

Scripture. II Peter 1:16-21.....1

Theme: Eyewitnesses of His Majesty.

Text: II Peter 1:16b -- "We were eye-witnesses of his majesty," ~~xxxx~~

Proposition: All of us may be "eye-witnesses of his majesty," ascertaining at least some bit of eternal truth.

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Places and dates preached:

Grace church, Cheyenne, Wyo., Feb 24, 57
8:15 + 11:00 a.m.

Sheridan, Wyo., Feb-22, 1959
9:30 + 11:00 a.m.

Montrose, Colorado, October 27, 1963.

Canon, Colo - March 17, 1958

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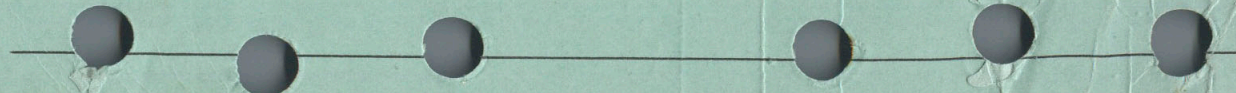
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Introduction:

1. As a boy the Scouting movement meant a lot to me. I knew all the laws and could pass all the tests for tender-foot long before I was 12, the age at which a boy then had to be to join. After being accepted by the active troop with a strong outdoor program, and with the frequent help of my next-door-neighbor Scout Master, I advanced quickly, getting to Star rank as fast as was possible at that time under national rules. About that time the Veterans Administration was completing an extensive new hospital plant near our town, and to dedicate it the President of the United States was coming in person. Honor Scouts from each troop in the area were chosen to aid in traffic control, and from this group a few were chosen to be the President's personal escort. I wasn't fortunate enough to be in this last group, though since then I've sometimes told the story as if I were the right-hand man of F.D.R. on that great day. I was given a traffic control assignment near the railroad, however, at the place to which the President's special train brought him and from which he left our community. I do well remember watching the President talk and joke with local dignitaries and members

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of his staff during the hour or so after he boarded the train before it left the station. To me that was a big day; much more important perhaps than such an event might be to a youngster today who has seen ~~xxxxxx~~ on TV, perhaps several times, the president of the United States, the Queen of England, and many of the world's other great figures. I bragged for years about the time I saw the president, even stretching the truth to include a handshake and words spoken to me personally. In a day when a boy still was encouraged to believe that he might become president, the person of the president took on immense stature. And FDR carried himself at that time in such a way as to instill confidence in him when observed personally and closely; or at least as far as we boys were concerned that was the case. The United States government seemed a more personal power because of the experience, and I had a lot more confidence in it. I had seen, if it were, evidence for myself that the government was in the hands of friendly but competent people. Many people feel the same way about our president today, Mr. Eisenhower. When we see for ourselves the men leading us we are more apt to be won to confidence in them.

2. The writer of our Scripture Book,

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II Peter, had experienced something of this nature. His experience, however, was of the personality and importance of a Being far greater than the head of an earthly government. He felt that he had seen for himself the real nature of Jesus, and he was ever thereafter taking every opportunity to tell people of his experience.

3. To see how our particular Scripture passage and message happens to have come about, let's become more familiar with the Biblical Book of II Peter, found in the New Testament. To do so we will try to get a

I. Summary of the circumstances and message of II Peter and spot-light from it our Scripture.

The question as to who wrote II Peter is one of the difficult problems of New Testament study. The opinion of modern scholars is strongly divided as to when it was written, and the difference in possible dates of its writing accounts for different ideas as to who wrote it. Some say that it probably was written about 200 a.d. or later, and therefore could not have been written by the Apostle Peter, as the Book says at the beginning. They argue that the writer felt he was saying what Peter would

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want said to the particular circumstance of the times, and since to write under an assumed name was a literary custom of the time the writer was perfectly justified in using Peter's name. Perhaps the majority of New Testament scholars follow this line of thinking.

I happen to be in the minority group on this question, but there are some very capable Bible scholars who have molded my thinking on the subject. If you turn to the Book of II Peter and examine its contents closely it seems that the evidence is sufficient to back up the claim that Peter wrote this letter. In the very first verse the author calls himself Simon Peter and declares that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. Then later in the Book he states that he has already written a letter to those to whom he now writes; and I Peter, to which he refers, is almost universally accepted as having been written by Peter. In the passage which is our Scripture he claims that he saw Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, which was an experience that Peter had with Jesus. From his references to and use of the Old Testament Scriptures he evidently was a Jew. He wrote as an old man who expected death soon. The spiritual conditions of his readers is well known

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to him and he is on intimate terms with
them, addressing them as "beloved."
Words are used by the writer of this
Epistle, or letter, which are used almost
exclusively by Peter in the Acts of the
Apostles. There is other evidence to
show that Simon Peter, the disciple of
Jesus, actually did write this Book.

We gather that II Peter was written
not long before the death of the Apostle
as a martyr, and it probably was written
about 66 or 67 a.d.

It is well to be aware of the fact that
there are differences of opinion
among competent scholars in the study
of the Books of the Bible as to the
circumstances under which some of them
were written, and in the question of
who wrote them. However, for the time-
less message, these differences of scho-
lastic opinion seldom make much differ-
ence. In the case of II Peter, whether
Peter actually wrote this, as I think
he did, or whether it was written 130
years later doesn't change the basic
message at all. Don't let any dispute
or criticism which you may hear about
the Biblical Books become a smoke screen
keeping you from getting the ageless
truth within them. They have survived
centuries because they are true. With
that in mind, let us look at the message
of II Peter and then specifically at

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the thought it gives which we stress to-
d.

News had reached Peter regarding the work of false teachers in the church, and he urges the Christians to keep strong in the faith that their religion is true, even though they are surrounded even in the church by error and infidelity. He warns the false teachers of their guilt and danger, and points to the second coming of the Lord as being for them not an occasion for rejoicing but a time of judgment. On the other hand, the Christians, he says, should live in the faith that Christ is coming, and he urges^{on} them holiness and diligence coupled with humility as traits befitting those who wait for the Lord.

In the section which we use today Peter stresses the truth of the Christian gospel. In our text he does so by referring to the great transfiguration experience in which he, James and John, saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, long-dead great figures of religious history. This experience for him placed Jesus squarely in the spot of the Jewish Messiah and pointed him out as man's savior (Mt.17). Peter points out that the Christian truths are not myths. He says that "prophecy of Scripture," or eternal truth never comes from man, but

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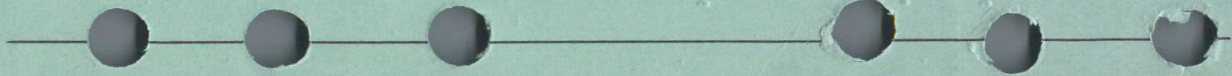
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truth comes through men who have been moved by the Holy Sprit. Then they speak for God.

The particular theme here today is suggested by words from v.16 of our Scripture (read). "Eyewitnesses of his majesty" is the phrase we take as a topic. For us today the thought is that God still speaks to men and through men to mankind as a whole. All of us may be, like Peter, James and John on the Mount of transfiguration, "eyewitnesses of his majesty," ascertaining at least some bit of eternal truth which we can share with our fellows. Let's look at this idea in the light of our own day. There are

II. Ways in which we can be "eyewitnesses of his majesty," ~~ascertaining at least some bit of eternal truth~~ or means by which we can come to know the nature of our God and Christ.

1. That we wish to know God positively to be sure that He exists and cares for us, is a desire common to all mankind, as Gamaliel Bradford has put it in his poem "God:"

Day and night I wander widely through the wilderness of thought,
Catching dainty things of fancy most reluctant to be caught,

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Shining tangles leading nowhere, I
persistently unravel,
Tread strange paths of meditation very
intricate to travel.

Glimming bits of quaint desire tempt
my steps beyond the decent,
I confound old solid glory with publi-
city to recent.

But my one unchanged obsession, where-
so'er my feet have trod,
Is a keen, enormous, haunting, never-sated
thirst for God.

(From The Questing Spirit, ed. by
Luccock and Brentano, Coward-McCann,
1947, p.285).

2. We can see Jesus and know that we
have seen God, but to do so demands hard
work. Peter, James, and John had been
with Jesus a long enough time to become
disciples very close to him, and that
meant giving of themselves fully to learn
His way. On the experience of the trans-
figuration about which they said "We
were eyewitnesses of His majesty,"
they had climbed a mountain with him
-- and mountain climbing is hard work--
to get to a place apart, where they could
engage in serious prayer without inter-
ruption. It was then that they saw Chris-
t with Moses and Elijah and realized who
and what

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He was.

3. Joseph W. Pratt, of Ontario, writing for page 12, or March 9, 1957, of The Upper Room used this illustration. "Long ago one of my fellow miners who also a fellow lay preacher said to me, 'when I was getting ready for work this morning, a new idea struck me. It was this: I could sit there in the mine and let my eyes look upon the undug coal, but that would not earn me my living. I have to dig to earn the reward.

" ' It is the same,' he said 'with Bible reading. It is not enough to glance at the words. A casual reading is not rewarding. The word of God demands and deserves serious study.' "

The writer then ends his devotional piece with this thought "Religious truth requires ones strength and ability to mine it from the word of God."

We would add that we can know God, see his glory, be eyewitnesses of His Majesty, if we are willing to pay the price of effort and application it takes.

There are many lovely poems, intriguing stories and solid arguments; almost all true, which point out that God can well be found in nature. So why sit in a stuffy old church on a pretty

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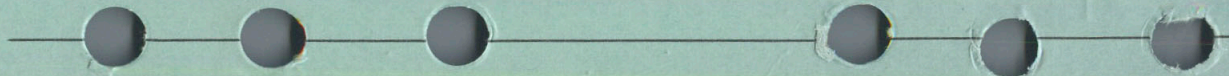
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day? Get out in nature and let God speak to you. All very true, and He will be there. One must put forth some effort. To be honest, most of us are interested in the contents of the portable icebox, the nature of the hunting or fishing gear and how well it gets the game or fish, how the old buggy passed up that even older and cheaper car on the road or how it climbed the mountain, carrying on a momentary flirtation with the pretty lady at the beach, and so on. We don't often see a message from God when we get out into His great outdoors. But His majesty is there and can be found. The Junior-Hi campers who used logs and pine branches to make a simple and beautiful outdoors chapel knew something of the application of self it takes to hear God in nature. But at the early-morning communion service they were strangely hushed and more than one of them was convinced he had been in the presence of God.

Veterans
The hospital chairman of a local organization recently reported on the experiences of his committee in a local hospital. As he talked he grew enthusiastic, telling how much friendship meant to lonely sick people, many of them away from home, many of older age with few relatives. Other members of his committee couldn't resist getting up

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and sharing some of their experiences. They summed it up with "I tell you, it's great." These men are seeing what service done in love and respect for ones fellow man can do, and are having truly christian experience. In giving themselves to others they are really becoming eyewitnesses of his majesty., seeing what God-given love does for people.

6. We could add many other illustrations to indicate ways in which we may see God, be "eyewitnesses of His majesty." Regular participation in worship, Sunday School, and other religious activities can bring us close to God. So can daily family and personal devotions. So can acts of charity and service. Work and sacrifice are part of all these ways of knowing God.

Conclusion:

1. We have said that when one comes close to God as an experience of Him, so of an eyewitness of His majesty, a permanent impression is made about which one feels impelled to tell others.

2. We have seen the kind of thing we mentioned about and demonstrated in the New Testament Book of II Peter, and we know how Peter gave a lifetime of devoted work to telling others of the Christ of

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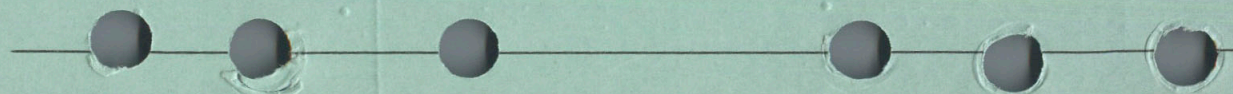
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whose majesty he was an eyewitness.

3. We have said that in everyone there is a longing to know God better and we have thought of ways in which we can become eyewitnesses of God's majesty.

4. All of us may be "eyewitnesses of majesty," and each can experience for himself at least some bit of eternal truth.

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