

WHAT WE HAVE IN THE WORD OF GOD

Some people have a real gift of telling stories, don't they? They remember so well—and explain things in such vivid detail—that you almost *feel like* you are experiencing what they went through right along with them!

But—deep down—you know it is *not the same* as being there. And—*sometimes*—you might even have *thoughts of jealousy creep in* because you *didn't have* the same experience—and *never will!*

Peter had that kind of experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. He...and James...and John were on a mountaintop with Jesus when He was “transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment white as light” we are told in Matthew 17:2.

Then Moses and Elijah appear and have a conversation with Jesus about His upcoming return back to heaven! And then a bright cloud overshadows them, and they hear a majestic voice out of that cloud saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him!”

What did that experience *do* for Peter? Seeing—firsthand—Jesus in this glorified state *deepened his conviction* that Jesus is coming again! And hearing—for himself—the very voice of God from heaven, *motivated Peter* to live a life that was pleasing to God.

But...*we weren't there*...and didn't get to experience what Peter did!
And—because of that—it is possible that we *don't have* the same certainly—*the same conviction*—that Peter had. In fact—although we can't say for sure—that may have been *why* God had Peter write the verses that we are going to look at this morning.

Please turn to II Peter 1 if you are not already there and follow along as I read verses 15-21. As we go through these verses this morning, I believe *God wants us to know* that we can be *just as certain* about the return of Christ as Peter was! How? Why? Because *we have the written word of God!*

1. What the apostles possessed

Vs 19 “*We* have also a more sure word of prophecy...”

--*Who* is the “we?” The same group of people referred to in vs 16-18.

--Who is *that*? Peter and John for sure, but based on II Peter 3:2, it probably refers to all the apostles—as well as to Paul.

--*What* is it that they *had*? *What* did they possess? “A more sure word of prophecy...”

But what does *that* mean? As is always the case, we want to first try to determine what it meant to those Peter *was originally writing to*, then see how it is relevant to us.

First, let's consider... A. The meaning of “word of prophecy”

When we hear the word “prophecy,” we often think of *future events*, don't we? So what is the *future event* that Peter is *probably* referring to? The *powerful return* of Jesus! *Why* do I say that?

--Because in vs 11, Peter refers to the *everlasting kingdom* of Christ

--And because in vs 16, Peter refers to the *coming of Christ in power*

--And because here in vs 19, the phrase “until the day dawn” also probably refers to the coming of Christ. So the context points to the *word of prophecy* being what the OT prophets wrote about the coming of Christ. *What* did they write? We don't have time to dig into that *but suffice it to say* that *it was a lot!* Some suggest that the Old Testament contains *over 300 prophecies about Christ!* (Cited by Cole; reference below).

Next, let's consider... B. The meaning of “a more sure word”

What does it mean to have a “more sure word of prophecy?” In my opinion, this is the most difficult phrase to understand out of these 3 verses!

Without getting too technical—or spending too much time on it—here are three ways to view it:

1) MacArthur suggests that Peter is saying that word of prophecy—the word from the OT prophets—“is a more reliable source than *the experience of anybody*, even the apostles.” In other words, God's Word is *more certain* than what Peter, James, and John *experienced* on the Mount of Transfiguration.

(<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/61-15/the-sure-word-part-pro2>).

2) Others—like Steven Cole—suggest it means that the OT prophets gave us a “sure word about Christ.” After their experience with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration—and after Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection—the disciples understood better what the OT prophets had written. “So in this sense, the Old Testament prophetic word was made more sure.” (<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-7-solid-foundation-2-peter-119-21>).

3) A third way to handle it is this—don’t translate it **more** sure! In other words, don’t make it a comparison with the transfiguration because it is not meant to be! Why do I suggest **changing** “more sure” to just “sure?”

Because in vs 10—“make your calling and election sure”—the same Greek word is translated **sure** instead of “**more** sure!” Why is it just **sure** in vs 10—and **more sure** in vs 19? I have no idea!

So, the verse could just as well be translated: “We have the most reliable—we have the very certain”—word of the prophets. (Thomas Schreiner, *The New American Commentary*, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, p.320).

Although it is a bit difficult to determine exactly **what Peter meant** when he wrote: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy,” it is not difficult **for us** to know what **we** possess! In fact, the first part of the verse is easy to understand if we think of the “we” referring **to us—now**—and not Peter and the other apostles!

2. What we possess

What do we possess? What is our “more sure word of prophecy?” I mentioned earlier that when we hear the word “prophecy,” we usually think of **future** events.

Although that is **sometimes** what is meant, there is actually **a broader** meaning for the word prophecy: “the inspired utterance of a prophet.” In other words, prophecy is simply a message from God **through a prophet** that may—or **may not**—be about future events.

So even though we have not **physically walked** with Jesus—or seen Him glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration like Peter, James, and John did—**we have something** that the apostles did not have!

What is that? The **completed revelation** of God! We have the Bible **in its entirety**—and they did not! We don’t just have the words of the **Old Testament** prophets—we also have the words of the **New Testament writers**! We have—as Paul Harvey used to say—“the rest of the story!”

So...based on what we have—our possession—what are we supposed **to do with it**? The same thing that God through Peter told the original readers **to do**! What was that? We see that in the next phrase in vs 19: “whereunto ye do well that ye **take heed**...” What does “take heed” mean? It means “pay attention” to it!

3. God’s plan—pay attention to what you possess

Not exactly a “news flash” is it? God wants us—**all of us**—to take heed to what **He** says! But “take heed” does not mean just “pay attention to.” It is **stronger** than that. It means “to give **full attention to**...to **devote** ourselves to...to **turn our minds to**.”

Paul used the same word in his farewell address to the leaders of the church in Ephesus. **Acts 20:28** “**Take heed** therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.”

Paul also used it in his first letter to Timothy. **1 Timothy 4:13** “Till I come, **give attendance to** reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” And the writer of Hebrews used it **Hebrews 2:1** “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest **heed** to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”

But Peter doesn’t just tell us to give full attention to God’s Word, he also tells us **why**—and for **how long**!

A. The “why” for taking heed to God’s Word

Why do we need to devote ourselves to what God has said? Peter gives us **two** reasons, both in vs 19.

1) Because “ye do well” when you take heed to what God says! **Do you believe that?** Do you believe that “ye do well” to devote yourself to what God says? To “do well” carries the idea of “excellently” and “good” and “rightly.” So I’m going to ask the question again: **Do you believe it is excellent...and good...and right to give full attention** to the Word of God? God says it is good for us to do that. What happens when we do?

There **are blessings in obedience**, right? We know from vs 11 that if we work on living a life that is pleasing to God, we will have a **lavishly supplied, rich, hero's entrance** into the **everlasting kingdom!**

But if we fail to devote ourselves to what God says, we do badly...we do poorly...we do wrongly. There are blessings in obedience—and there is chastening in disobedience!

2) The second reason we need to take heed to what God says is because **His Word** is as “a light that shines in a dark place.” “Light” refers to a lamp or a candle—not the light of the sun that comes at daybreak.

“Dark,” though, is **not the normal word** for physical darkness. In fact, this is **the only time** the Greek word that this comes from is used in the NT. Instead of meaning **the absence of light**, it carries the idea of **being murky**—of being filled with something that **clouds** your vision.

Like many of you, I learned to swim **in a river**—not a swimming pool! As teenagers, my neighbors and siblings and I would have contests to see who could **swim the farthest** underwater. I opened my eyes underwater but couldn't see very far because the **water was murky**—even though the sun was shining brightly!

Murky and dirty because of all the impurities in it is a good description **of the world**, isn't? We live in a **dark place**. We live in a world that has a lot of junk “floating” in front of our eyes that stops us from seeing **the right way to go**—and what is really important! God's Word **acts as a lamp** to lighten our path, though. **Psalm 109:105** “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

--God's Word sheds light on **which way to go**—and which way to avoid.

--It sheds light on **what is true**—and what is false.

--And it sheds light on **what is good**—and what is bad.

Why do we need to take heed to what God's Word says? Because God says it is **good and well and right** for us to do that—and because we **need the light of God's Word** to know how to live in a **dirty, murky world!**

B. How long we need to take heed to God's Word

So when **can we stop** taking heed to what God says? Peter gives us the answer to that, too! We see in vs 19 “until the day dawn...” But when is that?

Does Peter mean **tomorrow morning** when the sun comes up? Not hardly!

When will the **bad and the false** no longer exist? When will we **no longer need** God's Word to guide us?

When **Christ returns in glory** and sets up His kingdom—**or when we leave this earth** to be with Him! But then Peter adds: “and the day star arise in your hearts.” What does **that** mean? **I don't know!**

But we do know this: “day” in the **last part** of the verse is a different word than the “day” we just looked at and comes from the Greek word “**foce-for'-os**.” It means “light-bringing” and “the morning star.” **Jesus**, of course, **is the morning star** and He calls Himself that in Revelation 22:16.

In what sense will Jesus “arise” in our hearts? Commentators are divided as to exactly what Peter meant. My take is simply this: when we are in the **presence of Jesus**, the **bad will be gone**...and **darkness** will be gone...and **doubt** will be gone...and **fear** will be gone...and **sin will be gone!** **And in our hearts will be a joy** that is unlike any joy in this world because **our faith** has now turned to sight!

We have a wonderful possession in the Word of God. **What is God's desire**—what is His plan—for us **to do with** what He has given us? To **take heed** to it—meaning to give **full attention** to it...and **devote** ourselves to it...and **turn our minds** to what He says. So...are **you** doing that?

--Are you giving **full attention** to God's Word if you **only open it** on Sunday mornings?

--Are you **devoting yourself** to it if you merely **read** it so you can cross it off your “to-do” list?

--Are you **turning your mind to** what God says if you only read it—but **don't do** what He says?

--God through James tells us in **James 1:22** “But be ye **doers of the word**, and not hearers only...”

--Last week you learned from **Ezra 7:10** that “...Ezra had prepared his heart to **seek** the law of the Lord, **and to do it**, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”

--And let's not forget what Jesus said the difference is between a wise man and a foolish man!

--Which one **hears** the words of Jesus? According to Mt 7:24 and 26, **they both do!**

--But the wise man doesn't just hear! He hears... **and obeys!**

How long do we need to take heed to what God says? Until we **don't need it** anymore!

When will that be? When we are **with Him**—and our **faith turns to sight!**

Lastly, let's consider... **4. Peter's persuasion about what we possess**

What was Peter persuaded of regarding God's Word? What was he certain of? The 3 truths he lists in 20-21.

First... **A. No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation**

It is rather interesting to discover how much disagreement there is interpreting a verse **on interpretation!** Although commentators are divided as to **exactly** what vs 20 means, they do agree on what it **does not** mean.

It **does not mean** this: "You are **not allowed** to read the Bible for yourself because you can't properly **interpret it** for yourself! Only the **church leader** can interpret it properly." That is so far from the truth that I have a hard time even saying it! It **does not mean** that at all!

How do we know **that's not** what it means? Because we just learned in vs 19 that **we are all to take heed** to the words of the prophets! In order to do that, we need to **read and understand** what they wrote; in other words, **interpret it!** Not only that, in Acts 17 the Bereans are commended for **comparing Paul's preaching** to the OT Scriptures. You can't compare Scripture with Scripture without determining the meaning of it; in other words, **interpreting** it!

So now that we know what it **doesn't** mean, let's try to figure out what it **does** mean.

1) MacArthur uses vs 21 to help understand verse 20. Since vs 21 is talking about **the origin of Scripture**—that it came not by the will of man, but by holy men of God that were moved by the Holy—it would make sense that vs 20 **is also talking about** the origin of Scripture. Otherwise, vs 21 seems totally disconnected from vs 20.

2) Others—like Thomas Schreiner—suggest that **the word itself** refers to "unloosing, unraveling, and untying" which points more to **understanding meaning** than it does **origin**. The idea, then, is that Scripture cannot be interpreted **according to our own feelings or whims** the way false teachers do. There is an **intended meaning**—from God—that is found **in the text** and comes **from the text** and context. Although it is **not always easy to tell** what that intended meaning is, we cannot **make it mean** what we want it to mean!

Both views are valid, but I tend to agree with MacArthur. Since vs 21 starts with the word "For," it is obviously connected to vs 20 and seems to **give the reason** for what Peter said in vs 20.

Either way, **both** things are true: Scripture did not originate with man—and man can't interpret it "any old way" he wants to!

We already touched on the 2nd truth that Peter was persuaded of: **B. Prophecy came not by the will of man**

Please bear in mind that although Peter may **specifically** be talking about **the return of Christ**, this is true of **all Scripture**. None of the Bible originated **by the will of man**. That is not to say that the men God used were **unwilling partners** in the process. What it means, though, is that **they** didn't decide **what to write**—and **what not** to write. It was **not up to them**; it **was not** their creation. It was up **to God!**

Truth #3 that Peter was persuaded of. **C. Prophecy came from God**

We see that in the last half of vs 21 "...holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Again, this is true of **all Scripture**. We know that from II Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

It is all God-breathed—**not just the parts** about future events and the return of Jesus.

How did God do that? In vs 21, the word "moved" comes from the same Greek word that Paul used in the book of Acts to describe **a ship being moved** by the wind in its sails. So just as a ship is **moved along** by the wind, God the Holy Spirit **moved the men** that He used to write His Word.

But—if we are honest—that really doesn't tell us much **as to how**. The truth is we don't know exactly **how God did it** because God doesn't give us the details as to **how** He did it. And we **need to be content** with that reality—and accept it by faith! The theologian **Lewis Sperry Chafer wisely wrote**: "The Scriptures give abundant teaching to the **fact** of inspiration but do not offer explanation of this phenomenon. The **how** of every miracle is wanting [lacking], and inspiration is a miracle. Concerning this and all miracles, man is called upon to **believe** and not to **elucidate** [clarify or explain]." (*Systematic Theology* [Kregel], 1:82).

Simply put, if we believe **God created the world out of nothing** in six, literal, twenty-four-hour days, we can also believe that **God has the ability** to give us His Word—without error—even though He used sinful men as instruments to record it!

So what was Peter's conviction regarding what the prophets wrote? What was he persuaded of? That God's Word **originated with God** and consequently it is the **Word of God**.

Is that **your** conviction? **Are you** persuaded of those truths? God **wants you to be**—and He expects you to be! What will that **look** like?

If you are persuaded that **what we possess** is God's Word, I believe these 3 attitudes will be seen in your life:

- 1) You will want **to know** what it says. That means you will **want to be in church** to hear it—and that you will be daily reading it on your own.
- 2) You will also want **to do** what it says. If you believe it is God's Word, you will believe that you "do well" to take heed unto it like Peter says in vs 19!
- 3) And—if you believe it is truly God's Word to mankind—you will **want to share** what it says with others!

We have a wonderful possession, don't we? Even though we have not seen Jesus in His glory the way Peter did, we **have something** he didn't have—the completed revelation of God!

PRAY

So what does God want **you to do** in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First, evaluate your attitude toward the Word of God. Are you seeking to know what it says...and do what it says...and share what it says? If not, ask God to forgive you for your neglect of His Word—and start reading it and obeying it!

2. Second—but most importantly—are you saved? Are you born-again? Are you heaven-bound?

In just a moment, we are going to sing "Wonderful Words of Life."

The 3rd stanza reminds us that the gospel—the good news that Jesus died for our sins—is an "offer of pardon and peace to all."

Peace and pardon are offered to each of us as a gift through Jesus. But like any gift, it **needs to be received**. Have you received God's gift of salvation?