

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There is no shortage these days of “documentaries” about the Bible. You can see them on the History Channel, Discovery Channel and PBS. Occasionally, even mainstream media will have a show about the nature, origins or truthfulness of the Bible. If you have seen any of these shows, it may have rocked your faith a bit. The things they said and presented as fact, may be things you never heard or considered. The reliability of the Bible is frequently challenged.

If you are in college or attended college, chances are you heard things about Holy Scripture that you never heard before. The reliability of the Bible is frequently challenged.

Even books or movies like the Da Vinci Code may begin to rock your faith. In such works, highly questionable history is embellished, changed and added to with fanciful fiction, but then presented as proven fact. The reliability of Scripture is challenged.

Sometimes the attacks on the Bible are not at all subtle. Read a book by Richard Dawkins, a very vocal atheist... or even Bart Ehrman, who claims to be a Christian, and you may be left doubting whether what you’ve always believed is true. From every side, the Bible and the history it contains is being challenged and debunked. And you can be sure such attacks will only grow more frequent, more direct and more popular.

A 2009 Discovery Channel 3 part series was called “Who Was Jesus?” The documentary “aims to demystify the life of Jesus, looking to science, archaeology and history to craft a more detailed and accurate portrait of Christ's world.” The not-so-subtle presupposition is that the Jesus we have come to believe in is mythical, unscientific, embellished, and historically inaccurate.

For the first 1800 years or so of the New Testament church’s history, the reliability and truthfulness of Scriptures was not questioned. But today it most certainly is. And it’s not hard to figure out why it’s being challenged. Satan isn’t stupid. He hates God and wants to lead others to do the same. If you’re going to cut down a tree, the best place to do it is at the base of the trunk. The base of the trunk for our Christian faith is the reliability of Scriptures. If Satan can deceive people to think the Bible is nothing more than a book of myths written by and ancient, ignorant people, then he casts doubt on all the Bible says. He cuts down faith at the base. He chop blocks faith at the knees. Or he prevents faith from ever growing.

It is vitally important that we as Christians know and believe that the Bible is the reliable Word of God... without mistakes. It is the authoritative source of all that is true. It is the Word of God, and therefore we *must* pay careful attention to it!

In the second lesson today, one of Jesus’ own disciples, inspired by the Holy Spirit, convinces us of the reliability of the Bible. Listen the first half of the reading again:

2 Peter 1:16-21 **“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.**

Satan didn’t waste any time trying to undermine the Word of God. Already in Peter’s day people were attempting to debunk Christianity by claiming the stories about Jesus were just cleverly made-up fairy tales. People were already beginning to doubt that Jesus really was the Son of God.

Already, skeptics were trying to dismiss the miracles of Jesus. Peter directly addresses this non-sense by stating directly that he and many others were eye witnesses of the majesty of Jesus.

Now I find this interesting. Peter could easily recall any number of the many miracles of Jesus as an example of Jesus' majesty (that is, examples that would prove he was true God and not just a mere man.) He could have written of the wedding of Cana... Jesus' first miracle, and the moment when the disciples started to put their trust in him as the Son of God.

He could have written about the feeding of the 5,000... the calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee... the many healings of various diseases. Any of these would have been evidence of Jesus' majesty. Evidence that he is true God. But he doesn't write about them.

And honestly, this one surprises me. He also doesn't write about Jesus' resurrection from the dead at this point... as evidence that Jesus truly is the Son of God and the world's Savior (although he certainly did speak of it frequently at other times.) What's interesting to me that out of the vast pool of stories that would prove Jesus is the Son of God -- and therefore that all he said was true -- he picks the story of Jesus' transfiguration. He picked the story that we heard about in our Gospel lesson today.

**We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.**

So for Peter the defining historical event that proved beyond all doubt the majesty of Christ and his divine nature – was his transfiguration! Peter saw him shine brightly. Peter heard with his own ears the voice from heaven identifying Jesus as God's own Son. Whatever doubts Peter may have had before that day were now gone. That moment in history was proof and evidence to Peter that all Jesus was teaching was true and of God.

Friends, the transfiguration of our Lord does the same for us. In this age of skepticism and doubt about the reliability of Scriptures, look to the historical event that took place on that particular day on a mountain in Palestine. See Jesus transfigured in glory. See Moses and Elijah standing on either side, lending their testimony. Hear the voice of the Father, personally assuring you that this is his perfect Son. Hear his command to listen to him!

You see, our faith does not rest on an abstract philosophy, or on encouraging platitudes. Our faith doesn't rest on ideas that seem right and make us comfortable. Our faith is not a crutch for us weak-minded folks. Our faith is not rooted in our cultures traditions, or even in the faith of our parents or grandparents. Our faith springs from and rests on real, human history. Our faith is completely dependent on real historical facts. And the other writers of Scripture acknowledge this as well:

Luke at the beginning of his Gospel wrote:

**Luke 1:1-3 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.**

The eyewitness, God-honest truth of all of these events was vitally important! Luke the doctor and scholar wrote his doctorate research paper verifying everything.

And John wrote at the beginning of his first epistle:

**1 John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we**

**proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.**

And not only did these Gospel writers *say* that these historical facts about Jesus were true. They proved it by their willingness to die for their belief in these historical facts. Think about it... Peter knew that what he said about Jesus was truth... or a cleverly made up story. If he had made up this stuff about Jesus, why was he willing to die for it? Matthew was either an eye witness of the facts he conveyed... or he made the stuff up. If he made it up, why was he willing to be put to death for it? The best records we have tell us that all of the apostles (except John) were put to death for their faith. Martyrs! For what? For cleverly made up stories? No! Martyrs for the truth that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. That's truth worth dying for!

The writers of Holy Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, knew it was vitally important that you and I know that Jesus was a real person. Jesus really was true God and true man, born of the virgin Mary. Jesus really did travel around Palestine preaching, teaching and performing miracles. Jesus really was transfigured on the mountain as we heard today. Jesus really did go to Jerusalem, really was betrayed by a disciples named Judas, really stood trial, really was found guilty, really went to a cross where he died in agony, in darkness. Tombs really broke open, the curtain in the temple really tore at the moment of his death. On the third day Jesus' actual body really did come back to life, never to die again. He really did make numerous appearances... and ascended into heaven 40 days later.

Because all of these events are factual and true, your sin and guilt, which you know are all too real... don't you? (I don't need to spend much time convincing you about how real your moral failures are, or how far short you have fallen of God's holy expectations. I don't have to do that, do I? You know how frequently you haven't met *your own* expectations. How much more have we failed God?) But because all of these events are factual and true, your real sin and guilt have really been atoned for and forgiven forever by the very real blood of Jesus Christ. You really are children of the Almighty God and heirs of eternal life. You really do have meaning and purpose in your life here on earth as you serve God and love his children. All of these things are most certainly true!

Did you know that there is no other religion in the world that is rooted in and dependent on such historical facts? The importance of this real history is stressed again and again in Scripture.

**“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

Some seem to think that the Bible came about like this: Some religiously minded men sat around contemplating religious ideas and philosophies. When they came up with something profound and something that sounded good, they wrote it down. Peter directly refutes this idea. **Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.** The Bible is the very Word of God. God breathed these words to the people that recorded them. And it's easy to see, isn't it? 40 or so different writers, writing over a period of 1500 years in two different languages... and yet the message of the Bible is uniform. It all ties together. It's a perfect whole. It is the Word of God.

Therefore... and this is key... **“you will do well to pay attention to it.”** This Word is powerful. It changes lives. It changes *your* life. This is the Word that creates and strengthens faith in Jesus. This is the Word that connects us to Christ. This is the Word that gives and sustains life. This is the Word that pipes the forgiveness of Christ directly into our hearts. This Word gives life now

and forever... it saves us. Sometimes it seems we're willing to defend the truth of Scripture: 6 day creation. The virgin birth. The factual record of Jesus' miracles. His actual, bodily, literal resurrection from the dead. But do we always trust that the gospel message alone is the power of God for salvation? That it is this message alone that gives light and life to us and to those living all around us.

Listen: What brings people to faith in Jesus Christ is not pop psychology. It's not contemporary music or entertainment. It's not fun activities. It's not a top 10 list of how-to's. What creates and strengthens faith in Jesus Christ is the Word of God. Now, understand me right... all the things I mentioned can be tools to help people come into contact with the Word of God. But it is only the Gospel of Jesus Christ that saves. For our own faith life, and in all of our outreach efforts, keep that thought front and center. Connecting people to Christ *only* happens when the Word of God is heard. As Peter said, "You will do well to pay attention to it!" and so will everyone around. What can we do so that more and more people, both in our church and outside of our church, will pay attention to this God-inspired message?

Friends, we live in a time when the reliability of the Word of God is under constant attack. I pray that the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus will do for you what it did for Peter: may it convince you that Jesus really is the Son of God, and the Word he proclaimed really is the message of salvation. This word is reliable. This word is powerful. Know the word. Believe the word. Share the word. For this is the Word of our living and loving God. Amen.