

“What Do You See?”

2 Peter 1:16-21

February 23, 2020

Have you been following all of the stories on the coronavirus and what it actually does to the body? Or maybe you've been busy reading about all of the people running for president – where they stand on the issues, how they performed in their latest debate, or what promises they are making if they are elected president. Or, maybe you haven't heard the latest about the coronavirus or the individuals running for president, because you've been focused on the cheating scandal of the Houston Astros baseball team or the contestants still standing on “The Bachelor” hoping to get a rose from Peter. There's so much news and information available to us in this digital age that it's hard to know what to focus on. We can't even keep up with the Facebook posts and emails we receive every day from family and friends.

So our second lesson for today is going to help us cut through the information overload so that we are directing our attention to the one news source that is eternally vital – the Bible. Peter, in this text, urges us to pay attention to the Bible, because it was placed in this world by God himself and it is the only thing that leads us back to God.

But why should we pay attention to the Bible? I know the basics of what it says and since it never changes, wouldn't that be like reading yesterday's news over and over again? It's easy to think this way if you see the Bible only as a history book or a book filled with nice children's stories. Listen again to what Peter claimed in our second lesson: “We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor 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 pleased.’ We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts... 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.” (2 Peter 1:16-19,21)

The Bible can be trusted because it is filled with eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life, not rumors or gossip or fairy tales. Peter used Jesus' transfiguration as an example. In our Gospel lesson we see six months before Jesus was crucified, He took Peter, James, and John with Him to the top of a mountain and while they were there Jesus' appearance changed so that His face shone as bright as the sun and His clothes became as white as the light. And in case they thought their eyes were playing tricks on them, Peter says that they heard the voice of God the Father from heaven proclaim that Jesus was in fact His Son. For just a moment the disciples were witnessing the glory of God – something more spectacular than anything we could imagine.

But how can we be certain that Peter is really telling the truth? After all, couldn't he and the other disciples have made up all these stories about Jesus? That's certainly what the disciple Thomas thought when he was told by the other disciples on Easter that Jesus had risen from the dead. Thomas refused to believe it unless he could see Jesus alive and touch his hands for the scars from the nails. And one week later Thomas got to do just that when Jesus appeared to him and told him to touch his hands and his side, and to believe and stop doubting.

However, couldn't one suggest that story was made up? Maybe, but here's the thing. Before Jesus was crucified the disciples had spent 3 years with Jesus. They heard his teachings and saw him perform miracles. You would think they were committed to Him and would support Him no matter what. But when he was arrested and crucified, they fled and hid in a locked room for fear of the same thing happening to them. But when Jesus rose from the dead and lived among them for another 40 days, the disciples boldly went out and told people all about Jesus. They faced the same death threats as before, but now having seen Jesus alive, they ignored the threats and they all willingly died for Him. If it wasn't true, would those disciples or would anyone willingly die a gruesome death for a lie? If it wasn't true, I would think at least one of them would have cracked and confessed that all those stories about Jesus were fake or at least embellished. After all, just look at the Houston Astros baseball team. One year after winning the World Series someone finally cracked and admitted they cheated. As a result, others on the team admitted they cheated and some lost their jobs. On the contrary, Peter tells us that not only are the events in the New Testament which he witnessed accurate, so is everything else we read in the Bible.

It's no wonder Peter urges his listeners to pay attention to the Bible. It was placed in this sinful world by God himself. Just think of the excitement there is when long-lost letters written by someone famous are discovered. Those letters often shed new insights on that person's character. Or think how exciting it would be to find a long-lost letter addressed to you by a now-deceased grandparent. Wouldn't you cherish that letter and read it several times? Well, we have something better in the Bible – a love letter written to you by God for the purpose of leading you back to Him so that you may spend eternity in heaven. Isn't that what we all want – a life free from pain, worry, loneliness, sickness, and even death? If so, then pay attention to the Bible.

Without the Bible we would remain spiritually lost and therefore end up eternally lost, separated from God forever. Without the Bible, we wouldn't know that even cute beautiful babies are born with sin and need the cleansing water of baptism. Without the Bible we wouldn't know that the sin of simply thinking a bad thought is as offensive to God as is the refusal to forgive those who have hurt us. Without the Bible we wouldn't know that there is nothing we can do to make God love us or to earn a place in heaven.

But thankfully the Bible also reveals how God took care of our sin and self-centeredness through Jesus. And that's the whole point of this text. Peter wanted his listeners to know that the Bible is all about Jesus, the Son of God, who willingly took on the punishment for our sin, that being death, so that we could live with Him forever. We cannot do anything to make God love us, but He loves us nonetheless; and He forgives us for not paying attention to Him, for ignoring Him, for brushing off the Bible and thinking that we are too busy to spend time with God in His Word. That is why we should love the Bible. It may not be as flashy as HDTV and it may not be as technologically impressive as the internet, but it shows you something that you cannot see or learn anywhere else. It shows you Jesus, your God and Savior, who forgives you; and it gives you beautiful assurances such as, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, no any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35,37-39)

So make time for the Word of God, that's what Peter is telling us today. There is nothing more amazing, more insightful, more loving, or more beautiful than the Bible. In the midst of our busy world, where so many things are trying to grab our attention, the Bible is truly the only thing we really need to pay attention to in our lives. Read it, learn it, and see it not just as a book of information, but as the window through which the Holy Spirit gives us power and energy to endure life in this sin-filled world. Just as you need to keep filling your car with fuel so that it continues to run, so we need to keep fueling ourselves with God's Word so that we don't stall out on our way to heaven. There are a lot of things that fail us in this world, many things and people that let us down; but the Bible is the one thing in this world you can trust, it is the one thing that is necessary for us to live more than anything else – and it's available to all of us. What do you see?