The Glory of Christ and the Word of God
2 Peter 1:16-21

So we're back in 2 Peter and the part of the letter where Peter makes a turn. So far he's called us to live lives of virtue - *not* so we earn God's favour, but because - in Christ - we already have it. And because, as we live those lives, God will see us through to the end and welcome us into his eternal kingdom.

Except, Peter knows that there are people in the churches he's writing to telling the others, 'Nah! Peter's just telling you that to manipulate you, to get you to behave the way he wants.' And in particular, we know from what comes later in the letter, these people were undermining the apostles' teaching on Jesus' second coming and the final judgment. They're saying things like, chapter 3:4, "Where is the promise of his coming?" 'I mean, Peter and the others are telling you Jesus is coming back but we don't see any sign of that. They're just telling you that to control you. But you can live free of that kind of fear and fairy tales.' And needless to say, as we'll see in the weeks to come, the kind of freedom they're advocating for is to do with sex, money and authority.

Nothing changes, does it? And not just the sex and the money bit. But the authority that the apostles' should have in your life. Because that teaching is now our New Testament and there are plenty of people who will tell you, you shouldn't let that be the authority in your life; the Bible, the church, it's all about controlling you. You should be your own authority. Don't let anyone else take that place.'

But Peter's saying, 'no, the Bible should be the authority in your life, and for good reasons.' And we're going to look at three/four things: What the Bible isn't; what the Bible is, part 1; what the Bible is, part 2; and what you should do with it.

What the Bible Isn't.
Look at v16, 'For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Now, Roman/Greek religion was all about myths. Stories of what the gods got up to. But they weren't just stories for entertainment, they had a purpose. Aristotle said, 'the mythical form is chosen…' so that the masses can learn '…religious and ethical instruction.'

So, the philosophers knew the stories of the gods weren't *literally* true but they served a useful purpose - they taught virtue, courage, morality. Or think of Plato's 'Noble Lie', and how a society's elite can legitimately propagate a lie, a myth they know to be false, in order to maintain social harmony.

And that's what the false teachers are accusing Peter of doing. Of knowing that Christianity is not *literally* true, but it is useful, for its leaders, for society. And if you think about it, that's what Marx and Nietzsche and their descendants accuse Christianity of being: myths used for social control, the thing that makes you the people, or you the individual, weak or compliant. And we should be done with it.

But of course you don't have to be a Marxist or a wannabe Nietschean Ubermensch to think like that. That the central claims of Christianity, like Jesus rising from the dead, aren't literally true, but they are useful to teach us how to live moral lives. But what happens if you think like that? Well, you're free to pick and choose the bits you want to follow and which you don't. And that bit about

loving your neighbour speaks to you, but that bit about not sleeping with your neighbour? that's so archaic.

And the Bible becomes *an influence* in your life, but it's not your *authority*.

And Peter's saying, yes but Christianity is *not* cleverly devised myths. It's unlike any other religion. The gospel is not moral instruction - it's not 'this is what *you* should do', it's 'this is what Christ has done for you, in history, and what he *will* do, in history.'

Look again at v16, 'For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' And he's almost certainly talking about the apostles' teaching that one day Christ will return in glory. Because the word Peter uses for 'coming' is *parousia*, which means presence, or appearing. It's the word used for the arrival of a king on a state visit, and how the crowds would go out to meet him and escort him back into the city. And in the New Testament *parousia* becomes *the* word for Jesus' second coming and his return as king.

And Peter's saying, when we teach you that, we aren't making it up. This is not some kind of noble lie to get you to live a virtuous life, like: look busy, Jesus is coming!

Instead, Peter tells them what his and the other apostles teaching is and, therefore…

What the Bible Is - part 1

Verse 16, 'we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.' And Peter's got a specific event in mind, and how Peter and James and John went with Jesus up a mountain and saw him transfigured before them, as Matthew tells us, 'And his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light' (Matt 17:2).

And Peter's telling them and us, we are not making that up, we saw it. And what he saw was like a sneak peek, it was like a trailer to a movie. It was like a superhero pulling open his shirt and you get a glimpse of the superhero logo underneath, and you just know something's about to happen.

Because what Peter saw was something of who Jesus really is. In the words of the Christmas carol, 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity!' And momentarily, the curtain was pulled back and Peter and James and John saw his majesty. The majesty of the Word become flesh. That in the words of the creed, he is very God who was made man. And Peter's saying, 'You think our teaching is just a useful myth? Believe me, we have seen his glory, we've had a foretaste of his future coming, and it is no myth.'

Now, if I were to tell you, 'I've entered an ultra-marathon and I am going to win it,' you would right ly laugh. But if our friend David Niblack said, 'I've entered the same race and I've got every intention of winning' no one would laugh. Why? Because David's got form, he's got a track record.

And Peter's saying, 'You think we've made this up? You question the idea of Jesus returning in glory? No, we've seen his form. We're eyewitnesses to his glory. And when he comes, he's coming as king.' Because, they weren't just eyewitnesses, they were ear-witnessees… if that isn't mangling the English language.

Verses 17-18, ‘For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, *and the voice* was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well please,” *we ourselves heard this very voice* borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.’

Now, have you ever had that experience of hearing a new piece of music and there’s something about the chords or the progression or the melody that makes you think, ‘That sounds just like another piece of music I know’?

Well, at the Transfiguration, if you listen, there are echoes of three separate pieces from the Old Testament.

And the first is a song, Psalm 2, ‘“As for me, I have set *my king* on Zion, *my holy hill*.” I will tell of the decree: the Lord said to me, “*You are my Son*; today I have begotten you.”’ And that psalm was most likely written for a coronation. But if you look at it, it goes beyond any king we encounter in the Bible, because this king will possess every nation, to the ends of the earth. And every other king will worship this king, and he will vanquish all his enemies, and yet be the One in whom people find refuge. And you think, what kind of a king is that?

But here is Jesus, Peter says, on a holy mountain, a holy hill, and God the Father takes the words of the Psalm and says, ‘This is my Son’ - the heir to the throne above every throne.

But then there’s a second echo, from Genesis 22, where God tells Abraham to “Take your son, your only son Isaac, *whom you love*” and sacrifice him on Mount Moriah, which became Mount Zion, the holy mountain on which Jerusalem and the temple were built. But of course, what happens is that God steps in and provides a substitute, a ram, in place of Isaac. But the story leaves you reeling - why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son? And then you hear what Peter heard, on another mountain, as God says of Jesus, “This is *my* Son, *my* beloved Son.” The Son who will become the substitute and sacrifice to end all sacrifice.

But then there’s a third echo, from Isaiah 42:1, ‘Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, *in whom my soul delights.’* And the servant Isaiah describes becomes the suffering servant who bears our griefs and carries our sorrows; who was pierced for our transgressions and was crushed for our iniquities, and by whose wounds we are healed. And through Isaiah, God says, ‘behold him, the one in whom my soul delights.’ And at Jesus’ transfiguration God the Father speaks again and says, ‘behold my Son, my beloved, the One in whom my soul delights.’

We saw it and we heard it, Peter says. The glory of God’s anointed king who will come and claim his inheritance; the beloved Son and ultimate substitute and sacrifice; and the suffering sin-bearing servant. And we’re not making it up, Peter says.

Now maybe you think, ok, sure, I get that the New Testament was written by eyewitnesses, but the Bible as a whole, as the authority in my life, telling me what I should and shouldn’t do? I mean what about the Old Testament?

What the Bible Is - part 2

Look at v19, ‘And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention.’

So, it's not just that Jesus' transfiguration is a trailer of what's to come, it's also a confirmation of what's already happened: the words the prophets have spoken. But which prophets is Peter talking about?

Because if you were a Jew living at the time of Jesus, you'd be forgiven for thinking that when Messiah came, he would come as a king and Israel's enemies would be conquered, and the hills would drip with wine, and everything would be put right.

Which explains why those who believed Jesus was that Messiah and watched him die the death of the accursed on a cross, were crushed by it; as two of them, on the road to Emmaus that first Easter Sunday morning, said to the stranger walking beside them, "we *had* hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21).

But the stranger, Christ himself, risen from the dead, said, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter his glory?" And beginning *with Moses and all the Prophets*, he interpreted to them *in all the Scriptures* the things concerning himself' (Luke 24:25-27).

In other words, it's not just a few isolated texts in the prophets that speak of Christ, the whole Old Testament does. And some of what it says was fulfilled in his first coming, but other stuff will only be fulfilled in his second. But we know God will do it, Peter says, because we've seen a foretaste of it.

And yet, the Old Testament doesn't stand on our authority, Peter is saying, but on its own. Verses 20-21, 'Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.'

So, it's not just that the New Testament is eyewitness testimony and *not* cleverly devised myths, it's that the Old Testament and the Bible as a whole is not a human invention at all. That Moses, or David, or Isaiah, or Jeremiah decided, 'I know, I'm going to write some stuff about God', and then someone had the great idea of put it all together. No, Peter says, 'no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man.'

Instead, 'men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (v21). So, if in v17, the voice of God was 'borne' - literally *carried* - to Jesus at his transfiguration. And if in v18, the apostles heard that voice as it was 'borne [literally, again, carried] from heaven' then all the Bible writers, Peter says in v21, were also carried - same verb - by God's Spirit.

So just as God spoke at and through the Transfiguration, of who Jesus was and is, so he spoke and still speaks through the Bible… so that same voice carries to us.

But maybe you hear that and think, 'yeh, but are we really supposed to think that these 66 books really have just one author God? Because they are so different from one another.' Well, yes and no. You see, when I was a doctor I had one of those dictaphones. And after seeing my patients in clinic I'd sit in my office and dictate my letters to their family doctors. 'Dear Dr Smith, it was a pleasure to see little Jimmy in clinic today.' And then I'd hand the tape over to my secretary and she'd type

out the letter, I'd sign it and she'd put it in the post. And the letters were all boring Dr Slack, there was none of the personality of my secretary in them, and believe me, she was a personality.

That's not what's going on with Scripture. The writers were not dictating machines. Verse 21, 'Men spoke…' - with all their different personalities and styles and characteristics. Men spoke, but God had created them and fashioned them and chosen them and placed them in history so that when they spoke, Peter says, they 'spoke from God' - and said just what he wanted them to say. That like a ship raising its sails and being carried along by the wind, so these men raised their sails and were carried along by the Spirit.

So, it's not just that the Transfiguration tells us that Jesus is fully man and fully God, it's that the Bible is 100% written by men, and 100% inspired by God - it's his authoritative, infallible, inerrant word. It's why Paul writes, 'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness' (2 Tim 3:16).

Which is why Peter says it should be the authority in your life. Because if it's not something much less good will take its place.

What You Should Do With it

You see, whether you acknowledge it or not, something is the authority in your life, something gives you a moral code, that tells you the things you should do and the things you should never do. Last weekend Su was helping with another church's retreat, and when she told the kids that Jesus comes for all kinds of people, one of the kids said, 'but not for bad people'. To which Su said, 'yes, even for bad people. To which the kid replied, 'but not really bad people.' To which Su said, 'yes even really bad ones. To which they replied, 'yes but not for people who put plastic in the oceans.' And so your moral code will even give you your version of the unforgivable sin.

And today you're told that that authority, that code should come from within you. That you should be your own authority and you should do what ever feels right to you. But in reality, as Jonathan said a few weeks back at his baptism, that just leaves you like a puppet in the hands of puppet masters. Because what kind of guide are your feelings? They go up and down and sometimes you want one thing and sometimes another, or both at the same time, but they contradict each other. Or you'll be hostage to the surrounding culture, and the good opinion of those people you dare not offend lest they cancel you.

So if you're looking inside for light, things are going to be pretty dark. But maybe you're not, maybe you *are* looking to something outside yourself, like I read this week how Rory McIlroy, the captain of the European Ryder Cup golf team, turned to the writings of Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics to get himself out of a tight spot. Or maybe you have an eclectic approach and take a bit from the Bible, and a bit from Jordan Petersen, and a bit from Oprah Winfrey.

But does it have the power to convict and critique you, as well as encourage you? Is it a light that shines into the deepest, darkest recesses of your heart, or is it just an extension and expression of yourself? Does it have the power to humble you to the dust at the same time as lifting you to the skies? Does it show you how broken you are and yet how loved and infinitely valuable you are? Does it tell you, as CS Lewis said, that one day you will either be an eternal horror, if you carry on growing more like yourself, or something so magnificent, so beautiful, that if we saw it now we would be tempted to fall down and worship you? Which is what Christianity says. Or, like the

philosophy of these false teachers, does it tell you, ‘you should live how you want to live, and don’t let anyone stand in the way of that’?

Look again at v19, ‘We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.’

We’re all walking in the dark, Peter says: the world is dark, our cultures are dark, but so too are our hearts. But God’s word, the Bible, is like a lamp shining, Peter says. A light with the power to steady your emotions, because it shows you God is your rock. A light that frees you from being a puppet of the opinion of others because it tells you what God thinks of you. A light upon your path, telling you, ‘nope you’ve taken a wrong turn, this is the way, walk in it.’ A light you can trust, because you know its author loved you so much he died for you.

But if it’s to have that kind of power, Peter says, it’s got to be your authority. You’ve got to pay attention to it.

How do you do that? Well, as our girls had drummed into them in youth: read the Bible and pray every single day. Get yourself a Bible reading program. Read it slowly. Read it attentively, read it meditatively. Read it with others in your home groups. But whatever you do, read it. And as you read it, remember, you have the author of every book sat beside you. So, ask him to show you the glory of Jesus that Peter got to see.

And do that, Peter says, ‘until the day dawns.’ Meaning, don’t quit, don’t succumb to the false teachers, it may be dark now but daybreak is coming, when, v19, ‘The morning star rises in your hearts.’

When the false prophet Balaam was asked to curse Israel he couldn’t. Instead he said, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: *a star shall come out of Jacob*, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Num 24:17). And in Revelation Jesus says, I am that star: “I am the root and the descendent of David, the bright morning star” (Rev 22:16).

So, the Transfiguration and God’s word tell you, Jesus is the king, and one day he will return and put everything right, and you are no fool to believe it. He has got form. So make him and his word the authority, the guiding light in your life, whatever anyone else says.