

LIVING ON EARTH WITH A DIVINE NATURE - Part seven
Studies in 2 Peter - Sunday, March 17th, 2019 - Teaching #2114
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket

HOW CAN CHRISTIANS SAY THEIRS IS THE ONLY TRUE RELIGION?

Let me paint a bit of background before we start feeding on today's text. We need to see the **reason** today's text matters. And we need to see the conflict our inner selves might have with what Peter says - even if we are good, faithful, church-going people. Consider these words from our Lord before we study today's words from the Apostle Peter:

Mark 8:38 - "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

According to our Lord Himself the real test of loyalty to Jesus comes when divine revelation requires you to say things your surrounding culture no longer finds acceptable. That this is Jesus' intent He makes clear with He specifically adds that telling phrase - "**....and of my words....**"

Of course, no one need feel ashamed of Jesus' miracles. Virtually the whole world celebrates His adorably humble birth - wrapped in swaddling clothes in that manger. No. It's His words that make the world cringe. It's when He said absolutely no one could find God apart from faith in His saving death. It's when He said marriage had to be monogamous and absolutely heterosexual. It's when He talked about eternal damnation for those who didn't obey Him. Those **words** make the surrounding culture angry and Christians timid.

And Jesus says we must **push back** against that inner shame because it can cost us our souls. So for a watching and listening world - a culture that probably rarely picks up a New Testament - there is only one way they would ever hear the **words** of Jesus. Jesus assumes His disciples will be **saying those words**. It will be obvious to a listening culture that we say the same things Jesus said.

This matters because it is getting increasingly easy to talk about "**believing in Jesus**" without **believing everything Jesus said**.

2 Peter 1:16-21 - "For we [the original apostles] **did not follow cleverly devised myths** [notice that word '**devised**' - accounts *designed* for easy marketing rather than governed by revealed, absolute truth] **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 [Peter's audience - you and me] have something more sure, the prophetic word, 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."**

Even a quick glance at the first fifteen verses of this opening chapter of 2 Peter will reveal some of the amazing claims Peter has been making for the Christian faith. We can see the **grace of God in supplying the righteousness we so desperately need to stand before a holy God** (1-3). We can see the **incredible power of the promises of God relating to our future with Him, and the power these promises have to free us from the bondage of sin in this world** (4). We can see the **wonderful promise of assurance and the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ when we die** (10-11).

Certainly, all of this is very good news. But all of it also raises an important question - **How do we know this is all true?** There are all sorts of religions, all sorts of teachings, all sorts of aids to better and cleaner living. There are all sorts of paths to better self-esteem and inner peace. This is true now, and it was true then.

Most of Peter's audience had left other religions to embrace Christ. They weren't **non-religious** people. They were all people who were passionately possessed by **different** religious convictions. What would make these people **leave** their own religions and **embrace** the teaching of Peter and the rest of the New Testament?

That is the central issue of the verses before us today. It's almost as though Peter anticipates the question - **What makes Christians so sure theirs is the only true religion?** I have only one central point to make tonight. We'll continue this text next Sunday as well.

1) **IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE FOUNDATION FOR THE TRUTHFULNESS OF THE CLAIMS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS NEVER LEFT IN THE REALM OF ANY PERSONAL VISION, INSIGHT, CHANGE OF BEHAVIOR, OR EXPERIENCE OF VICTORY OR DELIVERANCE**

Now, all of those things are precious parts of valid Christian experience. They are absolutely gracious gifts of our loving Heavenly Father. And they're very important. But none of them is the **starting place** in determining the truth of the Christian message.

The issue Peter is dealing with is this - ***"Your experience is wonderful and important. But what is underneath your experience? What is the foundation your experience rests down on? And how do you know yours is the only foundation? Or the best foundation?"***

Look at what Peter says in **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."***

Aren't you surprised by what Peter does **not** mention in that verse? He could have said, "I want you to listen to all the things I've been teaching in these first fifteen verses. You can bank on these truths. I'm going to keep reminding you of these precious truths. Here's why..."

And then you'd expect Peter to go on to say something like this: "I was once a hardened fisherman. I lived a wicked and impulsive life. I was raised in a totally different religion than Christianity. But then I met Jesus. He called me to follow Him. When I did, everything changed for me. My life took on new meaning. My life turned a hundred and eighty degrees. I became a preacher and an apostle. I have had such an amazing relationship with Jesus ever since."

Or, perhaps Peter could have gone even deeper in the personal transformation he experienced through Christ Jesus. Remember, he denied Jesus three times. He denied even **knowing** Jesus. He refused to admit having anything to do with Jesus. And then he watched Jesus die without ever getting a chance to apologize to Him or repent. It's one thing to fail the Lord and seize the opportunity to confess sin and return home. This failure lingered heavily in Peter's soul.

But what tender grace Jesus showed Peter. Jesus sought him out. Jesus restored the broken pieces of what were left of Peter. And Peter never looked back. Peter knew the beautiful flow and power and joy of being **forgiven**. Peter felt the divine pull of mercy in his soul. He **knew** Jesus was different.

Now **that's** a dramatic story! That's what I probably would have said. But that isn't what Peter says at all. Rather than appeal to **personal experience**, Peter appeals to **objective, historical facts**. He uses legal words like **"eyewitnesses," "testimony,"** and **"declared."** Those are words we are more used to linking with the courthouse, or the class room, rather than the worship service.

There is such an important message here for today's church. The church today isn't much interested in the pursuit of doctrinal truth. And this can be easily verified. Give any church a choice between **learning doctrinal truth** and attending a **seminar on healthy living in the year 2019**.

Give people a choice between studying **the lives and writings of the apostles**, or attending a course on **finding freedom from inner conflict stemming from your childhood years**. The church is most inclined to the pursuit of the satisfaction of its desires and the meeting of its needs. **Truth takes a distant back seat to personal need and fulfillment.**

And that will be the undoing of the modern church. Because there is a world of difference between **trying to solve your problems** and **growing in the faith**. There's a world of difference between **trying to be a better person** and **deepening in the knowledge of Jesus Christ**. Christianity isn't therapy. It's factual, historical truth. The first question is never, **"Does this faith work?"** The first question must always be, **"Is this faith true?"**

"Well, why are you making such a big deal about this, pastor Don?"

I'll tell you why. Because as the church moves closer and closer to the therapeutic edge of the religious spectrum, the more indistinguishable she gets from every other wellness and wholeness cult and emotional encounter group on the market. And, at the very same time, the less she resembles the Christianity of the New Testament.

Please understand, ***not only do we lose the ability to defend the Christian message without its historic, doctrinal foundation, we lose the ability to define the Christian faith - to see what makes it precious and unique in a world full of religions and therapies.***

So Jesus Christ has set you free from self-destructive habits. You feel accepted and loved. You no longer live with fear and shame. Your marriage has been saved. You've been healed. You have a happy home. You feel in control of your life. Your priorities are sound and in order.

And then you hear that John Travolta and Tom Cruise have found exactly those same things in Scientology. And John Lennon found them in Eastern Meditation. What does that do to the place of the Gospel in the scheme of things? Where is the power and uniqueness of the Christian message? Why should people leave whatever they have found elsewhere and come to Jesus Christ as Lord, especially when that decision may cost them all that they feel they now have?

Peter puts this whole issue in a nutshell in the very first verse of this letter. Here it is. ***Why does my faith, and why does your faith, have to be the faith of the apostles? - 2 Peter 1:1 - "Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ..."***

So when Peter talks about the foundation of the faith, he doesn't even mention any personal experience. He doesn't talk about himself at all. He starts with the revelation of the righteousness supplied historically by God through the Incarnation, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The practical application of this point is pretty simple. Hook people up to ***Jesus Christ***, not just your ***experience*** of Jesus Christ. Experiences all have variables. That doesn't mean they're not genuine. It simply means they're not processed exactly the same way in every life. How people ***sense*** the presence and work of the Spirit of God can't be cookie-cut.

This is easily proved. You've probably had the experience of speaking to a fellow Christian - a Christian in whom the same Holy Spirit dwells - after some Christian gathering. It's happened to me. Someone will tell me with beaming face of the fantastic blessing that gathering was - how they've never sensed the presence of the Lord in such a powerful way. And I'm thinking that same service was so empty and contradictory to the teaching of the New Testament.

This simple illustration applies in many settings. It needs more attention than it gets today. Here's a person immediately set free from some sinful addiction. Here's another who wrestles with the same addiction for years. Then you find out the first was delivered through hypnosis. The second wrestled a hard-fought commitment to Jesus Christ. If you measure truth solely by visible results you will miss much of God's greatest work.

That's what Peter is pressing home in this text. The glory of the Incarnation, the sin-cleaning, wrath-bearing work of the Cross, and the hope-pumping glory of the Resurrection - ***those*** things are always the tools through which the Holy Spirit does His regenerating, renewing work in human hearts and minds. This is where Christians anchor in the Spirit inspired revelation of historic, eternal truth.

And they anchor their minds and hearts in these historic events because Peter doesn't want them relying on someone's ***private revelation***. This is what Peter meant in ***verse 20*** of our text - ***"...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation."***

Did an angel really talk to Joseph Smith - or the prophet Mohammed? We'll never be able to tell. But ***everyone*** saw Jesus die in Jerusalem. Christianity doesn't have its roots in ***private*** truth, but highly ***visible, public*** truth.

Strangely, the upshot of the objective, public, historic, doctrinal anchor for Christian faith is ***practical***, not ***academic***. Paul works out the beautiful, hope-filled logic of redemption for us in ***Romans 8:32*** - ***"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"***

Do you see what Paul's doing in those words. Start with the doctrinal because ***that's*** the only soil in which all the other promises and blessings and assurances in the Christian life grow.