The Truth from God

Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

2 Peter 1:12-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

I would say it is beyond dispute that a movement started in first century Jerusalem spread to the entire world and has changed the world. Of course that movement would be Christianity. That's a historical fact—it's beyond dispute. I would also say it's beyond dispute that at the center of that movement was the claim of a crucified and risen Savior. What can be argued today is whether or not that claim of a resurrected Savior is true.

Now you'll hear an unbeliever or a skeptic say they don't believe because they need proof. "I need it to be proved to me absolutely to be believed." You might hear some today say, "You know I'm not really a person of faith; I'm a person of science, and I don't think it lines up with science." Well there are a couple of things to think about. One: this idea that science always gets it right is a myth. Anybody in the world of science knows that. The reality is science is constantly discovering and rediscovering. The whole basis of science is they're constantly adjusting and correcting and discovering. There's a long list of things a hundred years ago we thought were scientifically true. Now with more modern equipment, with more research, we have to go back and say, "Actually it was not true;" science was off, and that science has to be corrected. We continue to grow and adjust and learn. That's not a put-down of science but that's the whole point. Science is constantly growing and changing and correcting and discovering. But if someone says, "I need absolute proof to believe," that person believes that the resurrection of Jesus did not take place. So I'd be interested to know, "What is your absolute proof? You've said you can't believe unless you have absolute proof so you must have absolute proof Jesus did not rise from the dead. I'd be interested in knowing what that is." Some people would say, "Well, science has proven people don't rise from the dead," to which I would say, "Science has absolutely not proven that." Science cannot prove that miracles don't exist. That is clearly beyond the realm of what science can prove. I would suggest that the unbeliever or the skeptic has hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of beliefs that guide his or her every day choices, and those beliefs are not based on absolute proof. They're not based on science; they're based on nothing more than their opinion. Most people, at the end of the day, their beliefs, their worldview really is based on nothing more than their opinion or the opinion of someone else who has influenced them.

Now I find that personally frightening—that as I travel the pathway of life, my most significant choices around which I would create a worldview, even my eternal destiny, would be based on nothing more than my opinion? So the question that we're getting to is not just *what* you believe; it's *why* you believe what you believe. What is your source of truth? Well, that's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Peter, Chapter 1. We're going to pick it up in verse 12. It opens with the word **Therefore** which is a reference to: based on the gospel truth, these wonderful and magnificent truths that we have talked about in 2 Peter 1, verses 1-11:

> **Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, and have been established in the truth which is present with *you*. I consider it right, as long as I am in this *earthly* dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my *earthly* dwelling is imminent, as also**

our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

(*NASB, 2 Peter 1:12-15)

So Peter is saying that it is his job to remind them again and again of what's true. He clearly says, "I know you know this. You know these truths. You believe these truths." But it's necessary to remind them. You can almost imagine he's anticipating the readers to say, "I know, I know." It's almost like, "You don't have to tell me again." You can almost imagine a parent having a conversation with a child and the child says, "I know, I know, I know." Maybe your children never said that. (*laughter*) You can imagine a child going out to play in the snow and the parent saying, "You know you've got to wear boots; you've got to wear gloves," and the child saying, "I know, I know, I know." And then ten minutes later you look out the window and they're outside without boots and without gloves! And you're thinking, "You don't know, or you'd be wearing boots and gloves. That's why I keep reminding you."

Peter has a concern that these people are being persuaded by the false teachers, so he continues to remind them what's true. It's interesting the word **know** in verse 12—**you already know**—we've talked that this is a significant word for Peter in 2 Peter, but this is a different Greek word. This is not the word we've seen to *know—kind of experientially and to live out*. This is a word that would be closer to what we would call *head-knowledge*; so he's identifying that you know it in your head. If I was to give you a quiz, you would pass it but I'm not sure you really know it, because it kind of seems like you're being influenced by the teaching of the false teachers. So he considers it **right as long as he's in this earthly dwelling,** literally earthly tent, to remind you.

He says he believes his death is **imminent**, so essentially Peter is using a metaphor that his body is like a tent and he's living in this tent, but he's about to *lay it aside.* That's actually a clothing metaphor. He's about to take off the body and he clearly says his death is *imminent, as was told to him by the Lord Jesus Christ.* Whether he's referring to John 21 when Jesus told him that he would not die of old age but actually be crucified or whether there's been some communication more recently, but he clearly knows he's about to die. I believe he knows how he's going to die; he's about to give his life for the cause. But he's concerned once he's gone, will these people remember the truth knowing the false teachers are among them?

In verse 15 he says *he needs to be diligent before his departure to remind them of the truth.* That's the third time we've seen this Greek word **diligent**. We had it in verse 5, in verse 10 and now we have it here. Basically in verses 5 and 10 we as believers need to be **diligent** to understand and believe the truth—to remember what's true. Peter says then *he* needs to be **diligent** to remind them of what's true. In a sense, that's why we gather week in and week out. We gather to worship; we gather to encourage one another, but we also gather to remember what's true. It's my job to be diligent to remind you; it's your job to be diligent to listen, to understand, and to believe, because every day all of us are bombarded with hundreds of messages that aren't true. The false teachers are all around us and it's critically important that we remember what's true.

So that's the first paragraph. Starting in verse 16 he moves the discussion to the *source* of truth. Where's Peter getting his truth? And that of course contrasts the false teachers. Verse 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. 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"—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (Vs. 16-18)

So Peter is saying that his source of truth comes from Jesus Himself. He is one of the core disciples that got the message directly from Jesus Himself. Now, little by little this band of apostles is dying off. This group that could say, "I got it directly from Jesus Himself," is becoming fewer and fewer. But Peter is identifying Jesus as his source of truth. Specifically what he is referring to here is what we call the transfiguration. It is recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It was a moment when Jesus invited only three of the apostles—Peter, James, and John—to come with Him up on an unknown mountain, and there Jesus began to transfigure, meaning He began to change into His glorified state. Literally, Peter, James, and John got to see Jesus as He will be glorified in His return, as a reminder of the promise that Jesus is coming back. It does seem one of the major themes of the false teachers is this idea that Jesus is coming back is just a myth, that it's not really true. So Peter says he didn't make up some fairy tale. It's not a myth. All of the Greek religions were full of fables and myths. That's what dominated the Greek religions, and Peter is using a very strategic word to say this isn't some sort of a fable or a myth. It's not something that I just made up. All of the world religions today would have beliefs, but the question is: where do those beliefs come from? They could be just made up. They could just be fantasies. They could just be myths. Peter is saying, "I got it directly from Jesus Himself. As a matter of fact I was both an eyewitness and an ear witness. I actually heard God say, '**This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased**.'" As a matter of fact, when he says, "...**we ourselves heard this,**" it's what we call the emphatic in Greek. He's kind of underscoring, "*I heard it with my own ears; I saw it with my own eyes."* That is the origin of this truth that he teaches.

In 1979 Pope John Paul II came to America. When he came to America, he came to the city of Chicago. I happened to be living in Chicago at the time. It was a big deal! I remember one day walking home from work, I noticed a huge crowd gathering on the street in front of a Catholic church. Being the clever sleuth that I am, I put it together. The pope must be coming. So I stood on the curb with hundreds, soon to be thousands of people and just waited. Pretty soon the police escorts, the police cars and limousines came flying through. There must have been a dozen black limousines. They all stopped, and as luck would have it, exactly in front of me, not twenty feet away, the limousine doors opened and out steps John Paul II! He looked right at us. He waved and said, "Hi Bryan!" (*Laughter*) Okay, I made that part up, (*Laughter*) but the rest is true. Pretty soon he was surrounded by people, and they took him into the church.

Now that was 1979. So as I tell that story today, there may be people in the room that say, "I don't think that's true." There may be people that say, "I don't think John Paul II even existed." You might say, "I don't think he ever came to America; I don't think he ever came to Chicago, and I don't think he ever visited that church." You're free to hold your opinion but what I would say is, "I was there. I stood on the curb and I saw him. I was an eye witness to the event." Now part of what you have to assess is my own character and integrity. Peter is saying he's about to die for the cause of Christ. All the apostles except John, other than Judas, were executed for their belief in a resurrected Christ. Not a single one of them backed off. Not a single one of them recanted. Every single one of them died, filled with hope in their belief in a resurrected and returning Christ. Peter's about to die for the sake of the gospel, so do you think in this moment he's just making it up or wouldn't there be credibility in his words? Given what you know about me, my life, my character, my integrity, do you really think I'm standing up here lying to you? Or isn't it more likely I actually did see that?

Now the distance between 1979 and this morning is almost exactly the distance between when Peter saw the transfiguration and then the resurrection of Christ and when he's writing this letter. So you tell me, "What is the chance that Peter's telling the truth versus the possibility he's lying and he's willing to die for a lie?" That's the point of that paragraph. That's the origin of the truth. Where are the false teachers getting their message? Where's it coming from and what is the source of their truth?" But it's even more than that. Verse 19:

> **So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure** (it means more reliable)**, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day** (meaning the Day of the Lord, the return of Christ) **dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.** (which is a reference to the Spirit of Christ reaching its fullness in their salvation, what he described in verse 11.)

What he just said is it's even more than Peter as an eye witness. There is this whole prophetic witness of the Old Testament that predicted the coming of the Messiah. That prediction and the fulfillment is like a light and he says, "*You'll do well to follow the light through life all the way to the return of Christ and the ultimate fulfillment of our salvation and entrance into the new heaven and the new earth,"* which we will talk about in Chapter 3. So what is he talking about? He's talking about the whole of the Old Testament, and specifically the voice of the prophets.

So what do we know? We know with absolute certainty that the books of the Old Testament were gathered and collected and completed well before the first century. By the first century there was a clear sense of the Old Testament. The books were gathered, collected, known and understood. Some of the rabbis actually had the entirety of the Old Testament memorized. So we know as a historical fact that these were written hundreds of years before the fulfillment of Christ. We also know with historical reliability that Jesus fulfilled each of these prophecies. There's some disagreement on the number but roughly seventy prophecies, specifically referring to the Messiah, Jesus perfectly fulfilled. Now many of these prophecies were things beyond Jesus' control—things like His family lineage, born of a virgin, being from Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, the Magi, the star, what King Herod did, how He would die, how He would be betrayed, what would be paid for that betrayal, where He would be buried. None of these things could He control, yet all of them were perfectly fulfilled in Jesus.

Mathematician Peter Stoner years ago decided to try to figure out the probability that this just happened by chance. Peter Stoner was a mathematics professor. His specialty was the Law of Probability so he set out to apply his science to the prophecies of the Messiah. He picked eight of the prophecies which he lists, and did the study to try and figure out: what's the probability that just these eight could have happened by chance? His conclusion: the odds are 1 to 10 to the 17^{th} power. For those of you that are math challenged like myself, it's 10 with 17 zeros after it! In order to illustrate the number, he said if you took 10 to the 17^{th} power number of silver dollars and you dropped them in the state of Texas, it would go north to south, east to west, border to border, 2 feet thick, across the entire state. One of those coins is marked with an "X". Then you get in a helicopter, fly over the state of Texas, are blindfolded and you drop it out of the helicopter at the place of your choice. You reach into the pile and you pull out the one coin with the "X". That's the odds of 1 to 10 to the 17^{th} power. That's just eight of the prophecies. He decided then to calculate 48 of the prophecies. His conclusion: the odds are 1 to 10 to the 157^{th} power. Write that down when you go home—10, and then 157 zeros. The ability to illustrate that number is so ginormous that it goes beyond comprehension. The odds are virtually impossible. How much faith would it take to believe that all that happened perfectly by chance? Way more than I've got! The reality is it

does give evidence that this is not merely a human book, but rather a divinely-inspired prophetic work, which is exactly where Peter goes. Verse 20:

> **But know this first of all** (and that means of most importance)**, that no prophecy of Scripture is a *matter* of one's own interpretation,**

What he means by that is you can't just make the Bible say whatever you want it to say. Sometimes you hear people say, "You know, what does the Bible mean to you?" It's a very bad question. The question is not what does the Bible mean to you; the question is what does the Bible mean? What is the writer's intent? God had something specific He wanted to say and it's our job to figure that out. Now this is really important in a post-modern culture, because part of the fabric of post modernism is the actual meaning is in the interpreter. Regardless of what the writer intended, I'm free to twist it into whatever I want it to mean. It's the same as when you look at a piece of art work. It doesn't matter what the painter intended; it's up to me to interpret the meaning of the painting. So what Peter is saying, "That's not true!" There is an intent by the writer and that's the meaning of the text. Verse 21:

> **...for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved** (that word moved is a word used to describe the wind blowing a sailboat across the sea) **by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

This is one of the critical texts in the New Testament that reminds us that the Bible is not a collection of someone's opinions but actually these men were moved—blown by the very breadth of God—to write exactly what God wanted written. One of the beauties of the Bible is it's written by people that have different backgrounds, educations, styles, personalities, and all of that is reflected in the writings. But within that, the Spirit of God breathes through them in order that they write exactly what God intended, in order to claim that the Scripture is the authoritative, inspired, reliable Word of God.

Several years ago I was having a conversation with a friend of mine who I would describe as kind of a baby Christian, and in the midst of the conversation—we were talking about something in the New Testament—he said, "Well that's just Paul's opinion." And I said, "I'm sorry, what?" It just kind of took me back for a minute. He said, "Well that's just Paul's opinion; I don't have to agree with that," and I realized he failed to understand one of the most basic foundational beliefs of our Christian faith. The Bible is not a collection of man's opinions; the Bible itself doesn't claim that. It claims to be the *Word of God.* The prophets claim to be declaring the Word of God. Jesus claimed that the Scriptures are the Word of God. The New Testament writers claimed to be presenting the Word of God. The Scriptures are the very God-breathed, miraculous Word of God. There's no other way to explain things like fulfilled prophecy. The amazing reliability of archeology and history and even science again and again demonstrate the Scriptures to be true.

So the fact of the matter is this morning you're free to believe whatever you want to believe. As a person made in the image of God, God has given you that freedom; He's given you that capacity. But I would ask you to consider: what is the source of what you believe? Most people will go through life, and the pathway of life will be directed by nothing more than their opinion, nothing more than their opinion or influence by the opinion of someone else. Even their eternal destiny will be based on nothing more than merely their opinion. I don't know about you; I find that to be utterly frightening—utterly frightening that I would not only define the pathway of my life or my eternal destiny on nothing more reliable than that! It's helpful to remind ourselves this morning that just because someone believes something doesn't make it true...just because someone *sincerely*

believes something, doesn't make it more true. At the end of the day, the truth wins—what Francis Shaeffer used to call *true truth*. Dallas Willard used to say, "Reality is what you run into when you're wrong." You can believe whatever you want. That doesn't make it true, and are you really willing to risk your eternal destiny on nothing more than your opinion? I can only speak for myself, but I will say, "For me, I am basing my life and my eternal soul into that which I believe to be the authoritative, reliable, inspired Word of God!"

> *Our Father, we celebrate this morning that we have not been left in the darkness to just grope around trying to figure out what's true and what's not true. Lord, every day we are bombarded by lies. Lord, help us to diligently seek, understand, and believe the truth—the truth that You have given us in Your authoritative, reliable, inspired Word. Lord, we thank You for that. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

"Science Speaks" by Peter Stoner. Moody Press, Chicago, 1963

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(Dramatic reading duo):

Truth!

What is truth?

That question has been asked for ages.

But in this culture...

In our culture...

Truth is believed to be relative.

Truth is whatever you want it to be.

Right?

No, wrong!

And since there's no right or wrong, we should feel free and full of joy, right?

Wrong!

Why?

Because the truth—God's truth—the truth revealed in His Word, is the only thing that can fill us with joy.

Joyful are those who search for Him with all their hearts and who obey the truth found in His Word.

Here's what *is* true:

His laws are wonderful.

They are perfect and completely trustworthy.

His words are a lamp to guide my feet...

...and a light for my path.

So how can a young person—or any person for that matter—live a pure life?

By carefully reading the map of God's Word,

By storing His promises in the vault of my heart so I won't bankrupt my life with sin,

By delighting more in what He tells me about living than in gathering a pile of riches,

By relishing everything He tells me of life.

Those who love His instructions have great peace—

And do not stumble.

When pressure and stress bear down on me, I will find joy in the commands and promises found in His Word!

Lord, You made me. You created me. Breathe Your wisdom over me so I can understand You.

Let me live.

Let us live

Whole and holy,

Soul and body,

In freedom and joy,

Revived and encouraged by Your Word

Which is truth and our only hope!

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Hope-filled Living in a Culture of Despair

2 Peter 1:12-21

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Opening Discussion

1. Everyone has a belief system. What do you believe is the basis for most people's belief system in our culture today?

2. What is the basis for your belief system? Why do you believe what you believe? What does this look like for you in practical terms for everyday life?

Bible Study

1. Read II Peter 1:12-15. What is Peter's concern for his readers? Is knowing the facts in your head the same as truly knowing and believing something? Explain.

2. Peter has used the word "diligent" 3 times in chapter 1 (5, 10, 15). What do we need to be diligent about and why? What does this mean?

3. Read II Peter 1:16-19. What is Peter claiming in this paragraph? What is his basis for truth? (see Matt. 17:1-9 for the transfiguration Peter is referring to)

4. What does Paul say about the claims of a crucified, buried and resurrected Savior in I Corinthians 15:1-19? How does Christianity differ from other world religions in terms of its truth claims?

5. Read II Peter 1:19-21. Compare II Timothy 3:16. Is the Bible simply a collection of people's opinions or does it claim to be the very Word of God? What did Jesus say about the Law in Matthew 5:17-19?

6. How does fulfilled prophesy support the idea of a divinely inspired book? Mathematician Peter Stoner identifies the odds that Jesus could've fulfilled 8 of the prophecies by chance as 1 to 10,000,000,000,000,000,00. The odds of fulfilling 48 of the prophecies by chance as 1 to 10 (157 zeros). How does this help affirm our view that the bible is the inspired Word of God?

7. In spite of the evidence from fulfilled prophesy, historical and archeological evidence, eye witness accounts documented in the Gospels, the overwhelming evidence for the authenticity and reliability of the Gospels as historical records and the evidence of history of a world changing movement exploding in Jerusalem around a claim of a resurrected Savior people still refuse to believe. What is that? Is it really about needing more proof or something else?

Application

1. What is your basis for truth? What in your practical day to day life reflects your belief that the bible is the source of truth and the light to our path?

2. What are some practical ways you can be "reminded" daily of what is true when we live in a culture of lies?" What would it mean for you to be diligent to remember what's true?

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