

PAY ATTENTION TO THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE

2 Peter 1:12-21

Key Verse: 1:19a

“We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it....”

As the gospel spread out to the pagan cultures in Peter’s time, one of the greatest challenges was licentiousness. In order to follow their own evil desires, people scoffed at Jesus’ second coming. However, Jesus’ second coming is very important in the Christian faith. Jesus’ incarnation, earthly ministry, death on the cross, resurrection, ascension and sovereign rule, and his second coming are all vital. Each has unique and essential significance. Among them, his second coming is the culmination of human history. It implies salvation and judgment. For those who trust in Jesus and live godly lives, it will be a time of glorification and reward. But to those who ignore God’s word and live by their sinful desires, it is a time of final judgment.

In our times, there are two dangers regarding Jesus’ second coming. Those who want to justify a sinful lifestyle mock Jesus’ promise to come again in order to suppress the truth. On the other hand, some people obsess about the end times. They ignore many of Jesus’ practical teachings and become fanatical about current events and the fulfillment of prophecy. They seem to be crazy and people dismiss them. In the process, people begin to tune out teachings on Jesus’ second coming, even unconsciously. But we should not overlook teachings about Jesus’ second coming. Then there are those who think of Jesus’ second coming in a theoretical way, as though it is unrelated to practical life. But it is indeed related. Peter wrote his second letter largely to proclaim and defend faith in Jesus’ coming again. In today’s passage he tells us two sound bases for believing Jesus’ second coming: the apostolic witness, and the prophetic message of Scripture. Together we know them as the Bible. Let’s pay attention to what the Bible says to us.

First, always remember these things (12-15). As a shepherd of God’s flock, Peter was deeply concerned about the spiritual condition of believers. He knew that people easily forget the truth of God that they have known. So he wanted to always remind them especially of Jesus’ second coming. Even though we know the truth and are firmly established in it, we still need to be reminded of it (12). Why is this so? It is because we are so forgetful. In some

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sense we have spiritual dementia. One day we may hold firmly to the truth. But the next day we seem to have forgotten it and become anxious.

Peter understood the weakness of mankind. So he said, **“I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body”** (13). Peter knew that his job was to remind people of God’s truth again and again until he went to the heavenly kingdom. Peter realized that his life would soon end (14). At such a moment one’s true color is revealed. For many people, the time of approaching death evokes fear and makes them self-centered. They have no room in their hearts for others. But Peter had a shepherd heart for God’s flock to the end. It was possible because he had a right view of death. He referred to his body as a tent. A tent is a temporary dwelling; it is easy to move, but quite flimsy. Likewise, our bodies are temporal and weak; they are easily destroyed by diseases, accidents, or simply the aging process. This makes people nervous, anxious and fearful. Apostle Paul used the same analogy, saying, **“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands”** (2 Cor 5:1). To believers, death is transition from an earthly tent to an eternal house in heaven, which is imperishable, indestructible, and everlasting. This gives us deep security, peace and comfort. When Peter had a right view of death, he was free from self-centered anxiety and could think of God’s flock. As his death drew near, Peter was concerned about God’s flock. He made every effort to help them always remember Jesus’ second coming, even after his death (15).

In verses 12-15 Peter used the words, **“always remind you,” “refresh your memory,”** and **“always be able to remember.”** Why do we always need to be reminded of Jesus’ coming again? It is because we so easily forget. And when we forget we become complacent and vulnerable. King Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, employed a special servant. His only task was to remind the king, “You will die soon.” Whenever the king was vulnerable to temptation, such as becoming unjust, the servant spoke up, “You will die soon.” This helped the king make right decisions in light of history, instead of reacting emotionally. In the same way, we need to be constantly reminded that Jesus is coming again so that we may be alert and live godly lives. Jesus stressed this through a parable: **“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows,**

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or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping” (Mk 13:35-36). We don't know when Jesus will come again, or when we may go to Jesus. That is why we need to always be alert and remember these things.

Second, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty (16-18). In this part, Peter contrasts his testimony—the apostolic witness—with the cleverly devised stories of false teachers. In the Greco-Roman world there were many man-made myths. In these myths there were many gods related to practical life. These gods had some kind of power, but they were like human beings: full of sinful desires. They were envious, hateful, adulterous, murderous, deceptive, and unfaithful. They were petulant, moody, and ruthless. They were unpredictable and totally unreliable. There were many cleverly devised stories about these gods. In this kind of religious atmosphere, false teachers tried to present teachings about Jesus as mere clever stories. They did not want people to take Jesus' second coming literally. In our times, false teachers deny God's existence through a distorted theory of evolution, in which every child is indoctrinated who attends public school in America. On this basis, they deny Jesus' second coming and justify all manner of immorality. This leads young people away from the truth, paving the way for a damaging fall into sin.

But Peter said, **“For 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”** (16). Here **“majesty”** refers to the deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not like the gods of the myths. He is not a man-made god. He is the true God. He is the almighty Creator God, the holy God who is perfect morally, ethically and spiritually. He is the Author of life and the Sustainer. **“For in him we all live and move and have our being”** (Ac 17:28). **“From him and through him and for him are all things”** (Ro 11:36). Peter was an eyewitness of the majesty of God in Jesus. Once, Peter confessed that Jesus is the Son of the living God. It was a good confession and Jesus was pleased. Yet right after that, Peter rejected Jesus' teaching about his suffering and death, and rebuked Jesus. Then he was severely rebuked by Jesus, **“Get behind me Satan!”** Though Peter was known for his big mouth, he became silent and could not lift up his eyes. In order to encourage him, Jesus brought him, along with James and John, to a high mountain. There Jesus was transfigured before them. **“His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light”** (Mt 17:2). When Peter saw this he was amazed with wonder and his spirit soared as if on

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eagle's wings. So he volunteered to make some shelters for them. Then a bright cloud covered them and a voice from the cloud said, **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"** (17; Mt 17:5). Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father. Peter, James and John were eyewitnesses of the event (18).

Jesus' glorious transfiguration was a prelude of his second coming. When foretelling his second coming, Jesus said: **"the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory"** (Mk 13:24b-26). When on trial before the high priest—who demanded, **"Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"**—Jesus said, **"I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven"** (Mk 14:61-62). After this, Jesus was crucified at the hands of evil men; it was for our sins. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. The Risen Christ appointed his disciples to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, and ascended into heaven. Then angels appeared and said to his disciples, **"This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven"** (Ac 1:11b). Peter saw Jesus' transfiguration, heard his promise of return, met the Risen Christ, and witnessed his ascension. Years later, it was all still vivid in his heart. He was sure that in the same way, Jesus would come again in power and great glory. Peter, along with the other apostles testified to this—even through their martyrdom. This apostolic witness is indeed reliable; it became the New Testament. We also have something that makes us more certain of this truth, that is, the prophetic message, which Peter calls **"completely reliable."**

Third, we have the prophetic message (19-21). Let's read verse 19a. **"We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable...."** Here, the prophetic message refers to the Old Testament. Peter says that it is completely reliable. Some things are pretty reliable. Our American form of government, based on democracy and freedom, has proven pretty reliable over the last 200 years. But George Washington warned that if we ever lost the Bible as our guide our government would fail. The U.S. Postal Service has had a reputation for reliability, with the motto, "Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night, stays these couriers from the swift completion of

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their appointed rounds.” But today’s changing technology has reduced most of their service to delivering junk mail. In terms of reliability, the Bible is in a class by itself. It was written over 18 centuries by more than 40 different authors in various situations. To be included in the Bible a prophet’s words had to come true and be verified by the Israelite community. If anyone claimed to speak God’s words, yet their words were not fulfilled, they would be stoned to death as a false prophet. Throughout the Old Testament we can find a common theme. The concept of a Messiah develops very consistently: first a seed, then a person, nation, kingdom, remnant, and finally Jesus Christ. There are many specific promises that were fulfilled precisely by Jesus, including his kingly genealogy, virgin birth, birthplace, rule as a shepherd, escape to Egypt, healing ministry, Spirit-filled life, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and more. As we find that these promises were fulfilled one by one, we become more and more certain about the complete reliability of the Bible. We find that the Bible is the very word of God. On the basis of God’s word, we believe Jesus’ second coming.

Verse 19b says, “...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.” What does it mean to “pay attention to it?” I heard a very interesting story. A newly married couple visited their pastor for counseling. The husband talked only about what he expected from his wife, and vice versa. Both of them spoke based on Scripture. So they are right. The problem is that neither one paid attention to the Scripture that was for themselves. So in truth, they are not listening to God, or to each other. If they really pay attention to God and each other, they can communicate well, all conflicts will be solved, and their marriage will be happy. We need to pay attention to the Scriptures as God’s words, not try to use them for our own benefit. Still there are some difficulties in accepting some parts of the Old Testament. In the book of Joshua, we find wars and the killing of many people, even innocent children, for the conquest of the Promised Land. In the book of Leviticus we find many regulations that are hard to understand and practice in our times. Such things can make us easily feel overwhelmed and doubt the Scripture. But we need to understand that all of the Old Testament points to Jesus the Messiah. Jesus said in John 5:39, “**These are the very Scriptures that testify about me...**” The Risen Christ told his disciples, “**This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and**

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the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day...’” (Lk 24:44-46). With this perspective, we can understand the Scriptures. The elaborate sacrificial system of the Old Testament foreshadowed Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. The priesthood was fulfilled by Jesus who became our Great High Priest. When we really pay attention to what the Bible says about Jesus, the light begins to shine. Peter encourages us to pay attention to it until the day dawns. Jesus’ second coming will drive all the darkness from our hearts. Here the Morning Star refers to Jesus (Nu 24:17; Rev 22:16). As the morning star rises, so Jesus Christ rises in our hearts and dispels all the darkness (2 Cor 4:6). A couple of days ago, former President Jimmy Carter appeared on a national television show. The host asked him how we can know true religion. Carter testified: “to practice true religion we should listen to Jesus Christ and follow him.” Usually former presidents are full of regrets. But Mr. Carter was full of joy and peace and was very humorous and clear, though he is just about 90. It was because he has the bright morning star Jesus in his heart.

When we want to pay attention to the Bible, we need to understand what kind of attitude is necessary, especially regarding interpretation. Verses 20-21 say, **“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.”** Though prophets spoke about Jesus the Messiah, God spoke through them by the power of the Holy Spirit. Here we learn that the Bible should not be interpreted in one’s own way. It should be interpreted to reveal what God intended to say. The origin of the Bible is not human, but God himself. To hear what God is saying, we should follow several principles in Bible interpretation. **The first principle is to be Christ-centered in our understanding.** As we saw in John 5:39 and Luke 24:44-46, all Scripture points to Jesus. We truly understand it only when we discover how it leads us to Jesus. **The second principle is to let Scripture interpret Scripture.** As we read the New Testament, we find that the writers interpret Old Testament passages. Sometimes their quotation of the Old Testament is a little different than the original text. We should understand that they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret the Old Testament for us. We should follow their interpretation. There is a saying that “The New Testament in the Old is

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concealed, and the Old Testament in the New is revealed.” **The third principle is to depend on the Holy Spirit.** Jesus said in John 16:13: **“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”** The Holy Spirit is our best Bible teacher. When we truly depend on the Holy Spirit he will inspire us to understand the meaning of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth.

The Apostle Peter exhorts us to pay attention to what the Bible says to us. As we do, we gain a certainty that Jesus will come again in power and great glory as King and Judge. When we have faith in Jesus’ second coming, the bright morning star shines in our hearts in any circumstances. We are not attached to the things of the world. We are free to love and serve Jesus and to make disciples of all nations until he comes again. Let’s pay attention to the prophetic message.