents and stay there forever, hanging out with Jesus, and Moses and Elijah too.

But the culmination and glory of God's plan of salvation wouldn't be accomplished on the Mount of Transfiguration. It had to be accomplished on a different mountain called Calvary, where Jesus would glorify his Father's name with his innocent suffering and death. So too, Peter, James, and John would have to take up their cross and follow along with Jesus back down the mountain into days ahead that would be filled with doubts in their hearts and attacks on their faith. So God had blessed them with this glorious mountain-top experience with Jesus to bolster their faith. Now years later as an older man, Peter writes the words of his second letter to Christians in a world facing all kinds of false teachers. He gives us his purpose for writing right before our sermon text for today starts.

He writes, **"So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things."** (2 Peter 1:12-15)

Think of these words as if they were written to you by your grandfather, who was about to be put to death for his faith, to strengthen you in the certainty of what you believe. And remember this important detail. Your adopted grandfather Peter was in the inner circle of Jesus. He's seen things like the glorious face of the Son of God that no one outside of James and John have seen. So our theme today is this: *An Eyewitness Reminds You of the Transfiguration 1) as an antidote to doubt 2) and a defense against false doctrine in the days to come.*

Remember those nagging questions from before, “*Am I sure it's all true?*” “*How do I know these aren't just made-up bedtime stories?*” Peter has you in mind as he writes, “**We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.**”

Eyewitness testimony has been the basis for verifying the truth in every court since the time of Moses, who wrote in Deuteronomy, “**A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.**” (Deut. 19:15)” And there on the mountain stood three witnesses, Peter, James, and John beholding Jesus in all his glory. Remember John's testimony about that moment as well, “**We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**” (John 1:14)

God was anticipating the doubts that may arise in the hearts of his timid children when he orchestrated this glorious transfiguration moment for us on the mountain. He was giving us *an antidote to any doubts* we might have about the divinity of Jesus, the Son of God and Mary's Son. So on the rainy day when the devil sows some sneaky seed of doubt and death in your heart that makes you think the truth is a lie, remember Peter's words, the words of a man about to face his death, who would not change one word of his story because he knew it was all true. Martyrs don't die for bedtime stories they made up, but for the Truth—for that they'll gladly give their lives. Both Peter and James did just that.

Eyewitness testimony is no doubt, a solid and trustworthy basis to go on. The dedication of men who stuck to their testimony even to death gives a great deal of reassurance. But my friends, we've got even more than that. We've got the very voice of God breaking heaven open and pointing out his Son three different times, on the occasion of Jesus' Baptism, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and again a week before Jesus died when he prayed before the crowd, “**Father, glorify your name,**” and the Father replied for all to hear, “**I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.**” (John 12:28). God's own voice authenticated his Son!

Let the voice of your Father in heaven silence the voices of doubt in you heart. “**Let God be true, and every man a liar.**” (Romans 3:4). His testimony is the antidote to doubt and unbelief, “**And this is the testimony; God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.**” (1 John 5:11,12)

And when God's testimony about his Son has silenced every lie and doubt in your heart so that you know the things you have believed with the certainty of faith, then Peter also writes to give you a 2) *defense against false doctrine in the days to come*. Peter points you to the written Word of God, **"We also have this prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."** (2 Peter 1:19)

People will say and teach all kinds of wild things dreamed up by their own imagination. That's what Peter is about to address in the section that comes after our text—to warn against false teachers introducing false doctrines and teachings that lead people away from Christ to destruction. And when they come after you like demonic birds of prey, whether it's college professors or advocates of the society's latest movement away from what God says, you have something to rely on. You have a reliable message that can defend itself, because it's backed by God's authority. Peter reminds you, **"Above all you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."** (2 Peter 1:20,21).

These two passages are like the foundational passages for our belief that the Bible, the whole Bible, is the Word of God, even though it was written down by several different human beings with different skillsets, writing in different languages and genres, and being collected and compiled over the course of a 1,500 years. All of those things are true, and yet those prophets never had any say in the content of what they were writing because they spoke at the direction of and under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit so that every word is the truth as God wanted it to be.

When the enemies of truth come swooping down to sink their claws into you and sweep you off to destruction, you can hold this reliable Word up like a holy pitchfork and shoo them away. When they accuse you of being foolish and naïve about what you believe, you can be ready to point at the word of God and say, "Right here, God says it, so I believe it."

Believe it or not, that kind of understanding and command of Scripture won't just happen on its own. To be able to do that, you have to do what Peter said before, **"Pay attention to [the message], as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."** That's why we gather here week after week to hear, read, learn and take this word to heart, that's why you pick up your Bible throughout the week so that the Spirit of God can shine his light within us and point us to Jesus, "the bright Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16).

Next weekend is an important weekend here at Mount Olive, something we're calling Welcome Weekend. It's a chance to put our faith in God into practice by inviting someone. God has silenced our doubts with his voice; he has given us a defense in his word against those who would attack us. With all that being true, our fears are laid to rest. It's time to hold out this reliable word to someone who needs it, like a light shining in a dark place. Identify someone, pray about it, and then see it through and do it. Amen.

Now my friends, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.