

## Something Sure and Certain

2 Peter 1:19-21

When the United States Constitution was finally ratified, it seemed to give a new and lasting identity to our very young country. And it was a momentous occasion, unique in the history of mankind, for the establishment of constitutional republic that was successfully designed to be permanent. For 240 years now, we have enjoyed the strength and wisdom of that constitution with great benefits for our nation, not the least of which is the peaceful transfer of power we experience with every Presidential administration. But still, Benjamin Franklin gave us all a wise and memorable warning, "Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."

Nothing can be said to be certain in this world! How true. What is there that is sure and certain in this life? Nothing. Nothing at all. What exists today may not exist tomorrow. Whatever defines reality for today may not be accurate tomorrow. Whatever you have, whatever you enjoy, whatever it is, there is no guarantee that you will have it tomorrow. That could mean your worldly wealth or material prosperity. It could mean your job. Even your health. And, of course, your life. Or the life of those whom you know and love. There is nothing upon which you can take your stand and know that you can be confident and secure that it will remain the same tomorrow, or next week.

You all know that. In your own experience. And I suspect, in one way or another, everyone of you feels that this morning. Some measure of uncertainty. Some aspect of your life that is obviously uncertain. Maybe painfully so.

In this world, there is nothing sure and certain. Except one

thing. The word of God.

Isaiah has a particularly poignant way of putting it, comparing our lives to grass. Grass that fades, like the grass on my yard back in Atlanta. Grass withers. Grass dies. And our lives are like grass.

Is. 40:6 "A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Similarly,

Psalms 103:15 "As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; 16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more."

The contrast there is with God's love, as the Psalm continues, Psalm 103:17 "But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children."

So nothing remains, nothing is permanent. There is no security in this world. None at all. No guarantees. Nothing that is unchangeable, for ultimately, everything is passing away.

Now for some people, that message is very disheartening. For some, overwhelmingly depressing. And a source of great struggle, because so much of life is focused upon the attempt to gain some security. And that is a natural and normal desire. That's why the struggles of life become so painful, because there is nothing certain, nothing to hold on to. And with the Lord, with a true and lively faith, this message would be all but disastrous for you. Because there are struggles. There is sickness and death.

There are financial losses and things we could label as catastrophes. And all of those things hurt, they cause us much grief. And apart from the Lord, I am drawing a picture really of despair.

But it is not despair, because there is one thing that is sure and certain. Ultimately, of course, that would be God, but God is a spirit and does not have a body. He does not live in the flesh and bones world we call the earth. He lives and exists in the spiritual realm, so what do we have sure and certain in this physical realm of our lives on earth? In other words, how does the infinite, eternal and unchangeable God make his presence known on earth?

In other words, what can you actually grab a hold of, here and now, in order to find a sure and certain place to stand, as you confront and battle all the complexities and uncertainties of life?

There is an answer. It is the word of God. And Peter has already emphasized that. Remember what he wrote,

1 Peter 1:24 “All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25 But the word of the Lord endures forever.” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”

So that which is sure and certain is not just some imaginary or mysterious philosophy— it is the “gospel that was preached to you.” That doesn’t change. We have something that doesn’t change, what Peter calls in verse 19 “the prophetic word.” What he calls in verse 20, the “prophecy of Scripture.” So let’s look at those words more closely. The prophecy of Scripture.

What does the word “Scripture” mean? Literally, the writings. Or, that which is written. And we are familiar with that idea of

something written being something certain. So, when you say, “Put it in writing,” that means, make it certain! Put it in writing means, give me a guarantee. And that is what God did. God took his word, and put it in writing. That is what we refer to as the “Scriptures.”

### **I. The Scriptures are sure and certain.**

That which God has written, is sure and certain.

Do you remember when Satan tempted Jesus, how Jesus answered? “It is written...” And then, of course, he quoted from the Bible. Those three words now define the very essence of God’s word made certain, “it is written.”

Remember God’s word came to his people often throughout their history during Old Testament. There were a lot of prophets, lots of prophecy. God revealed himself through his son Jesus throughout his life on earth. And John tells us,

John 21:25 “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.”

But some things were written!

John 21:24 “This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.”

Similarly,

John 20:30 “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

That which is written is sure and certain. Because it is the word of God. And, ultimately, that is the meaning of the word prophecy. I know that sometimes prophecy can have a broader and more inclusiveness definition, something like a simple proclamation or forthtelling, but at its most basic level the definition of prophecy is nothing less than the speaking of God's word through the mouth of a man. The literal definition is "mouth to mouth." God speaks mouth to mouth, that is, he puts his mouth, his words, into the mouth of a man. So that when the prophet speaks, God speaks!

Numbers 12:4 Suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. 5 Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. 6 Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. 7 Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. 8 I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?"

"I speak with him face to face." The Hebrew words are mouth to mouth. I put my words into his mouth. That's a prophet. Again, with that same definition,

Deut. 18:18 "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. 19 And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him."

That's prophecy. The eternal word of God is spoken in the language of men. And look at what Peter dares to claim.

v.19 "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed."

Made more certain! There is something very amazing in that verse. Remember from last week what Peter has just written. Peter has been an eyewitness to the majesty of God.

2Pet. 1:16 "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain."

And now Peter says, we have a word made more sure than that! A word more sure than the eyewitness account of Peter. More sure for us than God's own declaration to Peter. More sure than that glorious revelation of God at the transfiguration of Jesus Christ.

How is that eyewitness account of Jesus' glory made even more sure for us? It was written down. It is confirmed. The word of the prophets, now confirmed, is the Holy Scriptures. So we have prophecy, the prophetic word of God, confirmed by a permanent record which we call the Bible. The Scriptures.

Now, next question. How do you know? How do you know it that the Bible is the word of God? And Peter answers that questions by defining the origin of the prophecy of Scripture. In other words, where did it come from? What is the origin of prophecy?

I can answer that negatively, and positively. In other words, negatively, the origin of prophecy is not man. But rather God.

## **B. The origin of prophecy: God, not man.**

The prophecy of Scripture did not begin as an idea in the mind of a man. Peter is explicit,

v.20 "...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man..."

Now, why do I emphasize this so much? Because the Bible is under attack today, at nearly every turn. There are those who believe they find errors in the Bible. There are those who believe they can disregard parts of the Bible. There are those who simply live in ignorance of the Bible, sometimes willful, intentional ignorance. They simply don't want to know what the Bible says.

There are those who relegate the Bible to a collection of man-made stories, of cleverly invented stories that amount to nothing more than myths.

If you think that I'm overstating my case, then you don't understand the religious culture in which we live. This is the question that needs to be asked, to define the foundation of true faith, "Is the Bible the word of God, infallible and inerrant in all that it contains?" People of God, it is. The Bible is the infallible, inerrant word of God. It is, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, the Word of God. The prophetic word is confirmed.

That commitment is the foundation of this church, and it has been since our denomination was founded in the 1930's. It is the foundation of my ministry, and the foundation of my faith as I am called to preach the gospel to you. This is God's word. It originated with God, not in the mind or the will of a man.

Peter then gives us an additional explanation regarding the certainty of that prophecy, noting not only the origin of the

prophetic word but also its transmission. Exactly how did this word from the mouth of God be put into the mouth of the prophet? Straightforward answer, that's the work of the Holy Spirit.

## **C. The transmission of prophecy: The work of the Holy Spirit.**

v.21 "...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Here is an easy to understand definition of what we call the doctrine of "inspiration." First, men spoke from God. Again, the reference to the origin of their prophecy was God. It was not their own idea.

And they spoke "as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Carried along, the NIV has it.

Such descriptive language! The word for "moved" was used of a ship carried along by the wind. The symbolism here is that the prophets raised their sails and the Holy Spirit filled them and carried their craft along in the direction He wished. Men spoke. God spoke.

The men who wrote the Bible all had different personalities. They had different styles of writing, with a different choice of words and slightly different forms of grammar. They were all unique individuals, not merely stenographers taking dictation. But, all that they wrote was governed and controlled by the Holy Spirit. That's the definition of "inspiration," a word which we find in,

2 Tim.3:16 "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Inspiration means “God-breathed.” It means that God breathed out his very words into the heart and mouth of the prophets, so that the result was truly God’s own word.

Remember that Peter is speaking about “prophecy of Scripture.” Prophecy that is written down because it is from God. Prophecy that is recorded for us and included in the collection of writings we call the Bible. So there should be no distinction, therefore, between Scripture and such prophecy. That which was given as prophecy under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was received as Scripture by God’s people.

Thus I would say that if prophecy continues today, in this inspired sense of the word of God being carried along by the Holy Spirit, then the Bible needs to keep growing and expanding. But of course, it won’t be. For we have the very specific warning given by the last of the Apostles to write words of prophecy,

Rev. 22:18 “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

People of God, the Word of God has come to us through the mouth of the prophet. And God put put his own words into the mouth of the prophet. So that what the prophets spoke, as the prophets wrote, this is true, that, “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

How do you know the Bible is true, and, for instance, the Koran not true? How do you know that the Bible is true, and, for instance, that the writings of Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon are not true? Because only the Bible alone originated with God.

Only the Bible was written by men as God breathed out that word in order to put it into their mouths! The Bible, alone among all other books, is the inspired word of God. And to go back to my main point, it alone is sure and certain, unchanging and unchangeable in the ever-changing world in which we live.

Now, the application. What does that mean for your life and for my life? Go back to our text.

v.19 “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

“You do well to heed.” “You do well to pay attention.” That’s a rather nice way of saying it, isn’t it? The very strong exhortation is very gently understated. You will do well to pay attention to what the Bible says. Perhaps that’s stating the obvious, but let me emphasize it for you all the more this morning.

## **II. THE SCRIPTURES MUST BE APPLIED TO YOUR LIVES.**

Nothing here is merely theoretical. Nothing that you can just listen to without a call to respond. That’s the implication, isn’t it, of believing that the Bible is the word of God.

### **A. You must pay attention to the Bible.**

What does that mean for us today? First of all, you must pay attention to what the Bible says when you are being taught, by me or anyone else.

Acts 17:10 “Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”

Search the Scriptures, whenever you are sitting under the preaching or teaching of another man. And search the Scriptures when you confront all the various issues of life. Make sure that you aren't being attracted to cleverly invented stories, which Peter refers to in verse 16. Make sure that you don't turn your ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths, as Paul urges Timothy in 2 Timothy 4.

Make sure that your doctrine is determined by what the Bible says, not by your own tradition nor simply how you were raised. Make sure that your conscience is informed by the law of God revealed in the Bible, that you don't find yourself more restrictive than Scripture in areas of Christian freedom, nor find yourself too lax in violating God's holy laws.

Make sure that you are attempting to conform your life to what the Bible teaches, in every area of your life. And in that regard, make sure that you are reading the Bible. Day in and day out. Make sure that you are listening carefully and pay attention whenever there is opportunity to learn, whether that is in Sunday School, Bible Study, or here in a worship service.

Pay attention to the Word of God. And as Peter continues, pay attention to it, "as to a light that shines in a dark place." That dark place, I believe, is a metaphor or illustration of our whole life upon this earth. Therefore, the idea is that,

**B. You must allow the Bible to shine in the darkness of your lives.**

The Greek word "darkness" refers to something dry and parched, dirty and murky. Not necessarily absolute darkness, but dingy and dusky obscurity. In Calvin's words, "I extend this darkness of which Peter speaks to cover the whole span of life, and I understand the day to dawn upon us when we see face to

face what we now perceive through a glass darkly."

In the dark confusion of this life, which for some people reaches the point of hopeless desperation, in the darkness of our minds when it comes to controlling, understanding, predicting, and relating to all the events and circumstances that come upon us, in the darkness of confusion and bewilderment, the Word of God shines as a light.

You know some of the cross references,

Ps. 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path."

Today, every day. And until the end of the age! Until Jesus returns.

**C. You must allow the Bible to direct your life until Jesus returns.**

Peter's words are amazing, and they give us such a marvelous focus and context.

v.19 "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

The emphasis here seems to be on the life-long pursuit of obedience in the life of a Christian, the life-long pursuit of seeking to conforming yourself to the will of God revealed in Scripture. And so I believe that this verse is a reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ, for the day that dawns is the day of his coming. It is the day when "the morning star rises in your hearts."

That morning star is, of course, Jesus. We read in, Rev. 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of

David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

Until you see Jesus face to face, until you are made perfect in glory in the fullness of his presence, until that day comes, let the prophecy of Scripture be a light that shines in a dark place. And where the Word of God shines its light, walk. Follow. Pay attention! Peter is saying that you need to pay attention to the Word of God and apply it to the difficult darkness of your own lives as long as you live! Until Jesus returns.

Again, in Calvin’s words, “Peter is reminding us that as long as we are on pilgrimage through this world we need the teaching of the prophets to be as a guiding light, which if it is quenched we can do nothing but wander in darkness...His only purpose is to show that the whole course of our life ought to be ruled by the Word of God, because otherwise we are surrounded on every side by the darkness of ignorance, and the Lord only gives us light when we look at His Word as our lamp.”

So, is it? Is the Word of God a lamp to your feet and a light for your path?

It must be, as you pay careful attention to it. Let the Word enlighten your minds. Let the Word of God determine what you believe and how you ought to live. You who believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, “you do well to pay attention” to it.

Is. 40: 8 “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”