

Hold to Truth

Sermon of 2020-07-26

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Over the past few months I've been sending sermons out via e-mail each Sunday, since we were not able to hold in-person worship services. Many of you will have received those. Some may even have read them! But many of you don't have e-mail, so you've been left out of that teaching, which is unfortunate.

Through the most recent sermons, we've been working through 1 and 2 Peter and its call to Bold Obedience. Two Sundays ago, we started reflecting on 2 Peter, which was written during a time of very intense persecution against Christians. In fact, Peter writes it just one year before he is martyred for the faith. At the time of writing, he knows that his own death is imminent (2 Peter 1:13-14) and takes one final opportunity to teach and encourage his sisters and brothers.

The sermon from two weeks ago reflected on 2 Peter 1:1-11. In it Peter encouraged the believers to "Do the Math!" Given all that they were facing, those early believers needed to be strong in their faith and they needed to be powerful witnesses in the world. So Peter encouraged them, despite the consequences they may experience, to ADD to their God-given faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control,

perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, kindness; and to kindness, love (verse 5-7). These were the virtues/the qualities that those early day believers needed to display to the world. It's the same for us today. Seven vital characteristics are to be added to our faith! Are you doing the math? With the Spirit's help we all can!

As we move further into 2 Peter, looking at 1:12-21, Peter goes on to encourage believers to "Hold to Truth"! This is his parting letter to the believers of that time, many of whom he had personally introduced to faith in Jesus Christ, and so he shares what is paramount in his heart and mind as he thinks on the journey that lies ahead for them. Nothing was more important than that they hold to the truths they had heard from him; the truths that saved and transformed.

Peter starts this section by stating that he is going to keep on reminding them of the basic truths he had first proclaimed to them. What truth is he speaking of? The truth about the Lord Jesus Christ – His life, His ministry, His divine power, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His glorification, and His imminent return/Second Coming (verse 19). Though Peter says these truths were "firmly established" (verse 12) in them, he is eager to remind them (verse 12) and refresh their memory (verse 13). Peter knew that these key truths were worth

repeating. He also knew that false teachers would come (some already had) who would downplay and distort these truths for their own benefit. Holding onto these truths was vital for the spiritual well-being of those early Christian brothers and sisters in light of all that they faced – the external persecution and the false teaching coming from within the Church. What about us today? Are we facing similar pressures? I think so!

Knowing he had little time left to proclaim the Good News (verse 14), Peter feels compelled to re-state what he had shared with them many, many times before. Why? He gives his reason in verse 15. He was determined to “make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.” Truthfully, that’s the hope of any pastor/preacher; that the Gospel truths taught and claimed will not be lost or abandoned; but always remembered and lived out. Sometimes preachers may sound like a broken record, repeating the same messages again and again, but we do it out of the sincere desire that it will take hold and take root and be forever life-changing and life-empowering. Peter is, in essence, saying “Forgive my repetitiveness, but trust me when I say, ‘It’s necessary!’”

Peter repeated himself because these truths are worthy of being shared and heard and received again and again and again. The truth of Christ Jesus’ life,

death and resurrection and His glorification is the world's one hope for salvation, redemption and restoration. Many want to distort it ... but Jesus Christ is the same "yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). His story needs to be told over and over until the world receives and believes. That was Peter's position! That must be ours today as well.

Peter goes on to emphasize the truthfulness of the stories of Jesus that were told. They weren't made up. They weren't fiction. They weren't myths. Everything that he and the other apostles shared about Jesus was true. They had witnessed it all first-hand; they had seen with their own eyes! They didn't make things up. They didn't exaggerate! These weren't "cleverly invented stories" (verse 16). What they shared captured His life, just as He had lived it. Every miracle, every act of mercy, every word spoken and recorded, was witnessed and experienced by the men who, later, led by the Spirit of God, recorded the events of Jesus' life.

They even saw His Majesty, Peter says (verse 16). He, James and John, in particular, saw Christ's majesty when they witnessed Him transformed on the Mount of Transfiguration. He stood before them shining and glorious – Glorified - and they heard the Father's voice sound, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased!" (verse 17) Moses and Elijah joined them on that occasion,

offering clear confirmation that all the Messianic prophecies would be fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Peter, James and John saw and heard it all. They were given this foretaste, this glimpse into Christ Jesus glorified! (verse 18) (For more on the Transfiguration see Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36.)

This is why Peter was convinced completely that Jesus, having risen from the dead and ascended into Heaven before his eyes was now fully Glorified! He knew, without question, that Jesus was with the Father, seated at God's Right Hand, awaiting the Day when He would return to re-claim the world that He made and saved. At that time, Christ's return was being questioned by some of the false teachers in the church. It seems they had become impatient with His delay. But Peter had no doubts. Jesus had promised, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:3) Peter knew that what Jesus promised would be fulfilled. He had experienced it over and over again.

The Gospel message that Peter proclaimed assured believers of

- the forgiveness of their sins,
- sanctification - the transformation of their lives (making them more like Jesus each and every day),
- restored relationship with God the Father,

- indwelling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit,
- and eternal life and glorification in the New Heaven and New Earth

that God is preparing for all who believe.

The promise of Christ's return in power and glory is one of the vital truths that gird the Christian faith; one of the truths we are to hold to; one of the truths worthy of repetition.

Peter goes on to share how his experience with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration solidified the words of the prophets for him. Their predictions/their statements about Messiah were made "more certain" (verse 19) as he witnessed Jesus transfigured before his eyes. I suspect that in that moment, many of the Messianic prophecies that Peter had been taught came to his mind and he saw their complete fulfillment in Jesus Christ, God in human flesh! Of course, some had yet to be fulfilled. At the time of Jesus' transfiguration, His death and resurrection still lay ahead for Him. But as Peter pens this letter, some 30 years after Jesus' ascension into heaven, he knows with absolute certainty that ALL the Messianic Scriptures were fulfilled in His Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And so Peter encourages the believers then, and us today, to Hold to Truth by paying attention to the Scriptures. Paying attention infers reading, reflecting on and heeding the Scriptures; applying them to life. Peter is, of course, speaking

here of both the Old and New Testaments. He describes the Scriptures as “light shining in a dark place” (verse 19), and declares that they would offer light until “the day dawns” (the Day of Christ’s Return, that is) and “the Morning Star rises in your hearts” (Morning Star being a prophetic name given to Jesus in both the Old and New Testaments – Numbers 24:17; Revelation 22:16).

If the world seems dark, you need only look to the Scriptures to see the light of God’s love and mercy and grace. If the world seems dark, you need only look to the Scriptures to be reminded that the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, has come. If the world seems dark, you need only look to the Scriptures to see the darkness around you disappear. Hold to Truth! Pay attention to the light the Scriptures bring!

Peter goes on to remind those early believers, and us today, that the Scriptures are not words or interpretations made up by the prophets (verse 20). If they were, they could not be believed with absolute certainty, since humans are finite and faulty. The Scriptures, he assures us, did not come from the will or intention, good or otherwise, of the persons who proclaimed and wrote them. The statements and claims preached or written weren’t their own thoughts or ideas or beliefs (verse 21a). The words proclaimed and later recorded in Scripture

were/are the very words of God! Peter affirms that these men “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (verse 21b)

The prophets of old proclaimed messages given to them by God; messages that were then written down and passed on from generation to generation. Similarly, the apostles and disciples of Peter’s day were inspired by the Spirit of God to share and write truthful accounts of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection; as well as accounts of the Church that He raised up. Some of His disciples, like Peter, were also inspired by the Holy Spirit to write letters of instruction, correction and encouragement to the Church as it grew in faith and sought to be Christ’s Light in the world; letters which became part of the Holy Scriptures. All of these words, which now make up the Old and New Testaments, can be trusted because they come from God. That’s not to say that the human writers were mere puppets or transcribers. Their own writing styles and personalities were used in the crafting of the message delivered. But The Spirit of God was/is the true author! It is because of this divine inspiration that we can trust these accounts and teachings to be true; we can believe this with certainty, as Peter did!

As we journey through the complexities of life in 2020, with ongoing COVID-19 concerns, with ever changing societal values and standards, and with deepening hopelessness and despair all around us ... we need to Hold to Truth!

The greatest truths ever offered to humanity are these:

- God loved the world (you and me and all humanity) so much that He was willing to die for our salvation and restoration
- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has conquered sin and death and made life eternal and abundant available to all who choose to walk in faith with Him; He died but has risen to life everlasting and He offers that resurrection life and power to us
- Jesus is now Glorified. He sits at the Father's right hand in Heaven, praying for us, and eagerly awaiting the Day when He will return in victory and re-claim the world that He made and saved.
- The Holy Scriptures declare these truths and we can trust them explicitly because they are the very Words of God!

Are you holding to truth?