

Our Faith: Truth or Fable (Part 2)

II Peter 1:16-21

INTRODUCTION:

If you would open your Bibles this morning, in a few minutes, we will be reading from II Peter Chapter 1 verses 16-21.

Last week we considered the question, "Was Jesus Real?"

It's a question that most of us take for granted, and yet, honestly, I'm not sure there is a more important question we could ever ask. **After all, if Jesus of Nazareth wasn't a real person, everything we believe is nothing more than a fairy tale, a myth, and a waste of time.** Christianity may make you a better person, but if our faith is based upon a lie, then what is the point? If eternity in heaven is just a fairy tale, then we just as well "eat, drink, and be merry".

In order to determine if Jesus was a real person, you must look at the evidence you have and figure out what the best, most logical conclusion would be. And if you have tons of very solid evidence that all points to one conclusion, then you can very safely assume that your conclusion is correct, even if you know that you can't prove it 100 percent.

We did not live through the Civil War, but when we look at all of the writings concerning the Civil War, we can put all of the evidence together and believe that there was a Civil War in the 1860's, a lot of people were killed, and the North won the war.

When we look at the historical facts from the Bible, the historical evidence from non-biblical writings of believers, and especially the historical non-biblical writings of nonbelievers, we find that the historical proof is there that Jesus did exist.

Now, of course, just the fact that he existed does not prove that Jesus was Who He claimed to be. After all He made some pretty incredible statements.

Jesus made claims that a normal man would never make. The most important claim was that He was God and that He could provide eternal life with Him and His Father if we would just follow Him.

There are only three explanations to His claims.

1. Lunatic. He thinks He is, but He is not.
2. Liar. He knows He is not, but He claims to be anyway.
3. Lord. He knows He is and He proclaims it.

If you are going to proclaim that you are God, you had better be able to back it up!

Peter says that **THEIR TESTIMONY WAS NOT "CUNNINGLY DEvised FABLES"**

Peter is going to spend some time telling us how we can BE ASSURED that Christianity and our faith is **TRUTH, not FABLE!**

The problem for many people is that a lot of us don't know these reasons. Not only does this leave our faith weaker, but it prevents us from effectively telling others about the Gospel as well, since we lack any sort of compelling argument.

Upon what foundation does our "true faith" in Christ rest?

Is it just a "blind faith"? Do we believe only because somebody said it was true? While that may be the case for some, it is certainly not the type of faith the apostles expected or even desired for us to have.

Beginning with the first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and continuing throughout their preaching and teaching ministries, the apostles repeatedly appealed to two lines of evidences upon which our faith is to rest.

1. The testimony of apostolic eyewitnesses.
2. The testimony of Old Testament prophecy.

Even in this Second Epistle, we find Peter referring to these "two lines of evidence" as we consider the text for our study.

All Stand and Read Scripture

2 Peter 1:16-21 (NASB)

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised tales 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, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"— ¹⁸ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

¹⁹ So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. ²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

As we prepare to look more closely at Peter's passage this morning, let's bow in a word of prayer.

Prayer

Peter knows that the end of his life is near and he wants to spend his last days on earth reinforcing our faith by saturating our minds with the Gospel so that we will have assurance of our salvation and remain strong in the Lord.

Peter has spent this whole chapter explaining to us how to identify a "true faith". Peter tells us that a "true faith" will generate a peace within us that causes us to no longer fear sin or death. It also generates gifts of grace or Godly qualities within us that causes us to lead a Godly life of immorality, a true knowledge of the scriptures, brotherly kindness, and most importantly, a true intimate love of God.

Now, in this passage, Peter is going to remind us that our faith was not based upon fables and lies. Our faith is based upon a solid foundation! It was attested by the Apostles as eyewitnesses and by the Old Testament Prophets.

Last week we considered Jesus and the miracles that the Apostles, especially Peter, witnessed as they followed Jesus and was taught by Him.

The miracles that Peter experienced Jesus doing was something that no ordinary man could do and it confirmed that what Jesus was doing and teaching was from God. That was the purpose of the miracles.

This morning, I would like to start with the credibility of the eyewitnesses.

BODY:

I. THE CREDIBILITY OF THE EYEWITNESSES.

2 Peter 1:16 (NASB)

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

Have you ever had a husband, wife, son, daughter, or friend die and be buried and then have them reappear to you in alive and in person?

Dead people do not come back to life. This is ridiculous based upon human experience.

But that is what we are told to believe in the Bible. Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and on the third day, he arose from the dead.

And Peter says that he and the apostles were witnesses. Not only of the miracle of the transfiguration where Peter got to see the glory of Christ, but also of many of the other miracles that Jesus performed including raising from the dead as Jesus had told him would happen and then seeing Him in person with His scarred hands and feet.

So the question this morning is, "How do we **know** that the eyewitnesses credible?"

The short answer is that they paid for their testimony with their lives.

Following is historical and traditional information concerning the apostle's deaths.

1. **Matthew.** Suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia. Means of death not certain. Maybe burnt to death or killed by a sword wound.

2. **John.** Faced martyrdom when he was boiled in huge basin of boiling oil during a wave

of persecution in Rome . However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison Island of Patmos ..He wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation on Patmos . The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

3. **Peter.** Was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross. According to church tradition it was because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.
4. **James the Son of Alphaeus.** Also known as James the Lesser. Was stoned to death by the Jews and buried by the sanctuary in Jerusalem.
5. **James the Great.** (Brother of John the apostle). The Son of Zebedee, was a fisherman by trade when Jesus called him to a lifetime of ministry. As a strong leader of the church, James was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.
6. **Bartholomew.** Also known as Nathaniel was a missionary to Asia . He witnessed for our Lord in present day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia where he was flayed to death by a whip.
7. **Philip.** Was bound to a cross and stoned to death in Hierapolis, a city in what is now modern day Turkey.
8. **Andrew.** Was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras , Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers, they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he died. The skull of Andrew can still be seen. In 1964, it was given to the Greek Orthodox church in Patras, Greece by the Pope.
- 9 **Thomas.** Was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church there.
- 10 **Jude.** Was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ in Persia.
11. **Simon the Canaanite.** Was sawn in half in Persia and possibly buried with Jude.
12. **Matthias.** (The apostle chosen to replace the traitor, Judas Iscariot). Was stoned and then beheaded.
13. **The Apostle Paul.** (Apostle called by Christ). Was tortured and then beheaded by

the Emperor Nero of Rome in A.D. 67. Paul endured a lengthy imprisonment, which allowed him to write his many epistles to the churches he had formed throughout the Roman Empire.

ILLUSTRATION:

Today marks the 15th anniversary of 911. The destruction of the twin towers in New York City. The pilots of those planes were martyrs for their faith. But there was a major difference between their martyrdom and the Apostles. The pilots died only for their belief and hated the people they killed. The Apostles died for not only what they believed, but believed because they actually witnessed the miracles of Jesus including His resurrection which could only have come from God and saw the prophecies of the Old Testament being fulfilled which testified of their inspiration from God.

I want you to know that when you read this letter of the Apostle Peter, you are reading a firsthand account of an eyewitness, who soon after was crucified upside down for preaching the very things he said here. You can believe it. You can base your life on the validity of it. People don't make up things like this and then **die for the lie!**

II. THE TESTIMONY OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY.

2 Peter 1:19 (NASB)

19 So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

The Old Testament contains hundreds of prophecies concerning Jesus Christ. These prophecies were written by multiple authors, in numerous books, over approximately 1,000 years. Messianic Prophecy is so dramatic today, because with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the reliability of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament (both of which have been proven to exist prior to the time Jesus walked on the earth) you can be assured that these prophecies were not "conspired" after-the-fact.

A Dr. Stoner looked at the probability that one man, Jesus Christ, could have fulfilled even 8 of the hundreds prophecies that pertain to Him in the Bible. Let's look at these eight prophecies from the Old Testament pertaining to Christ, their fulfillment by Christ in the New Testament, the probability of one man fulfilling each prophecy, and the sum of one man fulfilling all eight prophecies. Keep in mind, the time span between the prophecies of the Old Testament and the New Testament fulfillment is hundreds, even thousands of years.

<u>Event</u>	<u>Prophecy</u>	<u>Fulfilled</u>	<u>Odds</u>
1. Christ to be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matt. 2:4-6	1 in 280,000
2. John the Baptist as forerunner	Malachi 3:1	Mark 1:2-8	1 in 1,000
3. Christ enters Jerusalem on donkey	Zech. 9:9	Matt. 21:4-11	1 in 1,000
4. Christ betrayed by a friend	Psalms 41:9	Luke 22:21	1 in 1,000
5. Christ betrayed by 30 pieces of silver	Zech. 11:12	Matt.26:15	1 in 1,000

6. These 30 pieces buys a potter's field	Zech. 11:13	Matt. 27:3-10	1 in 100,000
7. An innocent Christ was silent in trial	Isaiah 53:7	Mark 14:60-61	1 in 1,000
8. Christ crucified on a cross	Psalms 22:16	John 19:17-18	1 in 10,000

The odds that **all eight of these** would happen is 1 in 1 with 28 zeros behind it. And that is just for these eight of the prophecies to come true and there are hundreds of others that were fulfilled as well. **This doesn't include Christ raising from the dead!**

What do you suppose those odds would be???

This is powerful evidence of the inspiration of Scripture. It had to come from God!

III. THE CERTAINTY OF THE RESURRECTION.

2 Peter 1:20-21 (NASB)

²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter of one's own interpretation*, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The most important event for our faith is the resurrection of Jesus Christ! Because, if Christ did not rise from the dead, then He was not who He claimed to be, and our faith is in vain. What could be more proof that the scripture is inspired by God than for a man to be resurrected from the dead as prophesied hundreds of years earlier?

Here is what Paul said about it.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (NASB)

¹² Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found *to be false witnesses of God*, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

So, being removed from the event by 2000 years, how can we know that He truly did raise from the dead?

Since we know from historical evidence as well from God's Word that Jesus was crucified on the cross. And since we are told that Jesus rose from the dead, I would like for you to consider the following:

What happened to Jesus' body?

I believe that there are only three possible conclusions:

1. Some have said that the Romans took it. But if the Romans took the body wouldn't they have produced the body when the Gospel was being proclaimed by the apostles and laughed at them for their stupidity and blind faith?
2. Others believed that the apostles or believers must have taken it. But, if they were lying about the resurrection in order to save face, would they not tell where they hid the body rather than face persecution and even death? Remember they all died for their faith except John and he was severely persecuted! I cannot imagine that any of them would be willing to go through a lifetime of persecution and even death for a **known** lie!
3. Jesus miraculously rose from the dead and walked from the grave as prophesied.

From all of the evidence, **I BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD!** That Jesus was Who He claimed to be. **He was the Son of God Who came to earth to die on the cross to save mankind from sin!**

CONCLUSION:

There is so much more that could be said about the assurance of our faith. It rests upon the **weighty testimony of apostolic eyewitnesses** who saw and heard the things that Jesus did and were willing to die for their convictions.

It also rests upon **divinely inspired prophecy**. It was spoken in ages past by men moved by the Spirit of God. The prophecies were confirmed to be true by their fulfillment.

SO, our faith is not a "blind" faith. It is as Paul writes in...

Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)

11 Now faith is the assurance of *things hoped for*, the conviction of things not seen.

We did not see Jesus and His miracles, but we are convicted that Jesus **DID** exist and that He **DID** perform them based upon the evidence that we have looked at today.

We can be certain that if the prophecies concerning Christ was fulfilled, then the prophecies concerning the future like eternity in Heaven will also come true and we can have an **assurance** of those things!

Peter tells us what a true faith is like. **Is this the sort of faith that you have in Jesus?** It should be, for by such faith, you can forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

The first steps of faith were clearly given by Jesus to His Apostles just before He ascended into Heaven.

Mark 16:16 (NASB)

16 He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

If you have not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, do it today.

He is Lord!