

We Know the Truth of Jesus' Glory

2 Peter 1:16-21

by Rev. Michael G. Lilienthal

Hymn: *ELH #224* – “The Only Son from Heaven”

Dear believers,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:7, ESV). Amen.

Let us pray: O Lord, we thank you that you have called us out of darkness and into your marvelous light. Help us to remain in faith through your word, and to proclaim that same word, spreading your light and majesty throughout the world. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Fox or CNN? Local news or the Washington Post, or New York Times? Buzzfeed or Snopes? Where do you get your news? Here's the thing: although several of those I listed are more reputable than others, each and every one of them – each and every source for news – comes with a bias. Some slant the news toward the left, others slant it toward the right, and still others seem to do a confusing zigzag. But the way the news is reported often will be intentionally crafted in order to bring about some opinion or reaction from the public at large. The reports you hear are cunningly devised to shape the way you think.

Hear from our text today where a very specific report came from, and determine, compared to your other news sources, how reliable this one is:

St. Peter writes in his second epistle, the first chapter, verses 16-21:

¹⁶To be sure, we were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For he received honor and glory from God the Father, when the voice came to him from within the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸We heard this voice, which came out of heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.

¹⁹We also have the completely reliable prophetic word. You do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts, ²⁰since we know this above all else: No prophecy of Scripture comes about from someone's own interpretation. ²¹In fact, no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit.

These are your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your word is truth.

Amen (cf. John 17:17).

We can be fairly certain, I think, based on this report, that **we know the truth of Jesus' glory**. It is most certainly true, for **it is spoken to us by God**. And it is most certainly reliable, because **it sustains us to eternity**.

I. It Is Spoken to Us by God

I say this is spoken by God, and indeed Peter remarked: "the voice came...from within the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" However, that's not the only thing God spoke, although it might seem that way. Count the other sources that Peter lists: "we were eyewitnesses," he says, and their *eyewitness account* is one source. And, "We also have the completely reliable prophetic word." The *Old Testament Scriptures* are another source. With the eyewitness account, the voice from heaven, and the Old Testament, we have three news sources,

but what is remarkable is that, unlike if you compare Fox, CNN, and MSNBC, these three do not say different things, but agree 100% in message and meaning.

And besides this unity in output, they have a unified source. The voice is clearly the voice of God speaking this truth. The Old Testament, as confessional Lutherans, we have no problem understanding as God's Word, but hear how Peter tells it: "In fact, no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit." The prophecy from before Jesus came was all spoken to man by God, even though he spoke through human mouths.

And what does that mean for Peter and the other apostles who told of the report *after* it occurred? Peter does not claim here that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, but what was he telling? He says, "we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ." He was telling what that voice from heaven was telling. He was telling what the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament prophets was telling. He was telling *God's Word*. His news report came without slant, without any "cunningly devised fables," but was the unsullied report of the truth of Jesus Christ.

Peter's whole purpose in writing in this section is to tell people about the Word of God—it's nature, it's message, it's purpose. Its nature is that it is *true*. "To be sure, we were not following cunningly devised fables." "We also have the *completely reliable* prophetic word." Its message is Jesus Christ: "the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ," "he received honor and glory from God the Father."

In fact, it is this nature and message and purpose of the Word of God that causes it to be repeated today, not least in our worship services, when it comes in a specific

format. Reflect on the event Peter specifically looks to: The God who was invisible nevertheless appeared to Peter and the other apostles in all his glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, bearing the message of Christ: who he is, what he is for, what he would do. Recall what that voice said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him" (Matt. 17:5). The precise message from God is: "Listen to him," listen to Jesus. Martin Luther reflects on this:

Now every preacher should be so sure of having and preaching God's Word that he would even stake his life on this, since it is a matter of life for us. He should not be in doubt. Now no man is so holy that he would dare die on the strength of the doctrine he himself has taught. Therefore it is established here that the apostles were assured by God that their Gospel was God's Word. And here it is also shown that the Gospel is nothing else than a sermon about Christ. Accordingly, one should listen to no other sermon; for the Father wants no other sermon. 'This is My beloved Son,' He says; 'listen to Him. He is your Teacher.'¹

If we do as the apostles were told and listen to Christ, then we are listening to the Gospel about Christ, we are listening to "the completely reliable prophetic word." And this includes more than merely the Old Testament. It truly includes the New Testament as well. Luther again: "I believe indeed that henceforth we shall not have prophets like those the Jews had in times past in the Old Testament. But a prophet must really be one who preaches about Jesus Christ."² The most reliable prophetic Word, which is spoken by those who are "being carried along by the Holy Spirit," inspired by God, is this Bible that we carry around with us. Tease it out, from beginning to end, study it, cross-

¹ LW 30:163.

² Ibid., 165.

reference it, and you'll see one consistent message from Genesis to Revelation, from creation to apocalypse: Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, true God in the flesh, anointed by the Father to teach us.

Therefore, as I said, it is repeated: The Word of Jesus in his glory came to the disciples on that mountaintop. Likewise, the invisible God appears to us in "the completely reliable prophetic word," which is like "a lamp shining in a dark place," and he shows us his glorious grace and forgiveness in the twin mountaintops in our normal liturgy: From the beginning of the service we ascend and climb, higher and higher, until we reach The Service of the Word, the first mountaintop; then, we cross through the offering and prayer up to The Service of Holy Communion, the second mountaintop. From there we descend, having *seen God* in Word and Sacrament, and we depart for home in that joy, singing down the mountain.

We need not doubt that what we hear in church is true, because it is God's Word, and any pastor worth his salt will not be proclaiming any doctrine he came up with, no "cunningly devised fables," but he will preach "the completely reliable prophetic word." "No prophecy of Scripture comes about from someone's own interpretation," Peter wrote. Pastors should take this as a responsibility, to preach not our own interpretations of Scripture. We don't read the Bible and ask, "What does this mean to me?" We read the Bible and we ask, "What does this *mean*?" And we hear our answer from Scripture.

This should be taken as a responsibility by you as well, the Christian. Hear what Peter tells us: "We also have the completely reliable prophetic word. You do well to pay

attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts," which means, *read that Word, have personal and family devotions, attend Bible Studies, soak in Scripture at every opportunity*, because you are in a dark place. Left to your own understanding, you'd be whipped every which way either by those you think have authority and more smarts, or by your own thoughts and opinions. Pay attention to the Word, which is "a lamp," as the psalmist confessed: "Your word is a lamp to my feet / and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105, ESV). The Word shines in the darkness like Jesus shone with divine glory on the mountaintop. It is terrifying, because before such glorious light we who are sinful would seek to hide, because "everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:20, ESV). But it is also so wonderful, because this Word brings the report we desperately need to hear: that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, ESV), and "how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" (Rom. 10:14, ESV).

Therefore preachers, who actually do their job, come preaching that Word, resolving "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2, ESV). When that Word is preached to you of the divine God who shone his light high on that mountain, and who on another mountain died hanging on a cross, communicated to you is your salvation. Listen to that "completely reliable prophetic word," and pay attention to it, because when "the Morning Star rises in your hearts," do you know what that means? The "Morning Star" is referred to elsewhere in

Scripture, in St. John's Revelation: Jesus there says, "I, Jesus...am the root and the descendent of David, *the bright morning star*" (Rev. 22:16, ESV). When "the Morning Star rises in your hearts," that means that Jesus shines there in your heart with all his divine and gracious glory. Here we have come to the purpose of that Word. Its nature is true. Its message is Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Its purpose is to sustain you to eternity.

II. It Sustains Us to Eternity

Already partially, if you have faith, "the Morning Star" has risen "in your hearts." St. Paul wrote, in a passage in many ways parallel to this portion of St. Peter's epistle:

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:1-6, ESV)

The light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that simple Word of God, unaltered and clearly spoken, shines in the heart and gives us knowledge of salvation, faith.

But we do not yet have that shining in fullness. Instead, as St. Paul goes on to say: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power

belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7, ESV). We have this brightly shining glory of God given to us, shining in our hearts to create faith and save us, but as yet, it is hidden "in jars of clay," or, we might say, in the humblest places: would you expect to find God's glory in a puddle of water? would you expect to find God's glory in a loaf of bread on the table, or in a glass of wine? would you expect to find God's glory in a rolled up piece of paper? No, we want God bursting into light on the mountaintop, thundering down with his powerful voice! Instead, the God we are directed to is the one, again, on that other mountaintop, quiet and hoarse, naked and bleeding, shrouded in blackness over all creation.

This is why we must continue to attend to this "completely reliable prophetic word." The Holy Spirit does not come to us without these "jars of clay," that is, without means. Various sects and denominations will today seek the Holy Spirit moving in their hearts, will try to feel Jesus rising in their feelings, but they're looking for all that too soon. It is the written Word of God and physical Sacraments which are the moving of the Holy Spirit, and we must rest in them. But one day, or, more precisely, when "the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts," then that light of the Gospel, then that glorious God, hitherto hidden in humility, bursts fully before our eyes and we see him in perfect fullness. Hear how St. John describes it again in his Revelation: "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23, ESV).

The whole point, the whole purpose of this Word, this "completely reliable prophetic word," is to save us: to wrap us in the forgiveness Jesus won on the cross, the

life he attained by his resurrection, and to carry us along like babies in this Bible, this Word – although do not think of yourselves as babies intellectually, because we must read and learn and grow in this Word – carrying us until “the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts.” That day we’re waiting for to dawn is the day when Jesus will return and bring us into that eternal glory with himself.

There is so much more we could say about this simple section of Scripture, because its subject is Scripture itself, and all that Scripture contains, but we should leave it there, with a note of this great comfort, knowing that the Word by which God purposes to save us, to give us eternal life, which is all about Jesus, is truth itself. And I can think of no better way to conclude a sermon on a text which is about Scripture, than by reporting to you exactly what Scripture itself says at its end, and hear here what is said about the Word, about faith, about Jesus and salvation, and about eternity:

And he said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.’

‘And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.’

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’

And he said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.’

‘Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.’

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

'I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.'

The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. (Rev. 22:6-21)

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