

It's Real

Sunday, November 12, 2023

2 Peter 3

3 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

3 Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

17 Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Peter's words couldn't be more relevant, powerful and needed in today's world. And let's not forget that he is speaking primarily to the church, reminding them to hold on to The Foundational Truths of the Faith.

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Calling upon them to guard their hearts against the attacks that these truths would suffer in increasing measure in the last days.

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And again, I want to point out that Peter says this will happen, not only outside the church - which we would expect - but within the church. That is where these thoughts will infiltrate, causing many to question what they believe or to accept a watered down and distorted view of the scriptures.

16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

17 Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position.

And that was 2000 years ago, some 35-40 years after the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. How much more do we need these reminders today, following centuries of attack, and in a time in which - since he knows his time is short - the devil has increased his attempts to invalidate Gods words of truth, keeping as many as possible from receiving, believing, and acting upon that truth and leading many more astray from the truth they once believed?

This is the situation to which Peter writes and which I see all too alarmingly taking place today. I watch with angst, the increased skepticism that exists even within the church about basic biblical doctrines. I hear the scoffers call into question, attack and tear down things like

- The existence God and Satan
- The reality of Heaven and Hell
- Eternity
- Sin and Evil
- The life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus
- The saving, transforming power of the Gospel message
- Spiritual Warfare
- The Last Days
- The rapture of the church
- The second coming
- Final Judgement

And I just want to shout it. **IT'S REAL! ALL OF IT IS REAL.**

I know Satan doesn't want you to believe it. I know the world, friends and even family scoff at it, cast doubt on it, make fun of it, ridicule it and attempt to disprove these truths... **BUT THEY ARE REAL!**

So, let's take a moment and go through these things one more time - reminding ourselves of what the Prophets, what Jesus, what the Apostles, what the Early church - taught and believed and what the Bible continues to teach us is 100%, without a doubt, reliable and true.

The existence God and Satan

First and foremost, we must believe that God exists...

Psalm 14:1

¹ The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”

Hebrews 11:6

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

John 17:3 (ESV)

³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

On the other hand, there are those who are lulled into a false sense of security by believing the Devil does not exist.

1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

“Don’t think of Satan as a harmless cartoon character with a red suit and a pitchfork. He is very clever and powerful, and his unchanging purpose is to defeat God’s plans at every turn—including His plans for your life.” – Billy Graham

The reality of Heaven and Hell

I love Todd Burpo’s book, *“Heaven Is For Real - A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back”* (If you haven’t read it, pick up a copy or at least watch the movie) because it reminds me of the wonderful truth that the scriptures declares about the reality and beauty of heaven.

Psalm 33:13

¹³ From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind;

Philippians 3:20

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,

But Hell is just as real and something that Jesus talked about more than any other person in the Bible. So if you believe that Jesus is God's son, you must believe all he said and taught about HELL.

Matthew 25:30

³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Mark 9:43

⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.

Eternity

The devil would like nothing more than for you to believe that this life is all we have. That we should – like the people of Isaiah's day believed - eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.

But the truth is this life is not all that we have. We are eternal beings and will spend that eternity in either heaven or hell.

Paul said that we have...

Titus 1:2 (ESV)

² {the} hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began

Sin and Evil

Despite the enemies attempts to reframe evil as good and good as evil... Sin is still very much alive on this planet.

“If you turn on almost any popular streaming show these days, its shocking what’s included and even promoted in mainstream media. To me, they demonstrate the many demonic influences in our nation right now...”

We’ve seen the opioid and fentanyl epidemic sweep through our country and ravage entire generations. The culture of hopelessness and twisted entertainment has given our youth over to an oppressive spirit of suicide. The political turmoil and economical rumblings have put many people in despair for the future.” - Gary Wilkerson

The life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus

Almost everyday on my newsfeed I see articles seeking to discredit the existence of Jesus, his death and his resurrection. And yet it is one of the most attested to events of history, including those who were eyewitnesses and who, thought it cost them their lives, never once changed their story or slipped up and suggested that it was a lie. Why? Because IT IS REAL!

I want to shout the words of Jesus to Thomas...

John 20:29

²⁹ ...“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 (NLT)

¹⁵ Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. ² It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have

died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.

As many have rightly pointed out... Either Jesus was a liar, a lunatic or Lord

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God – C. S. Lewis

The saving, transforming power of the Gospel message.

The Apostle Paul was a perfect example of that transformation

1 Timothy 1:13-16 (ESV)

¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy... ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

How many billions of people have experienced genuine salvation and transformation because of the Gospel. One conservative estimate puts it a 7 Billion people. Millions, if not billions of lives that have been turned around, brought out of darkness, changed, redeemed, renewed, restored. And each one represents a very personal and powerful testimony of what Jesus did in their lives.

I recently read the testimony of a former Muslim, who is now one of Uzbekistan's "100 Most Wanted criminals because of his bold witness for Christ. About his salvation he said... *"The one thing I knew was that I got freedom," "The one thing I knew was that I met with the real living God."*

Tell me, how many other religions produce those kinds of testimonies. But what I do here from other religions is how oppressive they make people feel, How without hope, how driving to find peace, how discouraged at the lack of answers from their God's

Spiritual Warfare

Ephesians 6:11-12

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

The Last Days

Even a quick look at what's happening in the world today has got to get you thinking about what the Bible promised would take place in the last days. Earthquakes, Famines, Volcanoes, Wars and Political Unrest, Israel, continuing progression towards the control of buying, selling and trading and a global economy and government, a great falling away in the church.

Convoy of Hope says... that Africa is experiencing the greatest hunger crises the world has seen in 50 years accelerating toward famine and pushing more than 20 million people in East Africa alone into crisis levels of food insecurity.

George P. Wood, executive editor of Influence Magazine said in his recent editorial, that *"A truth taken too far in one direction reacts by swining too far in the other direction, like a pendulum. And so, end-times speculation (in the 70's and 80's) gave way to a this-worldly focused. Christians stopped worrying about being left behind and started working toward their best life now... Many post-2000 Christians have forgotten that their best life is yet to come."*

The rapture of the church

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

The second coming

Matthew 25:31-32

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

Revelation 1:7

⁷ “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.

Revelation 22:12

¹² “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.

Final Judgement

2 Corinthians 5:10

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Revelation 20:11-15 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

But some will say... How can we know it's real?

Supporting Proof

Proof of science, medicine, history, archeology

The scripture itself, textual consistency, about 60 authors written over 1600 years
Thousands upon thousands of manuscripts, whose content verifies its validity.

2 Peter 1:20-21

²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

those who gave their lives to proclaim this truth (They had nothing to gain) and not once do we have a report of one of them slipping up or even suggesting that it was all based upon a lie.

How about a guard of elite roman soldiers who supposedly couldn't fend off a few rag tag disciples,

how about secular testimonies, like that of Josephus who authenticate events of the New Testament as a non-Christian source

Prophecies Fulfilled

The science of probability attempts to determine the chance that a given event will occur. A professor at Westmont College, has calculated the probability of one man fulfilling the major prophecies made concerning the Messiah. The estimates were worked out by twelve different classes representing some 600 university students. The students carefully weighed all the factors, discussed each prophecy at length, and examined the various circumstances which might indicate that men had conspired together to fulfill a particular prophecy. They made their estimates conservative enough so that there was finally unanimous agreement even among the most skeptical students.

However, the professor then took their estimates, and made them even more conservative. He also encouraged other skeptics or scientists to make their own estimates to see if his conclusions were more than fair.

Finally, he submitted his figures for review to a committee of the American Scientific Affiliation. Upon examination, they verified that his calculations were dependable and accurate in regard to the scientific material presented. For example, concerning Micah 5:2, where it states the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the professor and his students determined the average population of BETHLEHEM from the time of Micah to the present; then they divided it by the average population of the earth during the same time period. They concluded that the chance of one man being born in Bethlehem was one in 300,000.

After examining only eight different prophecies, they conservatively estimated that the chance of one man fulfilling all eight prophecies was one in 10^{17} . To illustrate how large the number 10^{17} is (a figure with 17 zeros), the professor gave this illustration: If you mark one of ten tickets, and place all the tickets in a hat, and thoroughly stir them, and then ask a blindfolded man to draw one, his chance of getting the right ticket is one in ten. Suppose that we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They'll cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up the one silver dollar that has the special mark on it. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would've had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time.

In financial terms, is there anyone who would not invest in a financial venture if the chance of failure were only one in 10^{17} ? This is the kind of sure investment we're offered by God for faith in His Messiah.

From these figures, the professor concludes the fulfillment of these eight prophecies alone proves that God inspired the writing of the prophecies – the likelihood of mere chance is only one in 10^{17} . Another way of saying this is that any person who minimizes or ignores the significance of the biblical identifying signs concerning the Messiah would be foolish.

But, of course, there are many more than eight prophecies. In another calculation, the professor used 48 prophecies (even though he could have used Edersheim's 456), and arrived at the extremely conservative estimate that the probability of 48 prophecies being fulfilled in one person is the incredible number 10^{157} . How large is 10^{157} ? 10^{157} contains 157 zeros!

The professor gives an illustration of this number using electrons. Electrons are very small objects. They're smaller than atoms. It would take 2.5 TIMES 10^{15} of them, laid side by side, to make one inch. Even if we counted 250 of these electrons each minute, and counted day and night, it would still take 19 million years just to count a line of electrons one inch long. With this introduction, let's go back to our chance of one in 10^{157} . Let's suppose that we're taking this number of electrons, marking one, and

thoroughly stirring it into the whole mass, then blindfolding a man and letting him try to find the right one. What chance has he of finding the right one? What kind of a pile will this number of electrons make? They make an inconceivably large volume. Suppose again that we had this great amount of electrons, 10^{157} of them, and we were able to make 500 of these tremendous balls, six billion light-years in radius, each minute. If we worked day and night it would take us 10^{10} times the 6 billion years to use up our supply of electrons. Now, one of these electrons was marked and thoroughly stirred into the whole mass; blindfold your man and ask him to find the marked electron.

This is the result from considering a mere 48 prophecies. Obviously, the probability that 456 prophecies would be fulfilled in one man by chance is vastly smaller. Once one goes past one chance 10^{50} , the probabilities are so small that it is impossible to think that they will ever occur.

As the professor concludes, "Any man who rejects Christ as the Son of God is rejecting a fact, proved perhaps more absolutely than any other fact in the world."

Personal Experience

Billions of people who have been saved, healed, delivered, set free, changed, the testimonies within this congregation.

2 Corinthians 13:5

⁵ Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

1 Corinthians 11:28

²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

Joshua 24:14-15

¹⁴ "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

1 Corinthians 6:2 says "Today is the day of salvation

Acts 26:1-29

26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.”

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: ² “King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴ “The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. ⁷ This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. ⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

⁹ “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

¹² “On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ^[a] ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

¹⁵ “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ¹⁶ ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

¹⁹ “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I

preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. ²¹ That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. ²² But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— ²³ that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

²⁴ At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

²⁵ “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

²⁹ Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”