

2 Peter 1:16-21 *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. ¹⁷He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, 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. ²⁰Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹For 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.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Have you ever had a mountain top experience like Peter, James and John in our Gospel lesson? A mountain top experience is often described as being at an event that brings you to a spiritual high. You are uplifted, refreshed, and renewed. You are with like-minded believers and you wish you could stay there forever. Conferences can be like that for pastors and teachers—very uplifting and strengthening. Perhaps you've been to a Youth Rally or LWMS Rally or a marriage retreat and experienced something like this. Maybe that's your experience when you gather for worship on Sunday morning. You have the chance to get away from the constant problems of life and be uplifted and strengthened and full of peace...and you just don't want it to end. You want it to just keep going!

The challenge with mountain top experiences is they don't last forever. Peter found that out the hard way. He wanted to stay on that mountain top and keep that awesome experience going. But Jesus knew that before they could bask in his eternal glory, he needed to face the sufferings, death and hell that would win salvation for humankind. Before the glory first comes the cross. The harsh reality is that life is a journey that we must continue on and life on this earth includes sufferings and challenges. Linger as much as you on the mountain top, but eventually you've got to leave and get back to real life. It can be much like a vacation: the time was great and the place perfect, but eventually you've got to leave and get back to real life. We dread coming down from the mountain because we know there will be challenges before us—that's just the way it is living in a world of sin. We will continue to have to fight against our sinful nature as we struggle to resist the passions and desires to do the things we are not supposed to do. We will be mocked and ridiculed by those who laugh at us for calling something sin. We will be scorned by those who question our beliefs. We have to face those difficult questions: How do you know there is an absolute truth? How can you be sure whether there is a god or not? Do you really believe that God is coming back to destroy this earth and hold people accountable? How can you believe in a God who would be so mean to send people to hell? Life is a journey that comes with troubles along the way. We can't stay in one place forever and hide behind the walls of a monastery as the monks did in ages past trying to be exempt from the trappings and desires of the devil and our flesh. This journey can be tough and wearisome. We can easily get tired and exhausted from the constant struggle. We need spiritual strength to keep going and stay alert. We need the reassurance that we are on the right path and that we have a sure and solid hope on which to build our faith.

That is what God offers to us with the transfiguration of Jesus. Through the eyewitness testimony of Peter, James and John, God allows us a glimpse into the glory of Jesus. While Peter could not stay on the mountaintop, that experience shaped his life. As Peter was nearing the end of his life, he recounted what he saw at the transfiguration of Jesus to lay a foundation of confidence and provide the spiritual strength his readers needed to stand firm in their faith after he was gone. Peter wanted this experience to shape our lives as it shaped his. He wrote these words for believers like you and me who were struggling to make it through their pilgrimage without being discouraged to encourage them as they were ridiculed for believing in the coming Christ. He wrote down his eyewitness testimony so that believers then and still today would not lose their hope as they wait for the Lord's return. So that we never lose sight of the power and glory of Jesus, Peter shares these words with us to give us **Strength for the Journey**.

For us to have strength on our journey, we need to base our hope on an unshakeable source of truth. Working with youth over the years of my ministry, I have heard many cleverly invented stories which sound great but don't give the story teller much of a leg to stand on. I can tell you countless stories of high school students at youth rallies giving me excuses why this boy was in the that girls room or why they were out of their rooms at night when they were supposed to be sleeping. As one who made up his own cleverly invented stories at that age, it was easy to see that they had no place to stand. This is the problem with cleverly invented stories: they give you a little traction in the short term, but they don't last in the long term.

Peter tells us that what he wrote down and preached for the people could strengthen their hope because it was no myth or cleverly invented story. He wrote down what he saw with his own eyes. He was there on that mount of transfiguration and saw the glory of Jesus. He witnessed the honor and power given to Jesus as he spoke with Moses and Elijah and as the Father spoke his words of approval. This gives us an unshakeable source of truth which has been laid as a solid foundation of our faith: the word of God in the Bible. Jesus really is who he said he was. He really did what he said he would do. Just look at the evidence these disciples provided. Every one of them were martyred for their faith. They held firm to what they saw even though it meant death for them. If what these men wrote on the pages of the Bible were truly a cleverly invented myth or story, do you think every single one of them would have been willing to give their life for it? Don't you think if what they wrote were only a story that had been made up, that at least one of them would have cracked with

faced with the possibility of death—and most of them in a very painful way. Yet to a man, they were willing to give up their life because of what they saw.

Many in our world today still challenge the authority of scripture. They question whether a book written 2000 years ago has any relevance to their lives. They allow themselves to pick what seems to be believable to them but to discard what they deem to be impossible. Many today see the Bible as nothing more than a bunch of myths and cleverly invented stories that teach some good lessons about morals and crutch for people too weak minded to stand for themselves. But this provides no foundation of faith. It's like walking on ice that is razor thin and convincing yourself that you are ok. Eventually that ice is going to break. It may not come until Jesus comes again...but it will come. And at that time it will be too late.

Despite what many might say in our world today, the coming of Jesus is a reality. It will be a visible, majestic event full of fanfare, pomp and circumstance. But it will also include the final judgment of all people and the destruction of the world. This is the destination of our journey of life. Our life is a pilgrimage to the day when we will stand before our Lord Jesus in judgment. I wonder, how much is this on our minds as we go about our daily lives? The stress, busyness and worries of this past week may not have left us with the joyful spirit of a bride waiting for the bridegroom. The sins that we committed, the cares and pressures of life keep focusing our attention on the here and now. Sometimes, we are just trying to make it through the day before us. We get so frenzied that we don't always rely on solid truth but on what we think is logical and best.

Yet make no mistake about it: Jesus is coming and he will hold us accountable. This is no myth or fable or made up story. You read about millennialism or the Left Behind series that are nothing more than man-made fables which offer only temporary consolation. They are cleverly invented stories that will be blown apart when Jesus comes back to this earth. What Peter gives to us is an eyewitness account. Peter saw the glory of Jesus and heard the voice of the Father speaking approval on his son. It is in this eyewitness account that we find strength for our journey.

The whole transfiguration account happened as a strengthening event. It first strengthened Jesus as he prepared to set out on the final leg of his journey to suffer and die for the sins of the world. It focused him on his mission and reminded him of the full glory waiting for him when the mission was over. It strengthened Peter and the disciples in their faith as they would witness what Jesus went through and then be sent out on the mission of proclaiming this good news to the world. It strengthened them and shaped their lives to the point that they would rather suffer pain and death than recant their message or give up their faith. It is shared with us for our strengthening today. Our Christian faith is not built on myths or legends but on the reality of God's Son living in human flesh. We have the opportunity today to see in Jesus the glory of God keeping his promise made all the way back to Adam and Eve to send a Savior into this world. As we glimpse this glory, we know that Jesus was God's Son who came with the Father's approval to carry out the work of saving humankind. The one whose suffering we will focus our attention on throughout the season of Lent before us is the perfect lamb of God who deserved none of what he suffered but willingly endured it on our behalf. He fulfilled the words of the prophets and gave certainty to what God promised. We rejoice in this account because it confirms our faith in Jesus as our Savior. With the Father's approval, we can be certain that God accepted his sacrifice for our sins and that everything that needed to be done for our salvation has been fully completed.

Confidence in the truth of Scripture gives us certainty in an uncertain world. The Bible is a package deal. You can't pick and choose what to believe and what not to believe. Either you believe all of it or you have to question all of it. When we stand firm on these words of God given by the Holy Spirit, we can go forward with a confident faith no matter what we face. Knowing that all of the Bible is God's word gives us the confidence that God will hold firm to the promises he made to us as we face the trials and challenges of life. We can stand firm during as those in our world heap ridicule and scorn on us for believing what we believe because we have the certainty that God will deliver in the end. His promises will come true. It gives us the strength to keep going forward because we know that a mountaintop experience awaits us that will last forever. That is the one waiting for us in heaven. Like Jesus, when we stand firm and endure the crosses that come for our faith here, we will be able to enjoy the glory of God forever that he has waiting for us in heaven. When our journey stops on the mountaintop of heaven, we will never have to leave. There we can stay forever. The glory that we see in Jesus today will be ours for eternity. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we will receive the Father's approval to enter into eternal glory. It is this glory of Jesus that we are certain is waiting for us in heaven that gives us the strength to continue forward on our journey. It is our confidence in God's Word that gives us certainty in an uncertain world.

Anyone who tells you that God's word is a myth or a fable or isn't relevant to your life today simply hasn't read it. Reading God's word will convince you of his glory as our Savior and of the glory that awaits us in heaven and it will strengthen your faith in him. I pray that every time you read God's Word, whether here at worship or every day as you read it at home, that you have a mountaintop experience. Let that time in God's word give you confidence, peace and strength for your journey. Amen.