

Introduction...

2 Pet 1:16 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.

The Bible that you hold in your hand is trustworthy and reliable because it was not produced by the will of man, it is the very word of God.

Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.¹

For the Biblical authors, there were myths on one side and truth on the other, and the Bible clearly belongs on the side of truth. No one had a more settled trust in the reliability of the Scriptures than Jesus and He requires no less from His followers. ***The Christian faith requires*** trust in the truthfulness and reliability of the Bible.

Many have tried to deny this and create a form of Christian religion that is very selective about what it will accept from the Bible. They don't think we should take the Bible so seriously, but one thing the Bible can't be is moderately important. It is either of no consequence whatsoever or it is the most important book in the history of humanity; I'm going with the latter.

Both the OT Jewish faith and the NT Christian faith are intricately tied to history. The events that took place and are recorded for us are events that took place in space and time and under the guise of eyewitnesses. The most important claims of Christianity are historical claims. Jesus was born of a virgin in a stable in Bethlehem. Thousands of people saw him, heard him and witnessed the countless miracles that he performed. He was crucified by Roman authorities in Jerusalem. Then three days later He was raised from the dead and was seen by more than 500 eye-witnesses.

These facts and thousands more make up the historical evidence that fueled the Biblical authors. They wrote what they saw, they wrote what they heard, they wrote what they experienced first-hand; but beneath all of the seeing, hearing and experience, the Holy Spirit was also present.

Question: Who wrote the Bible?

Answer: Holy men who were taught by the Holy Spirit.

Transition...

¹ R. C. Sproul. Can I Trust the Bible? (Crucial Questions Series Book 2) (Kindle Locations 68-70). Kindle Edition.

This morning we are going to look together at **2 Peter 1:16-21** and we are going to ask the question, can we trust the Bible? Is the Bible trustworthy and reliable? Is the message of Christ true?

Sermon Focus...

I. The Message of Christ is no Myth (16)

2 Pet 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths (*cleverly invented fables*) when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

The problem that Peter is addressing in this letter is that a group of people in the church are dismissing the claims of the gospel as mere myth. They are denying certain aspects of Christian teaching, especially the second coming of Christ, as nothing more than a cleverly concocted story, and Peter is responding to their attack on the reliability of his teaching as well the reliability of all of Scriptures.

We face a very similar problem today. Many of you are familiar with the words of C.S. Lewis where he outlines the options available to us when trying to make sense of Jesus. Lewis writes,

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.²

Liar, Lunatic, or Lord; those are the options that Lewis presents us with. But in our day, we can add a new option to the list; legend.

Tim Keller in his book *The Reason for God* recounts his collegiate experience during the late 60's where he was confronted with the prevailing wisdom of the time.

My professors taught that the New Testament Gospels originated as the oral traditions of various church communities around the Mediterranean. These stories about Jesus were shaped by those communities to address the questions and needs peculiar to each church. Leaders made certain that the Jesus in these stories supported the policies and beliefs of the community. The oral traditions were then passed down over the years, evolving through the addition of various legendary materials.³

This was taking place at Bucknell University, a private liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. It was also taking place in Baptist seminaries during that time. In 1961, Ralph Elliott, who was a seminary professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote a commentary on the book of Genesis that was published by Broadman Press. Elliott's method of interpreting the Bible was to look for the

² C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity* pg. 52

³ Keller, pg. 97

symbolic and spiritual meaning to the text, because in his view the Bible couldn't be trusted as historically reliable.

In other words, their view is that the Bible is simply a collection of legends or myths made up by men in order to further their own religious cause. If this is true, then the Bible can't be trusted as reliable and taken seriously. **But these views simply are not true.** Over the last 50+ years we have seen the evidence for these claims crumble. There is no serious scholarship to back up what these men and women have said.

The Biblical documents that we have are historically reliable. When you look at manuscript evidence, archaeological evidence, prophetic evidence and statistical evidence; the Bible is the most historically credible book ever written in human history.⁴

Norman Geisler writes,

"By comparison with the New Testament, most other books from the ancient world are not nearly so well authenticated. The well-known New Testament scholar Bruce Metzger estimated that the *Mahabharata* of Hinduism is copied with only about 90 percent accuracy and Homer's *Iliad* with about 95 percent. By comparison, he estimated the New Testament is about 99.5 percent accurate. So the New Testament text can be reconstructed with over 99 percent accuracy. And, what is more, *100* percent of the message of the New Testament has been preserved in its manuscripts!"⁵

There was once a biblical skeptic named Sir William Ramsay, trained as an archaeologist, who set out to disprove the historical reliability of the books of Luke and Acts. He set out on an archaeological journey to prove his theory. However, after several trips through the Mediterranean, all the while comparing the archaeological evidence with the biblical record, he discovered that every fact that Luke, the author of Acts, recorded was spot on, and he became a Christian.⁶

Here is Ramsay's conclusion to his work:

Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness" ... "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."⁴⁷

You see, we aren't the only generation of people to face these attacks on the reliability of Scripture. Even in Peter's day, it is clear that a very early form of this same thing was taking place. There was a group of people in the church and they were rejecting the message of Christ as nothing more than mere mythology, legends created by men to gain credibility and influence. **And Peter responds to their attacks by saying nothing could be further from the truth.**

The NT gospels, Acts of the apostles and letters to the churches don't fall into the category of myth or legend – they fall in the category of historical, verifiable fact. Kevin DeYoung writes,

⁴ Josh Wagner, *Can We Trust the Bible* (personal notes from Falls Creek Apologetics Forum)

⁵ Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, [*Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*](#), 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 239–241.

⁶ You can read his story in his own book, [*St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen*](#) by William M. Ramsay.

⁷ Josh McDowell, *Josh McDowell's Handbook on Apologetics*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), Chapter 7.

The Greeks and Romans had lots of myths. They didn't care whether the stories were literally true. No one was interested in the historical evidence for the claim that Hercules was the illegitimate son of Zeus. It was a myth, a fable, a tall tale, a story to entertain and make sense of the world. Paganism was built on the power of mythology, but Christianity...is intimately tied to history.

But how? How does the message of the NT tie itself to actual historical events? For starters, the authors were eyewitnesses.

II. The Trustworthiness of the Gospel is corroborated by eyewitness accounts (17-18)

V. 16 - 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.

In other words, Peter isn't making anything up. There is not the slightest hint of mythology or legend in Peter's mind. This actually happened, and Peter, James and John saw it with their own eyes. What did they see? The transfiguration of Jesus.

They were present on the mountain when Jesus was changed right in front of their eyes. All three of them saw the same thing, they heard the same voice, they were all together with Jesus when the majestic glory of Christ was revealed. The mountain where this took place exists. The event itself took place in space and time. All three of the Apostles were present. This wasn't a vision in their souls or an experience within their hearts. If you and I had been on the mountain with them, we would have seen it too because it truly happened.

This is the posture of the entirety of Scripture. The events recorded actually took place and they were written down for our instruction and edification. The events were verified by those eyewitnesses but also by the countless number of people who were also present when the miracles of Jesus took place.

All four canonical gospels were written no more than 40-60 years after Jesus' death and most of the epistles were written between 15 and 25 years after Jesus' death. What this means is that the Biblical accounts of Jesus' life were all in public circulation well within the lifetime of hundreds of people who were eyewitnesses to His amazing ministry. If legends were to creep into the New Testament accounts, they would have to be written much later so that no eyewitness could point out the errors.

This means that all of the supernatural events that occur in the gospels could easily be confirmed by living eyewitnesses and that is exactly what we find in the NT.

- **Luke 1:1-4**, Luke claims that his written account of the life and ministry of Jesus was taken from eyewitnesses who were still alive when he wrote and began to circulate it.
- **Mark 15:21**, Mark mentions specific names of people, and there is no other reason for him to do so except to give them the opportunity to confirm what he has written.
- **I Corinthians 15:1-6**, Paul not only refers to an eyewitness but to more than five hundred who saw the resurrected Christ at the same time...almost to say, "Go ask them if you don't believe me."

On top of these, there is also the fact that the ministry of Jesus did not occur in a bubble, it was clearly visible to thousands of people in the first century world, especially important people. In **Acts 26:26**, Paul stood before King Agrippa and declared to him the gospel in Jerusalem, the very city where Christ had been arrested, tried, crucified and buried...but those present didn't laugh off Paul's words, they took them to heart and pondered them as an explanation for what they knew had already taken place.

What you find in the early days of the church is overwhelming continuity between the gospel writers, which is why we refer to them as the synoptics. The four gospels that we have in our Bible today were recognized from the start as authoritative eye witness accounts and this is evidenced by the fact that one of the church fathers, Irenaeus, declared in 160 AD that there were only four gospels.

It wasn't until the late 2nd century (175 BC) that the first of the so-called Gnostic gospels was written and that volume contained the type of legendary material you would expect to find, which is why the orthodox church rejected them. They were rejected because by that time the 4 canonical gospels that we have in our bibles were trusted as reliable and true.

When the Apostle John wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus, he led out with...

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you.

Peter, James and John were eyewitnesses to the glory of Christ and their burden is to pass on to us what they saw and heard. Their eyewitness testimony is powerful evidence of the trustworthiness of the Scriptures but there is something even more convincing than eyewitness testimony.

III. The Reliability of the Prophetic Word rests on God (19-21)

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,

More fully confirmed is an amazing statement that we simply cannot miss. Peter wants us to trust in his own first-hand account of Jesus transfiguration glory. He wants us to take his word for it as historically reliable truth. But Peter knows that there is something with even greater credibility, this Word came to us by the Holy Spirit.

It is not that Peter's eyewitness account of the transfiguration is less reliable than the prophetic word; but that the prophetic word should be accompanied with the utmost certainty and reliability as it comes directly from God. The Word of God is as true as true can be. There is no firmer foundation upon which to rest your faith, your life and your eternity.

The Word of God is true, and the Scripture is the Word of God. Neoorthodoxy wants us to affirm that the Bible *contains* the word of God or that it *becomes* the word of God. **But Peter's point is that Scripture is the Word of God.** The Greek term *graphe* means writing, or that which has been written down. The Bible is God's speech, God's communication to man, written down and preserved for us and this means that God's authority resides with His Word.

That's why the writer of Hebrews can say,

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

God's Word is not just something that we read, it is something that reads us. It brings the power of God to bear on our hearts when it convicts us of sin, convinces us of the truth of the Gospel, and motivates us to obedience and faith.

Yes, the word of God was given to us through human instrumentality but that doesn't make it any less true, authoritative or divine.

V. 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.

God chose to use the "intellect, skills and personality of fallible men to write down what was divine and infallible...but this in no way implies any fallibility in the Scriptures (**DeYoung 37**)."

B.B. Warfield writes,

The men who spoke from God are here declared to have been taken up by the Holy Spirit and brought by His power to the foal of His choosing. The things which they spoke under this operation of the Spirit were therefore His things, not theirs. And that is the reason which is assigned why "the prophetic word" is so sure.

The Bible that you hold in your hands was written down by the hands of men but every word, in the original autographs, was **inspired** by the Holy Spirit of God. And because God is the author of Scripture we must also say that Bible is without error. Scripture did not come from the will of man but from God and if it is God's Word then it must all be true.

Ultimately, we believe the Bible to be inerrant because it comes from God Himself. It is unthinkable to contemplate that God might be capable of error. Therefore, His Word cannot possibly contain errors. This is our faith-we can trust the Bible because we can trust God (RC Sproul).⁸

Conclusion...

Some people falsely believe that they can have a relationship with God apart from His Word. They want to be able to pick and choose what to believe about Him. They like certain aspects of Scripture but not others, so they form their opinion of God based on their own likes and dislikes. **In the end, what they have is not God but a deified version of themselves. They have constructed an idol that will never save them and probably doesn't even need to.**

But, this is not Christianity it is a delusion. A real relationship to God, the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture, is one where He changes us day by day from one degree of glory to another. "An infallible Bible is not an enemy to our relationship with God; it is the precondition for it."⁹

⁸ R. C. Sproul. Can I Trust the Bible? (Crucial Questions Series Book 2) (Kindle Locations 49-50). Kindle Edition.

⁹ Ibid.

You can completely immerse yourself in the Word of God and trust with certainty that it is true. Trust it, rely on it, and be shaped by it. When you read it you are hearing the voice of God and the words of eternal life. The Word of God is true. The good news of Jesus Christ is that He is the way, the truth and the life. He lived, died, rose again and appeared to more than 500 eyewitnesses. He calls us to repent and believe in Him so that we can be pardoned of sin and enjoy eternal life with God.

Preparation for the Lord's Supper...

Invite helpers to come forward and ask the people to prepare themselves.

As we prepare to take the bread and the wine into our hands and then to taste them with our mouths, let us remember with our minds what these things represent. The sacrifice has already been made and accepted. Christ has been raised victorious over death and this bread is but a reminder, albeit a powerful one. This bread is a tangible reminder of the body of Christ that was broken for us. The wine is a tangible reminder of the blood of Christ that was poured out for our sin.

As we eat this bread and drink this cup we remember the Lord's death and all that it accomplished for God's people.

If you are a believer in Christ, meaning that you trust that Jesus is the Son of God who died to take away your sin and was raised to secure your salvation. If you are trusting in Christ alone as your Savior and Lord then we welcome you to join us in observing the Lord's Supper this morning. As the plates pass you will see clear cups filled with grape juice and purple cups filled with wine.

If you are not a believer and have not come to trust in Christ then we ask that you simply let these plates pass by you. But I would urge you to think deeply about the state of your soul. I would urge you to consider your sin and its offense to God. I would urge you to look to Jesus as your only hope of rescue and to put your trust in Him alone for salvation.