

NEAC Bible Reading

The Context for Mission

Talk 2 Encountering False Teaching

Yesterday we saw how Peter stressed the joy of what we have received by grace through our Lord Jesus Christ — the divine power he has given us; the great and precious promises that we have through his glory and goodness; and the staggering privilege of partaking in the divine nature. We heard his challenge to live now as reflecting that nature, and never to forget the forgiveness of sins. Christ is at the heart of it all.

Now, Peter moves from this great positive Gospel statement and appeal, into handling the attacks of false teachers.

1. The Urgent Reminder— (vv 12-15)

So important is what Peter says that he insists his readers are to ‘remember’ the matters of which he has been speaking *always*, even if they know them well! Look at the repetition here.

{{In ch 1 see verses 12, 13, 15;

{{In ch 3 see verses 2, 5, 8 etc.

Verse 12 —

I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them

And the need to remember is there again in v 13 and v 15. It’s there in 3:1 after the examples of false teachers in ch 2. It’s there in 3:2.

It’s contrasted with the forgetfulness of the false teachers in 3:5; It’s there in 3:8. Remember these things.

Perhaps we feel we are firmly established in the truth (as v 12 puts it) and as good evangelicals we don’t need to spend time on these things! Peter’s concern is that complacency lays us all open to false teaching.

{{ We *will* encounter false teaching (2:1)

The fact is that we *will* all encounter false teaching. Look at 2:1 ... ***just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies,***

Note, it will ‘secretly happen’. As we have found in recent years in a number of areas, false teaching is suddenly upon us. Jesus himself warned of the same danger in Matthew 7 —

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing...

In 3:3 Peter is keen for us to see that the presence of scoffers and false teaching is actually a mark of the last days, the days in which we live.

Peter follows the prophets and the apostles who were worried about false teachers primarily because they are or will be *among* us.

So as Peter bridges into a detailed account of false teaching in ch 2, he is both concerned that we remember the full Gospel for our own joy, and trust the great promises, and so we can live as God wants.

a) we remember for joy and for life

But also so we can withstand false teaching. As we are told that we *shouldn’t* believe something or trust some Scripture, we remember what is true and what we have received.

b) we remember in order to withstand false teaching

Sometimes particular truth claims will be attacked. At other times the challenge will be more general. Here the strongest attack is reserved for the glorious second coming of Christ who returns to judge and to save.

- **Presenting issue — Is Christ’s return as judge a myth? (v16)**

It seems some people have said Christ’s return is a man-made myth. Perhaps they argued that the apostles had invented the story to put fear into people as a means of moral control. Sounds quite modern, doesn’t it?

But this passage helps us see how Peter deals with such false teaching. Behind this specific problem, Peter sees a challenge to the truth of Revelation itself. And when he looks at the attack on the trustworthiness of the Scriptures, he points out that it is also an attack on the sovereignty of Christ himself. Chapter 2:1 makes that point explicit, but

** for screen

{ {Attack on Christ’s return (one example of false teaching)
leads to
Denial of trustworthiness of Scripture
leads to
Denial of Lordship of Christ } }

I’ll develop that on Monday. For now we need to learn from Peter that we *will* encounter false teaching and, if we are ever to combat falsehood, we must recognise what lies behind the challenges of false teachers. The issue is whether the apostles and Scripture are accepted as trustworthy or not.

3. **Peter defends the truth of what the apostles have taught.**

So Peter turns us first to

a) the trustworthiness of what was *seen* and *heard* by the apostles. (vv 16-18)

And he specifically appeals to the Transfiguration. There he says, ‘we’, (Peter James and John as we know from Matthew 17) were eye-witnesses of Christ in his Messianic and judging glory. At the Transfiguration they saw a divinely given preview of Christ, the glorified King. Theirs is the eye-witness testimony to this event. But the event itself needed interpretation, and so Peter depends not just on what they *saw* but also on what they *heard*. (end of v 17)

** for screen (and keep on screen to include with it the next verse below**

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Virtually the same words as in Matthew. Here the Father brings together two Old Testament texts. The first part draws on Ps 2, a psalm full of Messianic expectation, which speaks of the Son who will rule the nations. The second part draws on Isaiah 42:1 which speaks of the suffering servant but also of that servant’s role in bringing just judgment to the nations

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. (Is 42:1)

The apostles had seen Christ in kingly glory (we were eye witnesses (v 16) and they had heard that pronounced by the Father (v 18). But how interesting it is that Peter turns to the Transfiguration to defend Christ’s return to judge. You see, in order to do this he depends on understanding the Father’s words of explanation in their Old Testament context — a context of Messianic coming and judgment. Even the high mountain on which the Transfiguration took place helps provide a context for the quote from Psalm 2:6-7, where we read —

“I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.” I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

The coming is also guaranteed with the future tense of Ps 2:9, and the use of that coming as a warning of judgment to come is established in Ps 2:10

You will rule them with an iron sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth.

So Peter says, this teaching about Christ’s return is trustworthy because of apostolic eye-witness and God’s word of explanation which has been given context by the Scripture from which it is taken. The Transfiguration was a divinely given preview of the Second Coming.

Secondly Peter turns us to

b) the trustworthiness of Scripture. (v 19)

While Peter may have had some particular promises from the Old Testament prophets in mind that refer to the second coming, it is more likely that, like Jesus himself on the road to Emmaus, Peter sees the whole of the Old Testament as trustworthy revelation about Christ himself and about his coming in glory as king and judge and Saviour.

He makes the point that “Until the Day dawns” this prophetic witness is a glorious evidence of the truth of what he says. Scripture is the star that shines in our world now, the dark place, until the full glory is revealed at the Lord’s coming.

Until Jesus once again returns personally the prophetic lamp and the apostolic lamp (Scriptures) shine out for us with the light of Christ, a light that remains until the day dawns and the morning star rises. The idea of the morning star is drawn from Numbers 24:17 and various other places in the Old Testament and is a Messianic text referring to the coming of the great ruler for Israel.

So the light that we have now, Peter is saying, is Scripture. And he says ‘you will do well to pay attention to it’. Why? Well, because here it is that, under the Spirit’s inspiration, we learn of the things of which he is talking —

the great and precious promises; the redemptive work of Christ; the forgiveness of sin; the power that we have been given to live godly lives; what godly lives are to look like, and, specially here, the coming in glory. But here we also learn what is false about false teaching.

But then this leads to questions of why these documents should be trusted.

Thirdly, then, Peter talks of

c) the divine origin of Scripture (vv 20-21)

Scripture carries God’s own authority. v 21 As the prophets spoke they did so from God.

This cuts right to the heart of some of the issues surrounding our modern debates over the extent of Scriptural inspiration.

Peter is arguing in v 20, and I take it this way along with most commentators, that it is not just the prophecy that is from God but the interpretation that the prophets give to their dreams, visions, etc that is given by God and fully trustworthy.

We must understand this “first of all”, Peter says. It is a critical point.

The false teachers as we see on in ch 2 were rejecting the authority of the prophets specifically as God’s word. They were giving their own interpretations. They were denying those bits that did not suit their wisdom or the culture of their day, or that undermined their own supposed authority. It is so like today. Often Scripture is the ‘peg’ on which we hang our own ideas. Peter is saying, it isn’t just the dream or the vision, or the story, or the law that comes from God, but the interpretation itself comes from God as these men were carried along by the Spirit. This doesn’t mean we avoid the work of studying to make sure we have understood the biblical writers, but it does mean that we trust and follow what we find there.

For those who are finding this rather tough going, let me give a different example from the Second Coming, but one we often encounter. Many false teachers today will appeal to the law to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. But they give this law their own interpretation, denying the

inspired interpretation of that law within Scripture itself. So for example, they would rather not link with their understanding of love any idea of obedience, even though Scriptures tell us that loving your neighbour is a sums up ideas like ‘not coveting’, ‘not stealing’, not committing adultery’, and so on. This is the problem we face again and again with false teaching. It often affirms something of God’s word but denies the Spirit-inspired explanation and interpretation of that word which is often deeply counter cultural.

So Peter insists on the divine origin and inspiration of Old Testament Scripture both in its account of events and dreams and visions, but also in its interpretation of those events.

How important it is for us today to hear this as we think of the nature of the revelation in Scripture. The *spoken* words had been the key to understanding what had been seen by Peter at the Transfiguration. Fascinatingly, even those words were from Scripture. For Peter to understand the Transfiguration as a preview and guarantee of the second coming, he had to know the context in Scripture of the words used by the Father, and he had to trust the prophet and psalmist and their interpretation and explanation in the *same* way that he had trusted what he had heard directly from the Father. So he allows the Messianic context of Psalm 2 and the ruling, judging servant context of Isaiah 41 to help him understand the father’s words and what he has seen and to put it all together.

Incidentally, though I can’t take time on it, I think this helps us understand the rather difficult first words of v 19

And we have the prophetic word made more sure.

The question in a nut-shell is ‘does this imply that Peter regarded the Old Testament as ‘more certain’ than apostolic eye-witness’? I doubt that!

It is at least possible that what Peter is saying is that, though what the apostles saw and heard provides fully trustworthy evidence, even what they saw and heard actually needed the Old Testament for its full or ‘sure’ explanation, for the prophetic word is also God’s word on the matter.

What I am saying is that, simply on their own, the Father’s words do not clearly demonstrate that Jesus will return to judge. However, once those words are seen in their Old Testament context where there is a fully inspired God-given interpretation and explanation of the role of the Son and the servant, both what the apostles saw and heard become firm evidence for Christ’s second coming. The interpretation is, as Peter has shown, inspired of God.

Peter’s final point at the end of v 21 returns to the *how* of inspiration. It happens through the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit in carrying along the prophets, and so he explains how what they say is actually what God says, ‘From God’.

Well, time has rushed on and application is almost self-evident. The passage shows us that the context for mission in the last days will be one where we do encounter false teaching and it should not surprise us. As we encounter false teaching, Peter has shown us that at its heart will be a challenge to the veracity of Scripture, not the apostolic and prophetic witness.

There will then have to be a response that does two things: first that deals with the presenting issue of the false teaching, and secondly, which goes back further into the nature of divine revelation in Scripture. Of course, often it will be our defence of biblical truth on the presenting issue that is picked up and makes the headlines.

Had there been a media in Peter’s world they might legitimately have asked whether Peter was ‘obsessed’ with the Second Coming much as we are sometimes accused of being obsessed with sex. The answer is actually ‘no’ Peter was not obsessed with that and nor are we, but people will not always see or hear that. What we are obsessed with is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who has so graciously spoken to us in Scripture and who has come among us in Christ, who forgives us and loves us and wants all people to come to repentance as Peter puts it in 3:9. But when we so love this Lord then at different times in history the attacks will come in different places and we must answer from God’s word the presenting issue and show why it is important, and

what God has to say on the matter, but we must also do what Peter does and really come back to something even more vital, to the utter trustworthiness of Scripture which is almost always what is really under attack.