

Eyewitnesses

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 October 2020

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. Special welcome if you are new or visiting.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we've become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it, which means that we know that everyone has something to hear from God and his word, which is why we open it week after week on Sunday mornings to look at what God has to say to us.

If you've been with us, you know that we are studying the book of 1 Peter, and the book of 1 Peter is a letter. It's a letter written by a man named Peter, and he writes it to a church in the 60s A.D. somewhere in the Roman Empire, and he writes it with one goal, one purpose in mind. He wants this church to grow, and he wants them to grow in two ways.

As we've seen, he wants them to grow in both knowledge and grace, and I've been emphasizing as we've started the first chapter the dangers of knowledge.

[1 : 15] We've talked about the ways we can have knowledge, but it doesn't do what it's supposed to do. We've talked about how knowledge is not enough, and you might be thinking at this point, as I've talked about the dangers of these things, that I'm anti-knowledge.

Maybe you think Peter is anti-knowledge. Of course, it's not that there's anything wrong with knowledge. It's that knowledge is necessary. It's just not sufficient, and we are now going to turn a little bit towards knowledge and see the necessity of it.

Of course, we have to have knowledge, right? If our growth in grace comes from knowledge, then we won't grow without it. Knowledge is essential. Even more than that, if we must have knowledge, that knowledge must be true.

If it is what is going to lead us to grow, if it is, as we talked about last time, the thing that stirs us up, then we want it to be something we can rely on.

We want it to be something that's trustworthy, right? And so that leads us to the question of this passage. We're in 2 Peter 1, starting at verse 16, and we're going to ask this question. Why do we trust the Bible?

[2 : 28] Why do we believe that it's true? And by the way, it better be true, right? The Bible says it can hold up the weight of our lives, can it? If we are going to love our enemies, if we're going to sacrifice for the sake of the poor, if we're going to say no to sexual experiences that our culture celebrates, if we're going to come here every Sunday rather than going to the mountains or watching Netflix, if we're going to lay ourselves down for the sake of others, what we believe and celebrate here on Sunday mornings better be true.

And so how can we trust it and have confidence in it? Of course, the Apostle Paul raises this same issue in 1 Corinthians 15. He says, In Christ, if we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

In other words, if this isn't true, you and I, we're idiots. And so why is it that we have such confidence?

It's that question that we're going to turn now. I invite you to turn with me in your worship guide. This passage is printed. Of course, you can find it on your phone or in your Bible. No matter where you turn, though, remember that this is God's word.

Isaiah chapter 40 tells us that the grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of God remains forever. And so that's why we read it now, starting at verse 16.

[3 : 55] 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.

For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, we ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for your word, which is not just comforting and challenging, but also true.

And so we ask that you would send your spirit to help us this morning to understand it and to believe it, that the confidence comes from knowing that these are not myths, that they're things that are based in fact.

They're things that you guarantee and secure through us. And so we ask these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. I have shared with you all before that one of my highlights of growing up was going to a wilderness camp every summer.

[5 : 19] That was in West Virginia. It was right on the border of the George Washington National Forest. And if you add up all the weeks that I spent there, I probably have spent multiple months of my life in West Virginia, from when I was in elementary school all the way through college.

And when I first started going, what I would do is I would go with these weeks called Father-Son Weeks. So you would go as a young boy with your dad, and you get to do all these things together. And one of the things that you would get to do is to go rappelling.

Now, if you're familiar with rock climbing, of course, you know there's rock climbing where you climb up a wall, right? Rappelling is where you go down the wall. So there's, you know, a flat rock face. You're at the very top.

You secure some ropes to something that's solid and not going to move. That's important. And then you kind of lean backwards like you're sitting, and you climb down the wall all the way to the bottom. And you can avoid any climbing to the top, right, if you're able to take a trail up to the top.

It's got strength on your part. The only problem with rappelling is that it's very scary. And it's very scary because you are literally sitting down into thin air.

[6 : 24] So you're doing something your body is telling you is incredibly dangerous. What will happen often then is if you have someone who's young, say a young kid, you might freeze at the top because you suddenly realize, I'm about to sit down onto thin air.

There's nothing here. This goes against everything I've been trained to believe and do. I am walking out, and it feels like I'm going to die. So it requires some coaching, right?

Now, at some point, I made it through that. I was able to rappel down with my dad, I believe. But later in my camp experience, there came a time where this was at that age reserved for father-son camps.

You couldn't do this if you came without your dad in elementary school. My guess is it was a little too scary. It's helpful if dad's there to coach you through it. But I remember when I was in junior high school, and now this is a point where even if your dad wasn't there, people were allowed to rappel, and so I was there at one point.

I was probably, I don't know, 12 years old or so, and I was there with another kid who was rappelling for the first time, and he hit that moment, that moment where you're sitting backwards onto nothing, and he froze, as often happens.

[7 : 30] He could not continue and keep going down because he felt like he was going to die, right? And so the man running this ropes course was trying to talk him through this to get him to go down the mountain.

I remember vividly what he said to him. He asked him a question. He said, do you trust me? And do you trust these ropes?

Are you able to rest and rely? Your senses, right, might be telling you you're going to die. Do you trust all this equipment? Do you trust me that I'm not going to kill you? It's an important question, right?

The same question of that is the one that comes before us this morning. When it comes to God's word, do we trust it? Do we trust that we're not going to die?

It is not an academic or theoretical question, right? He was not asking this junior hire, you know, in this theoretical world, if we're shopping at an outdoor store, do you have confidence that these ropes you're buying are going to work?

[8 : 35] It wasn't a theoretical question. It was an urgent question. You're about to step off the side of a mountain. Either you're going to die or you're not. And it's going to depend on whether you can rely on this equipment. The same is true for us.

When we come to God's word, it is not an academic or theoretical question. If we believe that's the case, we've missed the point. It is an urgent question for us as well.

If we are going to live the life of faith, what we believe better be true. And if it isn't, we are going to choose a different path.

Of course, this raises the question that I haven't answered yet. Why does Peter write a letter about knowledge? Why is knowledge so important to him?

Knowledge wasn't an emphasis in other letters that we've gone through. And the answer is this. Peter is writing to people who are under attack from false teachers. These false teachers, we're going to meet them in chapter 2, are telling this church all sorts of things that aren't true.

[9 : 41] And these untruths have the potential to lead them to sin, right? Because knowledge and growth and grace go together. So if there's an attack on knowledge, there's also going to be an attack on the way that we live our lives.

And so they're telling, we find out, what these false prophets are teaching in verse 16. We did not follow cleverly devised myths. Peter here is responding to what these false teachers are saying. They are telling the Christians at this church that what they believe is a made-up story. And so Peter comes in having to respond to that teaching.

In fact, in chapter 3, Peter's going to talk about how these false teachers are mocking the idea that Jesus would return to the earth. They're making fun of Christians for believing it.

And so we can understand why knowledge is so important for this letter and these people.

Knowledge is under attack. Their confidence in what they've been taught is under attack. And it's not just knowledge in general, but we find out it's a specific teaching that's under attack in verse 16.

[10 : 42] Now this word coming in the New Testament is a technical term. It's talking about the promise that Jesus is going to return to the earth.

It's talking about what we refer to as Jesus' second coming. Jesus' first coming we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus' second coming we look forward to and anticipate.

And so he has been teaching them this, that there's going to be a power and a coming. Jesus Christ is going to arrive. The false teachers are telling them that this is nothing but a myth. In other words, these false teachers are telling them these ropes won't hold you.

You are putting your life on something that is not strong enough to hold it up. Now you might be wondering why I brought my keys with me up front, which I typically don't do.

My keys are on this carabiner. And I bought this carabiner at an REI in Richmond, Virginia in 2016 to help hold up a hammock. So it needed to be able to hold a lot of pounds, right?

[11 : 48] This carabiner, this one I have right here, is rated for 22 kilonewtons of force. Now I assume most of you have translated that in your mind to pounds, but for those of you who haven't, that's almost 5,000 pounds of force.

So that's why I chose this one, because my keys are so heavy, I want to make sure nothing happens. There are other carabiners, however. I also have this one. Now this one is specifically made to be a keychain.

It's not made for what this other one is. And it says on it, China, not for climbing. In fact, if you look on it, it tells you, not intended for climbing, supporting human weight, or heavy loads over 10 pounds.

5,000 pounds, 10 pounds. And then I also have this other little one that I got at Home Depot. It was an extra when I was hanging up outdoor lights under the deck at my old house.

These false teachers are telling them, when you rely on the stories about Jesus' second coming, you are taking a 10-pound weight and you're resting your life on it.

[12 : 57] It is a myth. You are going to die. Peter is saying, it's actually this, it's actually a 5,000-pound carabiner. It is able to hold your weight and maybe a car.

Which one is true? Are we idiots? Is this a 10-pound keychain? Or is it a 5,000-pound climbing carabiner?

Well, Peter gives us the answer here why these are not cleverly devised myths. Verse 16, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. One of the emphases of the New Testament is the importance and the presence of eyewitness testimony to what Jesus did and said.

It's something that's emphasized over and over again. Two Easter's ago, we looked at 1 Corinthians chapter 15, which talks about the fact there were multiple witnesses to Jesus after he died and rose from the dead, including 500 people at one time.

Paul's point in telling us this is, you can go ask and check out the facts for yourself if you don't believe me. These things have not happened in secret. That's not the only place, by the way, that eyewitness testimony is emphasized.

[14 : 06] Luke chapter 1, the beginning of that gospel. Luke tells us he's writing it based on, wait for it, eyewitnesses. He has gathered the evidence.

He's now trying to report his historical investigation. There are details throughout the gospel of Luke that would only be there from someone who is concerned with accurate telling of something that's happened in history.

Also, 1 John chapter 1, verse 1, John tells us, I'm writing these things and we saw them happen. Over and over again, the New Testament emphasizes these are things that many people witness and act on as a result.

This could not be a delusion that was shared by just a few people. It's something that was seen by many people, and they reoriented their lives as a result. You can rest on this, Peter is telling them, as something strong enough to hold up your life, not only but in part because of eyewitness testimony.

By the way, those things they witnessed caused them to change their lives in such a way that they lost and suffered. It caused them to change their lives in such a way that they lost and they suffered.

[15 : 24] Peter gives up his great career as a fisherman, ends up being hung upside down. This is very different from other major religions. Think about, for example, Islam, Mormonism.

In those cases, there's something very private that happens that other people didn't witness, and the people who witnessed them gain wives and power. The eyewitnesses of Christianity did not gain wives and power.

They gained lots and lots of suffering. And so they have put their skin in the game. They are tons of people who were witnesses to the same thing that caused them to realign their lives in such a way that they lost in this world.

And so why do we have confidence in the Bible? Why do we have confidence in God's Word?

There are many reasons. Peter emphasizes one of them for us this morning.

We have confidence because of the eyewitnesses. The Bible is very concerned with evidence.

Notice, by the way, the way that we handle doubts here.

[16 : 36] Peter doesn't say, Oh, you have doubts? You're attacked by these false teachers? You just need to have more faith. You just need to believe harder. No, he realizes these are intellectual people.

God's given them minds. He presents them with the evidence for what they believe. He was there, and he was there with Peter, James, and John. Of course, which brings us to our next point here, what they were eyewitnesses of.

What I discussed earlier in terms of eyewitnesses in Luke and John and Paul were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and his resurrection. Peter, however, chooses something very different.

He says we were eyewitnesses of what happened to Jesus when he received honor and glory from God the Father. What is he talking about here? Well, he's making a reference to an episode that we see in Matthew 17, Mark 9, and Luke 9, which is referred to as the transfiguration.

The transfiguration is an event in which Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up to the top of a mountain, and while he's up there, he is transfigured. That's why it's called the transfiguration, because Jesus changes in his appearance.

[17 : 45] We're told that his face is like the sun. And so he's given this new appearance, this new power. Peter, James, and John are witnesses to it. We're also told that Moses and Elijah were there.

And so it's this moment, remember, most of Jesus' earthly ministry, he just appears to be a man. In fact, Isaiah tells us there's nothing in his appearance that would have made him attractive.

But in this one moment, for these three people, God chooses to give them a glimpse of what's going to come in the future. He gives them a glimpse of Jesus' glory. And that's what this honor and glory is telling us about.

It's about this episode. The honor is what God the Father says about Jesus at the transfiguration. He says, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.

So there's this moment where they see God giving his favor on Jesus. They also see his glory, which is when his face looks like the sun. So he's telling them, remember, this story that we all know about Jesus and what's told about him, which for us is now recorded in the Gospels, we were eyewitnesses of it.

[18 : 53] We were there. We saw. We have seen with our own eyes that Jesus is this. He's not this.

And because we have seen it with our own eyes, we have changed our lives. You can change your lives as well. We had a small experience in part of what you all will experience one day in full when Jesus comes back.

And so there's something a little bit different here that's happening from other eyewitness emphasis in the New Testament because he's focusing on this one episode. The reason he's focusing on the episode of the transfiguration is he's talking not just about knowledge in general, but about the doctrine of Jesus coming back to the earth.

When Jesus comes back to the earth, and we're going to go into detail on that in chapter 3, so I'm not going to take a deep dive this morning. When Jesus comes back to the earth, it's going to be a coming of power and glory.

And so he's saying, we saw him a little bit in power and glory when he was here on earth, and that's the evidence we need. That's the small sample we need to know he's coming in great power and glory. So this specific doctrine of the second coming, Jesus returning, being attacked, here's the evidence we have of that specific doctrine being true.

[20 : 12] That's the reason it's the transfiguration he focuses on, not saying we were present when Jesus taught. Of course these people knew that he was present when Jesus taught. No one was arguing about whether Jesus existed or not. The question is whether he's returning to the earth.

We'll dive into that question deeply when we get to chapter 3. The point for us is this. No matter how we feel, we hold on to the facts.

No matter what we're experiencing, we hold on to what we know to be true in time and history. Now, when I was growing up in the Capone family, we were more of a national park family than a theme park family.

We would take trips outside. We wouldn't visit theme parks as much. So that was something I wasn't very familiar with. In fact, I'm the only person in my immediate family who's willing to get on a roller coaster.

Now, I moved and lived for three years in Williamsburg, Virginia, which if you're familiar with it, you know it's the home of Busch Gardens. Now, I'm not a theme park person, but I wasn't just going to hole up in my apartment by myself and never hang out with people.

[21 : 21] So I did what great locals do, and I got a year pass. Actually, I got a two-year pass to Busch Gardens and to Water Country. And so the locals would show up in the evenings after all the tourists had gone.

We'd just be there for a couple hours, and then we'd leave. We didn't need to make a whole day of it. We didn't need to be there in the sun. That was for those poor people who had to travel to visit.

That's why you have a yearly pass, right? Well, you don't go and not ride a roller coaster.

And, of course, these roller coasters, for me, you feel like you're going to die, especially when you're coming up to the very top. You know, it goes very, very slowly, and then you have that moment where you think, what in the world have I gotten myself into?

Well, there's only one way I knew how to overcome this. I was involved in youth ministry at that church, by the way, and so this is what the youth loved to do. If I wanted to hang out with them, part of what I needed to do was ride roller coasters.

So when I was on the roller coaster, kid you not, this is how I would think through it. Right now, I feel like I'm going to die. However, I also know that many people have ridden this roller coaster before me and they have not died.

[22 : 25] Many people are going to ride it after me and not die. I know that there are mechanics, people who work on this roller coaster, to keep it in good working condition. And so no matter how I feel, I know that I'm going to make it to the end alive.

And so when I'd get to that pause at the very top of the mountain, I'd have to hold on to that. But I am not going to die. No matter how I felt, I knew what the facts were for the saints who had come before me.

And I knew what the facts were for the saints who had come after. And so I would be able for that moment to embrace the experience of dropping vertically at 90 degrees and know it was going to be okay.

And I was able to enjoy it. No matter how I felt in the moment, right, I was able to hold on to that truth. Now, you'll know if you've been on a roller coaster that they like to snap pictures right as you're at the worst section.

And I'm very proud to tell you that while most people, when they get their pictures snapped, they make sure they throw their hands up in the air, they put a terrified look on their face, I kept my face blank. It's excited on the inside.

[23 : 36] Don't need to be excited on the outside. Hands in. The same is true for us. We live as Christians in this world often with fear and doubt.

And when we do, we have to hold on to what we know to be true in time and space and history. Otherwise, we will not be able to keep going.

I have a friend who at one point in his life told me he would get up every morning and he would ask one question. It's a very challenging time in his life. Did Jesus rise from the dead or not? Yes, he could go on with the day.

5,000 pounds of force. I can trust it. And so that's what we do as Christians. We ask, is Jesus coming back or not?

If he is, we live our lives in light of that. That is the one piece of knowledge that we need to keep going. Same is true for these people as well.

[24 : 47] Of course, he is, right? The emphasis in this passage is on Jesus' return. He's coming back. That's meant to be a motivator for these people. Because what happens to us at Jesus' return depends on our faith in him.

When Jesus comes back to the earth, he is bringing full and final justice. He's going to bring judgment for those who do not have faith in him and salvation for those who do.

And so this knowledge, the fact that this is true, is meant to be a motivation for these people, encouragement that they are to hold on and a reminder of what their holy living is pointing towards. That they have only one hope, and that is Jesus' return. And so their faith is worth it. By the way, when we think about faith, many people think about faith as something where it's climbing up a wall rather than repelling down.

If you're climbing up a wall, a rock face, your grip strength is what matters. Your upper body strength is what matters. It is up to you.

[25 : 51] If you are repelling down, repelling requires not strength, but trust. The same is true for us and our faith.

When you are repelling, you are resting on and trusting the strength of the ropes and the harness. When we have faith, we are resting on the strength of another, not our own moral goodness or performance.

Your harness, when you're repelling, does not care how large your biceps are. It's either strong enough to hold you up and save you, or it's not and you'll fall to the bottom and die.

And so that's the offer of the gospel. God tells us in the gospel, we are not good enough. Our strength is too small.

There is a wall, maybe we could climb it, except we're not powerful enough. We're not strong enough. In fact, we're sinful. We need to trust and rest on another.

[26 : 56] We have to put ourselves on Jesus and his strength because there is only one way down. And there's only one way down that's safe. Jesus tells us he has come, not for the righteous, but for sinners.

He says in Mark chapter two, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. And so faith is saying this, I am not strong enough.

Outside of the strength of God's harness and his ropes, I will die. But because Jesus was willing to give up that harness and those ropes, he died on my behalf.

And so God's strength, his provision is for me. It's for anyone and everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ. Anyone and everyone who's willing to admit, I am not strong enough to save myself. But God in his power is. And so I rest on him and trust on him. And I do it because of the facts. There are many people who believe that because of their strength, they've earned themselves a way into heaven.

[28 : 08] But Jesus talks about this in Matthew chapter seven. He says, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven.

On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. In other words, there will be many people who come to Jesus and say, don't you remember how strong I was? Don't you remember how many walls I climbed up because my grip was so good?

And Jesus is going to say, depart from me, I never knew you. I came not for the well, but for the sick, for those who need a physician.

But for those who have faith and trust in Jesus Christ, he is powerful enough to hold us up. This can hold 5,000 pounds.

[29 : 11] I have just my keys on it. Hebrews chapter one tells us that God holds the world together by the word of his power. If he can hold together the world, how much more can he hold up your small life?

I had a friend recently shared with me a story about a time in her life that was very challenging, and it was so challenging.

She experienced multiple things that were incredibly traumatic. She began having panic attacks.

And if you're familiar with panic attacks, you know that when they become severe, they mimic, they have the same symptoms as a heart attack.

And so she was afraid in this moment of what was happening to her when she would have these attacks. And so she went to her doctor. And her doctor said, well, let's do a workup.

Let's look at your heart and see how it's doing. And they did a full workup on her heart to see what the help was. Came out, her heart was in amazing, wonderful shape. And so the doctor printed out the report for her, all the details and graphs on her heart.

[30 : 22] And he handed it to her and he said, when you have a panic attack and you feel like you're having a heart attack, I want you to pull this sheet out and look at the health of your heart and know what's true.

I want you to rely on the facts, not on what you feel. Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us.

As we live in this world, when we are tempted to believe what's false, when we're tempted to give up and forget what is true of Jesus and what he has done for us, Peter is telling us to take out the sheet and look at the facts.

That no matter how we feel and no matter what's happening in the world, God has not given up on us. There is life in Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for your word that you've given to us. We ask that you would use what is true to override what we think and feel in the moments and chaos of this world, that we would remember that you are a God who showed up in real time and real space and real history to pay for our sins and to bring us to yourself.

[31 : 42] We thank you that we cannot climb up. We are not strong enough, but that Jesus is strong for us. And so we ask these things in his name. Amen.