

Something big happened, something that you weren't there to see. And you want to know what happened. So what do you do? Obviously, you go to somebody who was there, who can tell you what happened. Well, in this case, there's a couple of people who claim to know what happened. One person was actually there. They saw it firsthand. They experienced it for themselves. But the other person wasn't there, but they still claim to know what actually happened. So who are you going to listen to? Which one are you going to believe? Obviously, you're going to believe the first one, right? Because they were actually there. They actually saw what happened. The second person, no matter how much they claim to know, just isn't going to compare, because they didn't see it for themselves.

And Christians, the truth of the Bible is much the same way. Because there are many in the world today who will claim to tell you what happened, what happened in the days when God did these things. But they will also lead you astray, because they teach you what is false. They weren't there to see it for themselves. So we should turn then to the ones who were there, to the ones who actually saw it for themselves. The way to know the truth in this case is to go to the Bible itself.

And Christians, this is what Peter wants to teach us today. And in our reading for today, Peter is nearing his death. In fact, Jesus told him in John chapter 21: "Truly, truly I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.' (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this, he said to him, 'Follow me.'" So Jesus has told Peter, then, that he's going to die a violent death, that he's going to be led where he doesn't want to go. And history tells us that Peter died by being crucified upside down. He was a martyr for his faith, and he suffered in that violent way. And so in this letter, then, he wants to give us his last words, his final warning against false teaching, his final encouragement to those who hear it. Because he knows that after he is gone, all kinds of false teachers are going to come into the Church. Men who are going to claim to know the truth, but are going to speak lies in God's name. And Peter tells us that if we aren't careful, they will lead us astray.

And Christians, how true this is for our time! We live in a time that is full of false teachers, that is full of heresies and error. And yes, these things have always been true. Yes, every time has struggled with these things. But sometimes I wonder if our age isn't particularly bad. Because we live in a time, Christians, when many want to be liked by the world. And so they'll say things that the world wants to hear. Or at the very least, they won't say things that the world doesn't want to hear. They'll be as inoffensive as possible, so that more people will like them. There are false teachers who will tell us that something isn't actually a sin that God clearly says is. There are false teachers who will say that something is a sin that God clearly says isn't. There are false teachers who will say that things have changed. Times are different, and so the Church needs to change along with it. There are false teachers who will say that you can just ignore what the Bible says. You don't need to pay attention to it. It doesn't apply to us anymore. There are false teachers who just want to get something from you, men who like having power and authority over other people. And over and over again, these false teachers have snuck into the church. And it can be very difficult for us to see them for what they are.

Why? we might ask. Why is it so difficult sometimes to tell that someone is a false teacher? Because a false teacher will always tell you something that you like to hear. Either because it sounds right, it sounds true, it sounds like something that makes you feel pretty good. Maybe it appeals to your emotions. It makes you feel really good. And for that reason, it seems to be true. Or maybe they will appeal to things that the world considers to be true, appeal to those assumptions that the world considers right. And for that reason, it sounds like it's true. Whatever the case may be, Christians, it sounds good. And that's why it's so often leads us astray.

But even though it sounds good to us, Christians, it leads into death. Because false teaching is a sin, a sin that turns the truth of God into a lie. And sin kills us. Sin leads us away from God. It leads us away from heaven. And this is why Peter is so adamant to warn us against false teachers: for the sake of our soul.

So how do we know the truth, then? What are we supposed to do to know what is true and what isn't? We need to go to those who were actually there, who actually saw the things that God has done with their own eyes. And we do that by going to the Bible. And that's the point that Peter wants to make today. Because he says in verse 16: "For 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." So it's not a myth that he is presenting to us. It's not some story he came up with because it sounded good. Peter tells us that he is an eyewitness of these things. Peter saw them with his own eyes. Peter saw Jesus transfigured. Peter saw Jesus' clothes turn bright white. Peter saw Jesus's face shine like the sun. And Peter heard with his own ears the voice which came down from heaven. So he's not making these things up. These aren't just fancies of his imagination. These are things he saw, and he records them for us. Who could possibly claim that for themselves today? Peter was there, as he says, in verses 17 and 18: "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." Peter can speak from experience. He can speak from what he saw firsthand. And everything that he writes is true for that reason.

And Christians, this is also true of all of the apostles and all of the prophets, the men who wrote the Bible for us. All the things that they have written down were things that they saw, things that they heard, things that God did in their presence. They were there! So why wouldn't we want to pay attention to the things which they say?

Peter goes on to say, verse 19: "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." We have the prophetic Word, the Bible, more fully confirmed by this. We can trust what the Bible says, because it records what these men saw. And we should pay attention to it, because it is like a lamp in a dark place. Psalm 119 says, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." This Word, Christians, is our guide, leading us through our lives until the last day. This Word is our delight, giving us the words of life and truth. This Word is our treasure, worth more to us than gold and silver. And this Word is our life, leading us to eternal life. So why would we not want to pay attention to what it has to say?

And this Word is not just man's word. This Word is also God's Word. As Peter says: "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." The Holy Spirit himself carried these men along. The Holy Spirit himself gave them the words that they wrote. So that when we hear this Bible, Christians, we are hearing the voice of God. This Word is trustworthy, because God is trustworthy. This Word is true, because God is true. This Word cannot lie, because God cannot lie. And he has given us this Word through these men so that we would know him forever. So why would we not want to pay attention to what it has to say?

So let us be in this Word, Christians. Let us be in this Bible. Don't put it off. Don't wait until tomorrow to get into it, thinking you'll get to it later. Because today is the day that God has given it to us. The way to know the Bible is to be in it. It's to study it. Good intentions are never going to make us know what the Bible says. Even if we say that we're going to get to it, that's not the same thing as actually reading it. And God will richly bless the time which we spend in this Word. So come, Christians, to Church to hear it read and taught. Read this Bible daily to learn what it has to say. Think about what God says as you go about your day, so that this Word changes the way that you think and influences the way that you act. And then we will not be led astray by false teachers, because we will know the truth. And as Jesus tells us in John, chapter 8: "If you abide in my Word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." So let us be in this Word, Christians, because it is the most precious thing that we have: the Word of God himself.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us Your holy Word as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We pray that You would help us always to abide in this Word, so that we would be built up in true faith to life everlasting. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.