

SERMON 10 IN SERIES 'A PERAMBULATION THROUGH (2) PETER'

DATE: 28/11/16. ADVENT SUNDAY. PREACHER: REV. ADRIAN HALLETT

READINGS: 2 TIMOTHY 3: 10-17 & 2 PETER 1:12-21

TITLE: 'ROCK SOLID FAITH' (2)

Last week we began to look at something that was really disturbing Peter's readers. It's apparent that they were troubled and confused. They were receiving teaching from others in the church who were claiming to be speaking from a position of authority. But what they were hearing from them was very different from what Peter had taught them, particularly over the return of Christ... the Second Coming. So, 'Who are we to believe, Peter? These other people seem very knowledgeable. What they say sounds very plausible. They claim to have the same authority as you. Why should we believe you and not them?'

So now, towards the end of the first chapter, he begins to address this issue. He's spent some time checking the foundations of their faith. He does that to make sure they are grounded in the truth so they are better able to identify false teachers and their teaching, now he moves to answer their main concern – and their confusion, over the return of Christ, and so he says:

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (verse 16). In other words, Peter had given them some teaching on this issue in the past. They knew what Peter believed and taught, so Peter moves on to defend his position and to affirm what he taught and why they can be certain of the truthfulness of what he taught.

He does so by making a clear distinction – the other teachers based their teaching on *“cleverly invented stories”* or *“cunningly devised fables”* as other translations have it. What Peter is saying is that there is no basis of fact to anything they are teaching you – the basis of their teaching is nothing more than what they can conjure up in the imagination of their own minds. It has no basis of fact – it's shifting sand. “What I have taught you about the return of Christ” says Peter, “is not a story or a fable. I'm not a second-hand story teller. This is not something I made up. My teaching is based upon what I saw. What I know to be true. I was '*an eye-witness of his majesty*' (v16)”. He refers to the transfiguration and the time when he heard the voice of God say, “*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased*” (v. 17). In other words, in the transfiguration Peter James and John had a foretaste of what his coming will be like when he returns in glory to establish his eternal kingdom. So, says Peter, “Everything I have ever taught you about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ is based on facts – what I saw, what I know to be true. I was '*an eye-witness*' of all he said and taught. It's factual – your faith therefore in the second coming of

Christ and everything else I taught you about him is 'rock solid'".

Now that should be an end to the matter, but Peter, knowing his readers and knowing human nature (!), seems to be aware that for some that may not be enough. No doubt there would have been some who would have been sceptical of Peter's experience. No doubt there would have been some who would have thought it dangerous or wrong to elevate experience over Scripture. And Peter recognises that. He knows too that Scripture is always the final authority – we will do well to take note of that in our 'experience' based culture within the church today! “OK”, he says, “if you are not convinced by what I saw and heard, if you cannot accept that as definitive or sufficient, and you're right not to base your faith just on the experience of others, then what you must also do is take note of what the Scriptures say. Go to the Scriptures”

In the next verse (19) Peter goes on to say, “*And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it...*”. In other words, Peter's message rests on two solid foundations, what he saw as an “*eye witness*” and the testimony of Scripture, and it is to the Scriptures that they are ‘*to pay attention*’.

The over riding concern of Peter is to equip his readers to be able both to recognise false teachers and to be able to stand against false teaching. He wants them to be able to recognise truth from error.. He wants them to be able to discern what is false and to know what is true. He wants them to have true understanding, true knowledge. True knowledge is what he hammers home throughout this epistle. He wants them to have a true knowledge of Salvation (Ch.1: 1-11), he wants them to have a true knowledge of Scripture (1:12-21) and he wants them to have a true knowledge of Sanctification, covered in chapter 3: 3-18. He wants them to be built up in the faith. He wants them to know that the faith they have is 'rock solid' because it is built on these two solid, unshakeable, immovable foundations – the apostles testimony and the authority of Scripture.

So he points them to the Scriptures – ‘*the word of the prophets*’ – that's the O.T. as a whole, not just predictive prophecy. He describes it that way because the whole of the O.T is prophetic in the sense that everything written points to Christ – both his first coming and his second coming. That's what Jesus himself said in John 5:39: “*These are the Scriptures that testify about me...*”. And again, on the road to Emmaus, talking to two of the disciples after his resurrection, “*He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*” (Luke 24:25-27). “*Moses and all the Prophets*” - in other words, the whole of the O.T. I would love to have been there to hear the way Jesus opened the Scriptures to them. No wonder the two disciples said, “*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*”. That must have been the best Bible study ever!

So the '*word of the prophets*', the O.T. points to Christ. It points to his first coming as Saviour and it points to his second coming in glory as judge to set up his eternal kingdom. It's all there in the Scriptures. No wonder Peter says, "... *and you will do well to pay attention to it*" (v.19). That's to be the difference between you and the false teachers. They don't pay attention to the Scriptures – they deny the truth of the Scriptures. So, to identify what is false, pay attention to the Scriptures, because the false teachers don't do that. That's the only way we can be safeguarded against error – to '*pay attention*' to the Scriptures. The false teachers deny the truth of the Scriptures and they are very subtle in their approach. It's very hard sometimes to discern error. The only way is to know the Scriptures – our second safeguard against false teachers.

Peter actually says, '*you will do well to pay attention*' to the Scriptures. That has the sense of you will do 'right well'... you will do excellently... you will do correctly, and if you do, there can be no room for blame. It has the sense of, 'if I do my part and pay attention to the Scriptures, God honours that and will keep me from harm and error. If I don't pay attention to the Scriptures and fall into error, there is no one to blame but myself! So, pay attention to the Scriptures!

Yes, we have the testimony of Peter and the other apostles, but we also have the certainty and the authority of the Scriptures. That's why our faith is 'rock solid'.

But there is another reason for Peter's emphasis on the importance of the word of God and why we should '*pay attention to it*'. He goes on to say in that same verse, "*as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*".

What is the point he is making here? He's painting a picture for us. Just as a man wandering around in the dark is totally dependent upon a lamp, so are we totally dependent upon the light of the word in this dark world. Remember how the Psalmist put it? "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a lamp for my path*" (Ps.119:105).

You don't need me to tell you that this world in which we live is, as Peter puts it, "a dark place". Our fallen world is a dark, dirty murky world. As it was in Peter's time, so it is in ours. Just watch the news or read a newspaper. What a sad and dangerous place is our world in the 21st Century. And I just don't mean physically and emotionally, but spiritually too. So many religions, so many different voices clamouring for our attention. So many people caught up in all sorts of weird and dangerous belief systems.... involvement in the occult....Satanism....witchcraft. Involvement in New Age spirituality.... involvement in the various cults. Some of the things I read about which apparently sane, mature people believe in these days simply amazes me! And they mock Christians for what we believe! I think it was ---- who said, 'When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything'. How right he was. Our world is a very dark place. Where are we to go for truth? What or who do we believe?

Answer? We need light. We need a lamp. We can't see the truth until the light shines. We need the word of God. God has given us his word to show us a safe path through. He has given us his word to illuminate that safe path. Pay attention to the word of God! Know the Scriptures!

Note that this light is temporary ...”*until the day dawns*”. Scripture will endure for ever, but it is only going to shine in this “*dark place, until the day dawns...*”. For now, Scripture is the only light we have, hence the vital importance of the Scriptures for us. But there will come a time when we will no longer need that light, because when “*until the day dawns*” is pointing to the Second Coming of Christ. For now, we have the Scriptures as a kind of night light enabling us to see in the dark. When Christ returns, the darkness is dissipated. He comes in blazing light in all his glory, visible all around us “*and the morning star rises in your hearts*”, dissipating not only the darkness but any doubts and questions still lingering in our hearts.

Just in case they haven't quite got the message yet, on the importance of the Scriptures, Peter hammers home one more point: “*Above all, you must understand*” (v.20) - he's talking about the Scriptures. Let me read on, “*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*” (v.20).

Now what is he saying here? In the O.T. you had false prophets who claimed to speak for God. Time and time again the true prophets of God exposed them for what they were. Shams! Jer.23:16 - “*Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord*”. One other example (there are many many more references I could give). Here's Ezekiel in ch.13:3 - “*Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing*”. That's what the false prophets were doing – making it up. They weren't speaking for God at all. The false teachers are exactly the same. They're making it up, doing and saying their own thing – that's the point.

Those who wrote the Scriptures were not like them. That's why he says “*Above all you must understand*”, or “*But know this*” as some versions have it. This is vitally important. What you read in Scripture is unique. It is not of human origin, but divine. This is God speaking. The Bible is not the product of men, but of God - “*For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*” (v.21).

Don't ask me how to explain how this works. The 66 books of the bible were written by men, yes. But men moved by the Holy Spirit. Each writer was different; they had their own style and personality. That comes through as you read the different books, but somehow, Peter tells us, “*they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*”.

In the book of Acts, in chapter 27 Verses 15 & 17, we read of the ship Paul was in being “*driven along*”. That's the same Greek word Peter uses. It conjures up a picture of the writers of both the Old and New Testaments hoisting their 'spiritual sails', as it were, and the Holy Spirit filling them with his breath, blowing them along, carrying them along, in the direction *he* chooses. “Men spoke from God” - that's the point Peter is making. This book is unique. It's different. There is no other book like it. All other books, even other so called 'holy books' of other religions are just men speaking. Men just speaking their thoughts about God, nothing more than “*cleverly made up stories*” (v.16), thoughts and words that “*had its origin in the will of man*” (v.21).

Let me close by asking you a question. How do you view this book? How important is it to you? Do you view as a sort of history book? Do you view it as simply a record of all that Jesus said and did? Or do you view the Bible as an inspired book that God himself has overseen and compiled? Do you believe that it contains everything we need to know to live in a relationship with that God who inspired it? Do you perhaps see it as a 'love letter' from this God “*who so loved the world*”? Because when we do begin to “understand” Scripture in that way, then we will have a very different view of this book and we will begin to realise how important this book is to us and just how privileged we are to be able to turn its pages. Our faith is 'rock solid because of this book.

Last Sunday was 'Stir up Sunday'. Some of you won't know what I'm talking about! Those of you with an Anglican or Methodist background will know that on the last Sunday of the church's year, this collect is used: “Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of they faithful people, that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of the be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord”. It became known as 'stir up Sunday' and that then, traditionally, became the Sunday on which you made your Christmas puddings to ensure they were nicely matured for Christmas Day!

I want to 'stir you up' this Sunday. Today is Advent Sunday, the beginning of the church's year, the Sunday on which the Advent season begins. The time when we look back in celebration of the first coming of Jesus, but also the time when we look forward in eager anticipation to the coming of Christ's kingdom when he returns for his people – the return of Christ, the Second Coming. The very thing Peter is so concerned about. Peter was 'stirring up' his readers by stressing the importance of the Scriptures. “*Pay attention*” to them was how he put it. The Greek word is very rich in meaning - 'devote myself to'.... 'to give full attention to'... 'to set a course and keep to it'... 'to turn my mind to'.... 'to be attentive'... 'to guard oneself'. That I think brings out just how much importance Peter places on the Scriptures.

So I want to 'stir you up' this Sunday, at the beginning of the churches year, to become a people of this book. Maybe you already are, but most of us, if we are honest, don't give this book and the reading of it the priority we should. Somehow

it's always so difficult with all the pressures we have. We mean to be a people of the book, but the time we intend to set aside to read the Bible somehow gets squeezed out.

I came across this the other day, something written by Selwyn Hughes a few years ago in a series he did on the importance of reading God's Word. I pray that what he says will be the spur for both you me to become truly a people of this wonderful Word of God:

“Every time I open the Bible and turn its pages, I do so with fingers that are almost trembling. I am staggered by the fact that I am thinking God's thoughts after him. So developing an appetite for the Bible turns on how we see this Book. If we see it as in a very real sense the Word of God then we will count any day ill spent which does not include some time given to poring over its pages and absorbing its great and wondrous truths.”

I only want to add that it is on the Scriptures which our faith stands – God's word, not man's, and that is why our faith is 'Rock Solid'!