SESSION OBJECTIVE: 2 PETER 1:12-21
To understand the importance of stirring one another up with the Word of God.

An Important Eyewitness

There are a number of literary works written in the 20th century that were profoundly important, but perhaps none more than *The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Written between 1958 and 1968, and first published in 1973, it is an investigative report on life in the *Gulag* (an acronym for *Glávnoje upravlénije lageréj*, the government agency in charge of the Soviet network of forced labor camps set up by order of Vladimir Lenin). George Kennan called it, "the most powerful single indictment of a political regime ever to be levied in modern times," and Doris Lessing said that the book, "brought down the empire." What made it particularly powerful was the various sources it was comprised of including reports, interviews, statements, diaries, legal documents, and Solzhenitsyn's own experience as a Gulag prisoner. Until this point, the Gulag was largely written off as propaganda. The eyewitness accounts brought it to life.

In 2 Peter 1, Peter appeals to his own eyewitness account of Jesus Christ Himself. Peter is not merely telling folklore or tall-tales, but is recounting what he witnessed. 2 Peter 1:16 says, "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." He goes on to recall what the Father spoke concerning Jesus during the Transfiguration and says, "we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain" (2 Pet. 1:18). Peter's account of Christ and therefore the force of his writing is greatly amplified by the fact that he is not simply passing on a story given to him, but is recalling what he saw and heard from the Lord in the flesh and through the power of His Holy Spirit.

A Legacy

At this point in his advanced years, Peter knew that his death was imminent; Jesus had revealed that to him. Verse 14 says, “Since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.” The, “putting off of my body,” is a reference to dying physically, but also implies a continual life spiritually. Death is not referred to as death for believers in the New Testament, but usually is described in more temporary or non-final terms. Here, it is the putting off of the body. In other places, it is referred to as, “falling asleep” (Matt. 9:24; Jn. 11:13). As a result of this, Peter sees his primary mission to stir up those believers he is writing to so that long after he dies, they will be well equipped and able to keep the faith. He says in verse 13, “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder.”

Peter is living out what Paul talks about in Philippians: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:3-5). To put away selfish ambitions and instead spend your time pouring into other people is to exemplify the same attitude that was present in the Lord Himself. It is a splendid picture of discipleship, something that every Christian is called towards.

The desire to engage in such discipleship is not merely for the sake of obedience to a commandment, and it isn’t simply to dump a bunch of biblical knowledge on them. The result of discipleship should be a more well-formed Christian. Peter says in verse 15, “I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.” In other words, it isn’t just that Peter is teaching them, it is that they are learning, adapting, and growing as a result of his instruction such that they can actually recall what has been passed down, specifically, “Christ’s glory and the Prophetic Word” (2 Pet. 1:15).

Trustworthy

In verse 16, Peter writes, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Peter’s usage of the first person plural pronoun *we* suggests he is speaking not only of himself, but the apostles in general. Peter’s appeal is couched in two different streams of authority. Below is a breakdown of each of them.

EYEWITNESSES

The first argument for Peter’s authority is the fact that he saw Jesus in the flesh. His message regarding the Messiah is not simply a, “cleverly devised myth,” but comes from actually seeing, beholding, and hearing Him. The example Peter cites is the *Transfiguration*, an event chronicled in all three synoptic Gospels (Matt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35). This event held an exclusive audience; only Peter, James, and John were in attendance, and what an event it would have been to experience. Luke’s account details that Jesus was speaking to both Moses and Elijah, two of the most important prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus’, “face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.” This was an unforgettable moment that established Jesus as far more than a mere teacher. This means that Peter’s eyewitness credibility extends well beyond any average person who had seen or been in the physical presence of Jesus. Peter was a VIP, an insider, a member of Jesus’ inner-circle. The terminology in verse 18 is unique as well. The inclusion of the phrase, “holy mountain” certainly harkens back to Sinai, when the law was given. This phrasing is consistent with the content, since Moses is a part of the Transfiguration event, and was also on Sinai to receive the law.

PROPHETIC WORD

This portion of the passage has proven challenging for commentators because of its wording. “We have the words of the prophets made more certain,” or, “We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed,” is a strange statement to make, especially coming off of the Transfiguration reference. Is Peter talking about the voice that they hear from heaven? Or is he speaking about the spiritual gift of prophecy? What are we to make of this? My take is that this is a reference to the Old Testament. The, “prophetic word” is exclusively connected to the Old Testament all the way up through the second century in historical Christian writing. Given Peter’s reference to the Transfiguration as an eye-witness, he is making the point that the prophetic word (Old Testament prophecy) has been more fully confirmed because it predicted a coming Messiah, Jesus fulfilled those prophecies, and Peter witnessed it all. Therefore, the prophetic word that the apostles proclaim is more fully confirmed because it is rightly interpreted in light of Christ.

This is confirmed in the next phrase, "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19). This is likely a reference to Numbers 24:17: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel.” This is a passage that was already being understood as a Messianic reference during Peter’s time, and is being connected to Christ here as well. Peter’s authority (and the apostles’ authority) is firm because it rests on Scripture (specifically, the Old Testament) that has been rightly interpreted in light of Jesus Christ, who Peter and the apostles witnessed fulfill the Messianic prophecies. They are trustworthy because they not only understand Scripture correctly, but actually saw and heard Jesus demonstrate His divine power.

The Ultimate Author

Finally, Peter ends with an important note regarding how Scripture comes into existence, and thus why it is trustworthy: “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.” Scripture is, “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). This is why Scripture is so harmonious when it is all put together. Despite having multiple human authors in various parts of the world over the span of thousands of years in several different languages, it still coalesces into a single, powerful message.

Again, this follows the line of argumentation that Peter is formulating. Scripture, specifically the Old Testament in this context, is not the invention of men, but God. God constructs the Scripture and men are merely moved by Him to write down what He is revealing (hence, Scripture is *revelation*). Therefore, any of the texts regarding the Messiah are God’s plan for Messianic redemption. Jesus perfectly fulfilled those texts and Peter and the apostles witnessed it. If that is the case, then when they speak or teach or write, we would do well to pay attention. They were eye-witnesses to these things taking place, and therefore understand Scripture with clarity and thus interpret it correctly.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read 2 Peter 1:12. What does Peter intend to do? What qualities do you think that he is referring to? Are these qualities new to his audience?

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2. Read 2 Peter 1:13. How does Peter intend to remind them? What does it mean when Peter says, “as long as I am in this body?”

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Day Two

1. Read 2 Peter 1:14. "Since the putting off of my body will be soon,” is a reference to what? Who indicated to Peter that this would happen?

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2. Read 2 Peter 1:15. What does Peter hope to accomplish before he dies?

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Day Three

1. Read 2 Peter 1:16. What did they not use to proclaim Christ? What were they eyewitnesses of?

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2. Read 2 Peter 1:17-18. What is this passage a reference to? (Hint: See above notes)

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Day Four

1. Read 2 Peter 1:19. What does, “the prophetic word more fully confirmed,” mean? (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read 2 Peter 1:20-21. Who is Scripture authored by? Who is not authored by? How are men able to write it?

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Week 4 Discussion: Scripture Completed

In 2 Peter 1:12-21, Peter discusses the, “prophetic word more fully confirmed.” Peter and the apostles understand and thus rightly interpret Scripture in part because they were eye-witnesses to Christ in His earthly ministry. Talk as a group about the importance of the New Testament when reading the Old Testament, and vice versa, and how having the whole canon of Scripture gives us advantages that the ancient people of God did not enjoy.

1. Icebreaker: Which do you prefer to read more, the Old Testament or the New Testament? Why?
2. How important is the New Testament when interpreting the Old Testament? Why?

3. How important is the Old Testament when interpreting the New Testament? Why?
4. Do you believe that Scripture is perfect and without error? Why or why not?
5. How does Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture validate the New Testament?
6. If God is the author of Scripture, how important is it that we should know what it says?

Takeaways:

1. Peter intends to leave a legacy of faith after his death by stirring up and reminding fellow believers.
2. Peter was an eye-witness to the Transfiguration of Christ.
3. The apostolic instruction is powerful because it is rooted in a correct understanding of Scripture.

PRAYER REQUESTS: