

“Eyewitnesses of His Majesty,” 2 Peter 1:12-18 (July 3, 2016)

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. <sup>13</sup> I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, <sup>14</sup> since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. <sup>15</sup> And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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,” <sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

## PRAY

We are studying the book of 2 Peter this summer. Though this has been a matter of some debate in the church over the centuries, I’m convinced anyway that Peter, the apostle, did indeed write it. After all, in verse one the author claims to be Simon Peter.

Peter writes this very late in life. In verse 14, he writes that he will “soon” die, he will soon “put off his body.” Literally, he says, “I will soon put off my tent,” the tent of his body. Knowing that his end is near, Peter has one last message to the churches.

Peter is an apostle, he’s a Christian teacher. So since it’s his last message to the churches, you know that in this message he will want to emphasize the things that he thinks are most important.

And Peter’s main message in these seven verses is a simple one: to all Christians, “to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1),” Peter says, “You must remember.” Three times in our passage Peter (in verses 12, 13, and 15) says to the churches that they must “remember.”

In the fight to live the Christian life, one of the most important weapons we have is our memory. Al Mohler once preached a powerful sermon on the importance of memory in the Christian life, and he said this: “The Lord created us as rational beings, homo sapiens, but He also gifted us with the power of memory. This is a remarkably powerful capacity [that] is apparently shared by no other creature. We are shaped ... trained ... [and] liberated ... by our memories.”

Peter tells Christians that to live the Christian life, you must remember. It’s an indispensable weapon with which to live the Christian life. Three things about remembering that I want you to see: first, what we must remember (the Transfiguration historical facts). Second, why we must remember. Third, how we can remember.

First, what we must remember. Let's read 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."

Everyone agrees – all the commentators, all the scholars – that Peter here is talking about the Transfiguration of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record this event from the life of Jesus in their gospels. Peter, along with James and John, go to the top of a high mountain with Jesus. While they are up there, all of the sudden Jesus' face begins to shine like the sun, and his clothes radiate light – Matthew says his clothes become as white as light. And while this is going on they hear that voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Of course, Peter, James, and John fell to ground in abject fear. But what was the point of it? What was the Transfiguration? The key, I think, is found in verse 17: "For when he received honor and glory from God the Father..." The Transfiguration was the inauguration of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, as the ruler and judge of the universe.

An inauguration is a formal celebration and recognition of someone taking an office of power, where they receive the honor and glory due someone holding that office. And the more prestigious, important, and glorious the office, the more lavish the inauguration.

If you are elected the mayor of a small town in Mississippi, like the one I grew up in, there is an inauguration, but there's not much to it. Probably just a reception with finger sandwiches and punch, maybe a brief speech or two. The music, if any, is probably pre-recorded. All over in an hour, tops. And no offense to small town mayors, but I'm not sure many people outside of their families remember those inaugurations. When presidents of the United States have their inaugurations, it's far more impressive. A far more glorious ceremony.

But not even presidential inaugurations compare with the ascension of Queen Elizabeth II to the throne of England in 1953. You can watch it on YouTube. She left Buckingham Palace in a stage coach made of gold, drawn by eight horses, and when she gets out at Westminster Abbey you can see how long the train of her robe is – it's at least twelve feet long, and it takes six maids to carry it. Then she comes into the church to King Edwards's chair, which every monarch since the fourteenth century has used. And then, item by item, they dress her. They place a robe of gold around her, and jeweled bracelets on her wrists. Gloves, reflecting how gently the queen is to deal with her people. A sword given by the Archbishop of Canterbury. A scepter. And finally, they place St. Edward's crown on her head. And the abbey is filled clergy and nobility and they cry out, "God save the queen! God save the queen!"

But even her inauguration pales in comparison to Jesus'. The queen was clothed in a golden robe, but Jesus was clothed in light. He shone like the sun. And while clergy and nobles shouted praises to Queen Elizabeth, God the Father himself spoke from heaven to

praise Jesus. He said, “ ... the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased ...’” 2 Peter 1:17b.

In Psalm 2, we read a prophecy of the Transfiguration. It’s one of the most quoted Psalms in the New Testament, and the Psalmist wrote, “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. <sup>3</sup> “Let us break their chains,” they say, “and throw off their fetters.” <sup>4</sup> The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. <sup>5</sup> Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, <sup>6</sup> “I have installed my King on Zion [that’s the inauguration], my holy hill.” <sup>7</sup> I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father. <sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. <sup>9</sup> You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” Psalm 2:1-9 (NIV 1984).

The Transfiguration is the inauguration of Jesus Christ as the ruler and judge of the universe, and Peter is clear that he’s talking about facts here, not myths. “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths [other translations have it as “cunningly devised fables” or “cleverly invented stories”] when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” 2 Peter 1:16.

The New Testament authors constantly insist they are eyewitnesses to the historical facts surrounding the life of Jesus, and this insistence on the facts makes Christianity unique among world religions. How? You can be a perfectly good Buddhist without believing Buddha ever existed, because history isn’t foundational to Buddhism. What is foundational is the philosophy of Buddhism – do you follow the Eightfold Path to Enlightenment? Same with Hinduism – it’s a philosophy of living, it’s a way to explain the universe, and the history behind it, the facts surrounding how Hinduism came into existence, are irrelevant to being a good Hindu. You can be a good Muslim or a good Jew without having to really believe the origin stories of those two world religions. The facts surrounding Mohammed and Abraham and Moses could all be “cleverly devised myths,” yet it wouldn’t prevent you from faithfully following the ethical principles of Islam and Judaism. History is not what’s most important to these world religions.

Not Christianity – why? Because only Christianity has a savior. Christianity says that Jesus Christ is the savior of the world, and he really, literally, historically came to earth to save you, to rescue you. Buddha is not the savior of the world. And that’s not a slap at Buddha – he was very clear, he said, “I am not the way of salvation.” Mohammed was very clear – I am only a prophet, I’m not God. Moses and Abraham were not saviors.

Only Jesus Christ said, “I am the savior of the world – I am the way, the truth, the life.” And so to be a Christian you must trust that he really did come to earth to save you. If Jesus is just another “cleverly devised myth,” he’s worthless to you.

You must believe the facts about Jesus: his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his inauguration at the Transfiguration. You must believe that Jesus lived a

life of perfect obedience to the law of God in his thirty-plus years on earth, and that at the end of his life he died a horrible death he did not deserve, a death under the curse of God, on the cross. And you must believe that he lived his life and he died that death for you, to save you, as your substitute, because you haven't kept the law of God perfectly with your life, and therefore you deserve the everlasting curse of God.

Do you see that? Do you see that Jesus is the savior of the world and, more importantly, do you trust him as your savior? If you believe that, then you are a Christian. That's what we must remember.

Second, why we must remember (because it's the only way to be ultimately motivated live a life of love, service, and peace). When Peter writes in verse 16 how he is an eyewitness of the "coming" of Jesus, he uses a Greek word there that in the New Testament *always refers to the second coming of Jesus*, when Jesus will come in all his glory as the judge of the earth. The Transfiguration is a sort of down-payment to the church that the second coming of Jesus Christ as the judge of the earth will happen, and Peter wants us to remember it.

But why? Because Peter is desperate to protect these Christians from false teaching. We'll hear a lot about these false teachers later this month when we dig into chapter two. Peter writes in 2 Peter 2:1: "But false prophets also arose among the people [of Old Testament Israel], just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction."

These false teachers are coming to these churches Peter so patiently and lovingly got started, and when they come they will come with basically one message: this world is all there is. Yes, they'll say, there is a God. And yes, Jesus did come. And yes, Jesus did some really good things.

But, these false teachers would say, **Jesus isn't coming back**. They deny that. He isn't coming back to judge the earth or for any other reason. He's died, and whatever Jesus was supposed to accomplish he's already done, but he's not coming back. They'll say, "Don't believe in those fairy tales Peter used to talk about." In 2 Peter 3:4 Peter says that these false teachers will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

All things continue as they always have, they'll teach, which is another way of saying, "This world is all there is." Don't believe those fairy tales about Jesus being transfigured on some mountain, because this world is all there is.

And hence these false teachers, Peter says, will urge you to follow after the comforts of this world. That's 2 Peter 2:18-19: "For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by **sensual passions of the flesh** those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.<sup>19</sup> They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved."

This world is all there is, Jesus did live for a while and do some good things while he was here, but now he's dead and he's not coming back, so the best thing you can do, these false teachers said, *is get yours*. When it comes to money, sex, and power, use those things, to the extent you have them, to satisfy the “sensual passions of the flesh”? So, for example, money: if you have it, spend it on yourself, spend it on your family, save all you possibly can to spend on yourself in retirement, make all of it you can and by no means give any significant portion of it away. Sex: it exists to bring you pleasure, and so use it for that end. Don't let any rules of traditional morality keep you from it, don't let any relationship keep you from having it, but so long as it feels good, do it. Power: when you have control, when you have authority over other people, use it to promote your own interests. Whatever it is, while you can, these false teachers are going to tell you to *get yours* because this world is all there is, and so what's the point in using sex, money, and power for any other reason if, when we die, all we'll do is rot?

Now, do I even have make the point that this is exactly the issue we face today? The big struggle we all face is the constant temptation to view this world as all there is. We are bombarded with this message – there is nothing else beyond this life, so eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

But if the Transfiguration means anything at all, it means this: **this world is not all there is**. Right? Peter, James, and John saw something on the holy mountain that can only be described as supernatural. A man suddenly begins glowing, and not just glowing but actually produces light – he shines like the sun before them. That doesn't just happen. That's not something a naturally occurring phenomenon. A voice booms from heaven – that's not natural, either. The only explanation for these things is that this natural world we live in and observe with our five senses *is not all there is*, but instead there is a supernatural realm, there is a power in the universe we don't really know about and cannot be measured scientifically, and for a few minutes it broke through the person of Jesus of Nazareth and manifested itself to three of his disciples.

This world is not all there is, there is something above and beyond life on this earth, there will be a second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to judge heaven and earth, and so, Peter says, we can be motivated to use money, sex, and power not to serve ourselves, but to try and use them to serve and bless others.

If you remember that this world is not all there is, you can do crazy things you're your money (from the world's point of view). If you come into an extra bit of money (if you get a raise, or maybe your spouse gets a new job and so all of the sudden there's a lot more income in the household), you don't have to immediately spend that surplus on yourself, but instead sit down and pray and think about how you can use that extra money to bless the people around you because you know this world is not all there is. Maybe the single mom down the street who needs a new car, you use that money to buy her one. And do it in such a way that she never knows you were the one who did it.

You can do crazy things if you remember the Transfiguration, and that this world is not all there is. Crazy things like reserving sex for marriage, marriage between one man and one woman, the man born male, the woman born female (we can't assume anything these days in our definitions), where sex is used not for gratification but to communicate to our spouses that we love them, we belong completely and wholeheartedly to them, and we want to please them.

You can do crazy things if you remember the Transfiguration, like using the power you have as an employer or as someone with wealth and prestige in the community not just to benefit you and your family, but to empower and build up those around you who, historically, have been oppressed and haven't had a say in how things go. Jesse Williams, an actor on the TV show *Grey's Anatomy*, gave a very powerful acceptance speech along those lines at the BET awards last week. Some of you may have seen it. In some ways, it was outstanding. But there was one line in particular that caught my attention. He said "the hereafter is a hustle." What's that mean? It means this world is all there is, so you can't count on divine justice to right any wrongs.

But when he said that he was flying right in the face of the civil rights leaders of a previous generation, who did not believe the hereafter was a hustle. They believed in the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who would one day right every wrong. They believed in the One who said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And that belief did not keep them from trying to secure civil rights in the here and now. Rather, that belief empowered them to work all the more, and it kept them from violence and vengeance as they sought those rights, and empowered them to forgive those who wronged them.

One last thing: if this world is all there is, then you have every reason to be terrified of death. Because when death comes for you, that's it. You die, and then one day everyone who ever knew you will die, and then one day the sun will die, and eventually every record that you ever existed will be destroyed. That's a reason for terror.

But if you remember that this world is not all there is, if you remember that in the Transfiguration the supernatural broke through as a down payment on the future coming of Christ, then you can live life without worry and without fear. God will provide your daily bread in this life, and take you home and personally comfort you in the next. That's Joshua 1:9 – I love how the old King James puts it: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God *is* with thee whithersoever thou goest."

But this will only happen if we remember. So what does that look like? Third, how we can remember (repeated exposure to the Word). Again, three times in verses 12-15 Peter talks about the importance of remembering in the Christian life – he says twice that he will make sure to remind them of these things and then, in verse 15, Peter says that after he is gone he will set it up so that they will continually be reminded. Paul, before he dies, in 2 Timothy 2:8, says, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel ..." Before Moses died, when he's giving his last

sermon to Israel, which we have recorded as the book of Deuteronomy, sixteen times he tells them to remember.

Why this emphasis on remembering in the Bible? *Because Peter, Paul, and Moses all know how easy it is for us to forget.* In order to become a Christian, it really does only take one decision: to see that you are a sinner, to hate your sin, to look in horror on your sin, and run to Jesus, trusting his sacrifice on the cross to reconcile you to God. It really only takes that one decision to repent and trust Jesus to become a Christian.

But living as a Christian does not *feel* like just one decision. It is accurate to say that the hardest thing about the Christian life is remembering *every single day*, a hundred or more times every day, that this world is not all there is, because everything in this world preaches just the opposite. The culture around us, the advertising around us, the pressures of work and family around us, the politics around us, the air we breathe all act together in such a way to try and convince us that this world is all there is and to live accordingly.

It is a fight, and struggle, daily to remember. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Luke 9:23. And the apostles knew that until Jesus did actually return and fulfill the promise of the Transfiguration, every succeeding generation of Christians would have to fight to remember. So, what did they do to help? While they were alive, they preached, they gave their own eyewitness testimony about what they had seen and what they had heard. They made sure everyone knew they weren’t following cleverly invented stories.

But as they prepared to die, they did something else to make sure future Christians could remember. They wrote – they wrote what became the Scriptures, the Bible.

Peter says in verse 16 that he is one of the eyewitnesses of Christ’s majesty, and I can’t tell you how many times I thought, “It would have been great to have been to be able to sit down and let Peter, let John, let James tell me about it. If I could hear their eyewitness testimony, it would strengthen my faith so much.” Guess what? We do get to hear them. We hear their eyewitness testimony every time we read the Bible. Hebrews 11:4: “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.” Abel wasn’t there with the author of Hebrews, neither were any of the patriarchs and prophets, yet through the Scriptures they spoke to him and today they speak to us.

Friends, the way we are to remember is *by constant exposure to the Word.* There is no substitute – through the Word, the witnesses speak, and confront us, and force us to remember.

This means reading the Bible for yourself devotionally as often as you can, preferably every day. This means meeting together in small groups regularly to at least talk about spiritual things with reference to the Bible if not actually opening up the Bible and

studying it for yourselves. This means singing songs to yourself and others based off of the Bible. That is so important – sometimes when you can't pray or read, you can sing. And this means, on top of it all, coming together with other believers on Sundays and listening to the sermon. **Sundays are for remembering.**

Can I give just a brief plug on behalf of preaching this morning? Do you have a choice? I know it can be very hard to have to sit and listen to the same guy, or the same couple of guys, talk for 35 minutes week after week after week. It's hard because some of you are smarter than we are, so you're forced to listen to your intellectual inferiors. It's hard because we're not perfect, and maybe we've done something to offend you, and yet you have to listen to us. Maybe we just remind you of your son-in-law or brother-in-law, and you can't stand it. It's hard because sometimes we don't do a very good job of preaching, we haven't prepared, we haven't thought about the sermon enough.

All that may be and sometimes is true, but still it remains that nothing helps you to remember that this world is not all there is, that Jesus will return, like hearing the Scriptures preached by someone who really believes it to be true! It's certainly been true in my life. Preaching helps me remember in a way nothing else does. There is something **lovingly confrontational** about the Bible rightly preached. When you read the Bible by yourself (which is a very good thing to do), it doesn't always have the same effect. It's easier to make the Bible say what you want to say – maybe you just want to be comforted, when you really need to be convicted. It's easier to just skip over certain parts. But when you hear the Word of God taught rightly by a man called by God, it's much harder to do that and you are much more likely to remember.

I think that's why Paul says this to Timothy, again, just before Paul's death: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup>preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort [and without too much editorial license we could add "remind"], with complete patience and teaching." 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

In 1 Chronicles 16:12, David charged the Israelites: "Remember the wondrous works that he has done ..." If you don't fight to remember, you will never be able to live the Christian life and, in fact, you may find one day that you no longer believe at all. If enough of us at this church do not try to remember, one day Grace Bible Church will go the way so many churches have over this last century, into theological liberalism, into heresy, into apostasy. And we will not love one another, we will not give our money and our lives away, we will not work for the civil rights of all people, or if we do we won't do it with a spirit of kindness and love. We will live this life out of fear or anger or greed or lust or apathy. So please, friends, Peter pleads with you, make every effort to remember the wondrous works that God has done, for our good and His glory. Amen.