

Text: 2 Peter 1:16-21**Theme: A Light that Shines in a Dark Place**

Last fall I saw the places of the Holy Land. It was a trip that I will never forget. Some of the places were easy to connect with how they are described in the Bible, like the homes in the village of Capernaum or the descent of the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem. Other things were a lot different from Bible times, like jet-skis and water skiers on the Sea of Galilee. It was an interesting trip and illuminated a lot of what the Bible speaks of, but it was no substitute for the Word of God in the Scriptures, which Peter describes as a light that shines in a dark place.

I. There are many things that testify to the truth of the Gospel.

Peter saw many things in his life. He writes that the apostles did not make up myths when they preached the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus. The Greeks and Romans had a lot of myths about their gods. My guess is that everyone knew that they were not true. But Peter writes that he actually witnessed all of the things that he and the other apostles testified to. He, James, and John were on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured. They heard the booming voice of God the Father from heaven declare that Jesus is His beloved Son. He saw the Lord change water into wine, walk on water, and feed 5,000 people with a little boy's lunch. They saw the Lord die and watched where his dead body was laid. They saw Him after He had risen and watched Him ascend into heaven. The apostles were witnesses of all of these things.

Yet, those great deeds of Jesus never brought faith. Shortly after Jesus fed the 5,000, all of those people left Him. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests began to plan how to kill Him. One of the disciples, Judas, betrayed Jesus into their hands. Peter Himself denied the Lord 3 times in the courtyard of the High Priest. It even says that as Jesus ascended into Heaven, that some of them doubted. Seeing was not believing. They were still darkened by too much unbelief.

That continues today. Archeology has shown how the stories that we have in the Scriptures are true. The places where we went in the Holy Land, were exactly as the Bible describes them. I also think of the lives of Christian people and how they are an example of Christian faith, hope, and love. Many congregations do a lot of social ministry to help the people of their area with food pantries, clothing, and other things. I think that one of the saddest things that I hear said at funerals is when someone will tell me that Grandma's faith meant a lot to her, but they don't seem to desire to share the same faith and hope that their Grandma had in Christ. There are many evidences for our faith in archeology, in the mercy of the church, and in the lives of God's people, but they don't necessarily bring us to believe in Christ.

II. It is only the word of God that enlightens our hearts.

The Bible was given to us to bring faith in Christ. John writes at the end of His Gospel, "*These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His name.*" (Jn 20:31) When Peter preached on Pentecost and 3,000 people believed, most of his sermon was from the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul writes that the Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. In our text, Peter writes

that the Scriptures are even more sure than what the apostles saw. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible, so that what they wrote was God's Word, right down to the smallest letter. As we hear and read those words, the Holy Spirit uses those words to bring faith into our hearts. It brings us from the darkness of unbelief and sin to trust that Christ died on the cross to bear my sins and rose as my Savior on Easter morning. As Paul writes, "*Faith comes by hearting, and hearing by the word of God.*" (Rom 10:17) It's also like the song says, "Jesus loves me, this I know, **for the Bible tells me so.**"

Think of some of those times when God's Word worked on your heart. To this day, I can remember the day when I first read Psalm 73 in high school or Romans 8 in college. I love preparing for Bible classes, because it helps me to grow in my faith as I look at a book of the Bible in depth. When I was a vicar, I learned a lot from a study of Genesis that I did. My class on the book of Exodus was an enlightening experience for me last year.

I have also seen how the word of God works in the hearts of people. Monday, I did my monthly nursing home service on this text. When the residents saw "Jesus Loves Me" on the sheet, they all began to sing it before I started. In my sermon, I recalled several Bible verses, and they said them all right with me - John 3:16, "For God so loved the world...; Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my Shepherd..." Despite all that they are going through in their old age, that word of God is still shining in their hearts. I had the same experience with an elderly German lady recently. I began with the 1st verse of a Paul Gerhardt hymn. She was able to recite all 12 of them and remarked how those hymns have helped her through life.

That is why it is so important that our kids learn Bible verses, Bible stories, prayers, and Christian songs right from the beginning. Those things will build their faith in Christ and will guide through their lives until the Lord calls them to His glory. There is no greater treasure that we can give to our kids and grandkids than to fill their hearts with the Word of God from the Scriptures.

This world is very dark. Think of some of the horrific things that have been in the news, just in the past week. There is something however, which shines in a dark place. That is the life-giving word of God. Read that word of God, listen to it. As the prayer says, "inwardly digest it." Meditate on it. You will find that as it points you to God's love in Christ, the day will dawn, and the Morning Star, our Savior Jesus Christ, will rise in your hearts, as you are drawn to believe in Him as our Savior. May God grant us each such a love for His word.

Amen.

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