

Part 17: The Certainty of Discipleship

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Growing up, I remember the joy of going to a video rental store. You would walk in to a physical building and you would see rows upon rows of movies. I remember the stores had the same smell that those plastic boxes which contained the VHS did.

But out of all the video rental stores, I remember that there was one store which stood above the rest. If you lived in the sticks of Missoula's north side, you could go to Crazy Mike's video. The budget friendly family could swing over to Hastings. But for those who really wanted prime time, fully encased, three day rental glory, you would go to Blockbuster video.

It was king. To be a kid in Blockbuster was to have made it to the big time. As Netflix and Redbox began to pick up, you quickly saw stores of lesser quality pushed out of the marketplace. But soon enough, in 2018, Blockbuster in all of her glory also closed its last store to become an icon of a bygone era.

History sees fads, movements, stores and celebrities rise and fall without hesitation and we don't even tend to look for a comeback. As culture progresses, tastes change and technology advances there are always casualties. Even as we look at the way in which the coronavirus is shaping the consumer experience we might wonder what the landscape will look like in the future.

Nearly 2,000 years ago the Apostle Peter wrote to a collection of churches who themselves felt that they were growing out of style. They perhaps feared that the church, already in its young history, had a good run, but now the advent of new heretical teachings and sensual lifestyles would replace the faith they once believed in.

Peter is writing to these churches to encourage them that they will not end up on the shelves of history. What Peter encouraged the church with has been proved throughout history. Nero couldn't burn the church. The Gladiators couldn't keep up with the converts. The enlightenment didn't displace them. Humanism hasn't consumed them. Post-modernity has yet to silence them. And progressive thought has yet to rid themselves of them.

Why is that? And what hope do you have as an individual that you yourself regardless of your religious belief will find yourself to be more than a trivial commodity of time gone by?

In a world full of talking points and causes which demand attention as if they are the only ultimate issue, Peter wants to speak to us today by way of reminder. He wants to remind us that the future, the hope, and the conduct of the Christian comes down to one simple truth: the nature of being a follower of Jesus.

The Bible has a term for this, it's called being a disciple. A disciple follows their teacher and for the Christian their teacher, their model, their master is ultimately the Jesus who saved them from their sins and gives them new life in him. If you've ever wondered what the sum and scope of the Christian life is, Peter wants to provide that to you today.

If you want to know a way of life which can finally and fully comfort those who feel lost in the frantic quest for meaning, Peter wants to help you today.

Our big picture this morning is this: The reality of Jesus gives us confidence and guidance in all of life. We are going to see this in two ways today. In 2 Peter 1:12-15 we are going to see **Discipleship Defined (What discipleship is)**. And in verses 16-21 we are going to see **Discipleship Defended (Why discipleship matters)**.

Let's begin our first point today by reading **2 Peter 1:12-15**.

Here we see Peter writing to his beloved churches in light of his coming death and as his lasting legacy he is calling them, reminding them, and encouraging them to continue to follow Jesus. This is our first point today: **Discipleship Defined**.

I love parts of scripture where the authors begin to reveal their hearts. Because what we see in this passage is that Peter, though he was an apostle, though he is going to be a martyr, though he is writing scripture preserved through the ages by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was first and foremost a man who wanted to help others follow Jesus.

It's in this passage that we see the wonderful simplicity and stunning priority of discipleship according to Peter. There are two aspects of this passage that I think are helpful for us when it comes to our own lives of discipleship and it is the *priority of discipleship* and the *content of discipleship*.

When it comes to the *priority of discipleship* here we see the way in which Peter assesses the whole scope of his life. Church history doesn't have a clear answer on how Peter died, but tradition in the early church holds that he was crucified not shortly after he wrote 2 Peter.

But in this biographic moment, Peter is less focused on how he will die and more concerned with dying well. In the end of John's gospel we read Peter's interaction with the risen Jesus. Look at what was said: **John 21:17-19**.

Here Jesus predicts Peter's death at the hand of other men, and gives him a final call to follow him. You see for Peter his whole life was summed up with three realities. First, Peter understood that he was going to die at the hands of someone else. But he also understood that this physical death was not the end, in fact our 2 Peter passage he never explicitly refers to death, but instead simply calls it the putting away of his earthly tent, his body. There is life yet to come afterwards.

This is where Peter's hope comes because even though he understands first of all that he will die, he secondly has hope for what is after physical death because he knows that even a broken, rebellious, Christ-denying sinner can be won back to Jesus and eternally secured by his unfathomable grace.

And lastly because of these first two realities, he knew that the sum of his life was to follow Jesus and care for his church.

In light of all of this Peter wants you to know the same things. He wants you to understand that there will be a day where you too will depart from this body by a physical death. At that point there is the possibility of condemnation, but also the hope of being loved by a Jesus like this. A Jesus who accepts

those who once misunderstood him and distanced themselves from him. A Jesus who takes broken and repentant sinners and recommissions them for a life of following him.

If you watch documentaries or read biographies, you have realized that for most people there is a distinct moment where their life turns to assess their own legacy. Despite all they've accomplished they begin asking themselves if they've actually made a difference.

For those of you who have seen Disney's movie *Coco*, you've seen this illustrated in the paranoid hope of Latin spirituality. In the movie the only hope that the afterlife will be kind to you is that people on earth will remember you in a positive way.

But the Christian has immense hope because we have Jesus, our great high priest who remembers us. We are fully represented, fully loved, fully accepted because Jesus was everything that we are not and in salvation he is for us before God the Father.

And because of this, Peter shows the wonderful joy that comes in living not for a legacy of self-preservation, but living for a legacy of helping others remember Jesus. Christians like Peter get the wonderful privilege of living for a legacy not to themselves be remembered, but to remind others about Jesus.

Peter doesn't care if he's remembered by his church, he wants his church to remember the transformative beauty of salvation in Jesus Christ.

John Owen was a 17th century theologian and pastor and he models Peter's tone to his own church in light of his coming death: **I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm; but whilst the great Pilot is in it, the loss of a poor under-rower will be inconsiderable. Live, and pray, and hope, and wait patiently, and do not despond; the promise stands invincible, that He will never leave us, nor forsake us.**

When you lay down at night and you wonder, "Did I close the garage door?" you should also think, "Did I help people follow Jesus better today?" That's what it means to see the priority of discipleship.

But if you are convicted or wanting that, what does it look like? This is the second aspect of discipleship that Peter defines, the **content of discipleship**. Look back at what Peter is reminding his church of: **2 Peter 1:12-15**.

He wants to stir them up by way or reminder so that they will recall these things when he is gone. When we think of stirring something up we think perhaps of something gentle and subtle. And while Peter is certainly being gentle the language he's using is far less than subtle. In seeking to stir up the church he's seeking to wake them up, to arouse them.

The other day my kids all chose to sleep in on a day where we needed to go somewhere early. So I had the privilege of waking them up. I went into the room where three of them were sleeping. I stood there silently observing them, and then I let out the longest and loudest trill I could.

This is what Peter wants to do to us, and what does he want to wake us up to? **2 Peter 1:12, 15**.

Right before this passage Peter shows the church the wonderful effect of faith and repentance which fundamentally converts Christians and gives them a new heart and a new affection so that they might

live differently. He gives eight qualities (vs 5-7) which then would show this newness of life: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love.

The life of discipleship is a life that does two things. First it affirms what Jesus has already done in an individual's salvation. That's what Peter says, he says, "Though you already know these things and are established in them." Discipleship always assumes the positive that God has really saved and equipped this person for a life of faith.

But secondly, discipleship seeks to advance the nature of that conversion into a life of godliness. It presses the hope of the heart into lives of the believer.

When we talk about discipleship at Sovereign Hope we define it as helping each other follow Jesus in all of life through the gospel. It's really that simple, and yet the effects of it are divinely complex.

Discipleship can look at times look formal, but Peter's discipleship here is relatively informal. He's writing to friends in the faith and talking to them about their fears and encouraging them firmly to act like Christians. We are going to start a podcast series at Sovereign Hope in a few weeks which I hope will be helpful in this area of understanding what discipleship can look like. If you don't yet follow the podcast, I'd encourage you to do that so that you don't miss these interviews.

Peter's goal in writing to his church is to prevent them from bailing on the gospel by calling them to be disciples of it, applying it to their lives. Discipleship is simply a way of life for Christians. Growing in holiness is not something for the sincere or super. It's for the one converted by the grace of Jesus.

But Peter assumes a critique of this a critique which our own culture and perhaps our own hearts remind ourselves of: But why should we follow Christ in such a costly way? In other words why is growing in our ability to follow Jesus so important?

Peter's answer: because it's true. This is where Peter moves into his second point: **Discipleship Defended.**

Peter is now going to defend all that he is asking his church to do by showing the reliability of Jesus. If Jesus was who he was and said what he said, then we ought to listen and obey.

Read with me, **2 Peter 1:16-21.**

Peter now begins to build some contrast into his legacy of discipleship by telling us what the Christian life is not. This way of life is not a cleverly devised myth. It's not a fairy tale. It's not a fable.

The boy who cried wolf is a fable. In other words, does it matter if the boy really existed or not? No, what matters is that you be wise with your words. Many religions are myths in that it doesn't really matter if they are real so long as you understand their principles. Christianity is no myth.

Moreover it is not man-made. It's often said by critics that Christianity is simply the religion of power kept by those who want to hold positions of power, primarily white, western males.

This is not true on two levels. First theologically, if men of power wanted to invent a religion that catered to their own authority they would not have invented Christianity. The first premise of

Christianity is that there is a God and I'm not it. The second is I'm an idiot. The third is that by grace I'm saved by someone else's work and not my own. Christianity is a religion of power, but it's not the power of man it's the power of God in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, this idea is wrong statistically. There are more non-white Christians in the world than there are white Christians. Statistically white males are the least likely to go to church. Instead people of color and women are the primary church goers. It also fails to realize that the fastest growing churches in the world are in nonwhite and nonwestern cultures generally typified not by prosperity and power but by poverty and often persecution.

How can you explain such a phenomenon? You can think that perhaps this is just the largest group delusion in the world. Or maybe that this Jesus and his plan to save his people and build his church is actually true.

Peter affirms the later and he does so from the most empirical and enlightenment perspective: I saw it. I was an eyewitness of it. And now he says his job is to make known Jesus' power and his coming.

In English when we think of power and coming we think of Jesus' first coming and his miracles. But the Greek word Peter uses for "coming" is "parousia" which is used almost exclusively in the New Testament in reference to Jesus' second coming.

In other words Peter is saying, "I saw with my own eyes his first coming and now it's my business to prepare the church for his second coming."

And he gives two proofs to the church to help them understand the certainty of hope that Jesus will come back, that we will not drift into nothingness like Blockbuster.

First he speaks of something wonderfully unique that he himself experienced with James and John: the transfiguration of Jesus. You can read this story in Matthew 17 and Mark 9. In these accounts Jesus takes these three men up on a mountain and they see Jesus transfigured before them.

What does this transfiguration look like, it looks like the veil of Jesus' humanity being pulled back for a moment. He becomes radiant, glowing like the sun, his clothes like the purest of linens. They saw Jesus in the fullness of his divinity, and more than that they heard the voice of God the Father say to them, "This is my beloved Son."

In other words the sum of this whole experience they had on the mountain was to confirm to the disciples that this Jesus is the real deal. He shows us that there is a reality beyond this world, a reality made visible only through this godman Jesus Christ.

Peter recounts his experience like this: **2 Peter 1:17-18**.

Wouldn't that be great if you were there! Certainly if you saw what Peter saw you too would trust that if this Jesus said he would come back, he certainly seems capable of doing just that. More than that this same Jesus went on to predict, perhaps more unbelievably, that he would rise again, and sure enough he did.

But for us who didn't get to see this in person, Peter holds out hope for us too that we can have the same level of certain hope in Jesus. Look at what he says: **2 Peter 1:19-21**.

Here is something astounding. Peter says that I saw Jesus glowing on a mountain and you see Jesus in scripture. Both are just as sufficient to prove not just Jesus' beauty and glory, but also his reliability.

Why? How might this experience in God's word be as illuminating as nite-brite Jesus? Because scripture is not just man's words. It's God's words, written through men, carried along by the Holy Spirit.

I had a conversation with my neighbor the other day where he referred to scripture as a heavily edited book of history. Perhaps you've encountered people who think this or maybe you yourself are prone to think this.

While my conversation with my neighbor didn't address these issues, Christians should take great heart in the idea that the Bible is an inerrant and divinely inspired book in its original manuscripts.

Our English translations are based off these original manuscripts and we should have a good level of confidence that the translators are able to transmit the full sense of those original copies.

In fact when it comes to text comparisons we have presently seven existing manuscripts of Plato's writing, 49 of Aristotle and 2,000 of Homer. But of the New Testament we have over 6,000 Greek manuscripts and 24,000 manuscripts in other languages during the New Testament period.

Additionally all these manuscripts are in pure unison on 99.5% of textual issues. And of that .5% very few have any sort of bearing on doctrines of the Christian faith.

Now many of us might love the details and apologetics in defense of the Bible, but Peter cares less about us defending the Bible in this text as he does about us believing the Bible in this text. Jesus will not be impressed by your ability to defend the inerrancy and inspiration of scripture if you do not yourself submit to the Lord of scripture.

Peter wants us to see that at the center of this divinely inspired and prophetically consistent book is this man Jesus Christ. He is the center of all of it. And for the Christian we ought to live like him because we have been saved by his righteousness. Your Christlike conduct proves the power of scripture far better than historical documents do.

Peter gives this word picture saying, pay attention to Jesus as revealed in scripture like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day finally dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

What is Peter saying here? He's saying this, we live in a miner's tunnel. It is dark, there are many paths we might go down, many directions we may choose, but for those who want to do well, for those who want to make it out, you ought to follow the tunnel which has the light.

Scripture makes sense of our world by holding up to us the reality that one day Jesus will come back and he has given us guidance to make it to that day. One day all we labor for in discipleship will be finally and fully rewarded. One day you will stand judgment for your work, and those who stand in Christ will endure.

Why is Peter presenting to you the proof of scripture? So that you will trust Jesus as Lord over all your life. That you do not need to fear the shuttering of his door even when culture threatens to leave it all behind.

Do you realize that if Twitter and Facebook were people, they wouldn't even be able to drive yet? Those who were born in the last half of the Cold War aren't even able to order off the senior citizens menu yet. Retirees who vacation in Hawaii or Alaska are going to states that weren't even states when they were born. The first public radio station is only 100 years old. My great grandfather lived to be 96 years old and I knew him well. But it was only 150 years ago that slavery was still legal in America.

What's my point here? My point is that when it comes to priorities for living we will always find the priorities of the world changing. There will always be some new venture, some new idea, some new frontier which promises to guide us to the end.

But Jesus, and a life lived in obedience to him is the only guide which gives way to eternity. Following him is not only what saves us, it is what shapes the priorities in our life. We are to follow him and to help others do the same.

If you are not a believer in here today I want to leave you with one piece of application coming from Matthew's account of the transfiguration: **Matthew 17:1-8**. There are so many things in this world which will compete for your attention, but look at what the course of history always gives way to: Jesus and only Jesus.

I pray that today you might look up and see only him. That he might be the light that calls you out of darkness and orients your life when all seems dim.

For you who are Christians in here today: Do you believe the word of God in Jesus Christ? Do you believe that he has saved you to change you? Do you believe that he is coming back and he desires for us to live as faithful disciples and disciple makers in this time? Do you realize that the sum of your life and the only legacy that matters is the legacy of stirring others up to this end?

I mentioned last time I preached that J.I. Packer recently died at the age of 93. As a man who spent seven decades caring for God's church and mining the depths of theology he was asked: "What would be your final words to the church?" He answered: "Glorify Christ in every way."

May this be true in our church as well.