

A Story Worth Investigating

2 Peter 1:16-21 (NIV)

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Pineapples grow on top of shrubs. I say that, and maybe you already knew that, and you are thinking, "What's the point here, Pastor." But then again, maybe this is new information to you, and your thought goes no farther than "Well, okay. I always thought that they grew on trees because they're a fruit, kind of like a coconut, and they have that leafy stem thing which shows that it would be hanging from a tree, right? But the pastor wouldn't lie to me. So, it must be true." Others of you find your hand twitching to reach for your phone so that you can Google this or to find a botanist, or better yet a pomologist, and know if that statement is true. And I'm sure that there are still others of you who don't care, thinking that this factoid isn't important enough to be bothered to do 30 seconds of Googling. Is confirming whether or not pineapples grow on shrubs something worth investigating?

Now how about investigating the Bible to find out if that's true? Given that you are here, I'm thinking that you value the Bible. But what has your investigation into it been? Is it that you have meant to investigate it, but there's a whole lot more to look into rather than a 30 second Google, and you don't have that kind of time. Also, the Bible has supernatural stuff in it. So, I can't necessarily apply the same research into pineapple shrubs as I do the Bible, which, then how am I supposed to investigate it. Others of you are probably content to take it on faith that it's true because billions of people have believed it for thousands of years. Besides, isn't the saying, "You just gotta have faith?" But what should we have faith in? What happens if we investigate the Bible.

In recent years, you may have heard someone say that they went through a deconstruction of their faith. Maybe you can guess what this is by the words, that faith deconstruction is basically the taking apart of an idea, practice, tradition, belief, or system into smaller components in order to examine their foundation, truthfulness, usefulness, and impact. Maybe this scares you or puts you off because those who say that they have done a faith deconstruction have given up their Christian faith.

Faith deconstruction, though, is actually a good thing, examining what we believe and why we believe. Many of our beliefs and belief systems start off with our parents telling us what they think that we should believe or seeing what they believe modeled for us. While it's true that God commends the faith of a child, he also does not want us to shut off our brains when it comes to believing in him and his Word. Actually, quite the opposite. His Word is one that claims to have the basis for all morality, the purpose of life, how long we will live and how and where we will live when our lives end, when this world ends. And so he wants us to examine our faith. He wants us to take apart what we believe and examine the foundation, the truthfulness, usefulness, and impact of what his Word says. This is a story worth investigating, and the Apostle Peter writes to us today to help us do that very thing.

"For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (verse 16) Yes, the Bible has supernatural accounts in it, but that doesn't mean that it can't be investigated, tested, examined. The supernatural happened to natural people who would watch, listen, observe, ask questions. That's what happened on a mountaintop some 30 years prior to Peter writing these words. In a moment, in a flash, he saw this flesh and blood, rather ordinary looking person Jesus, turn pure white, whiter than any white he had ever seen. Two dead people, Elijah and Moses, appeared and carried on a conversation with Jesus, talking about his upcoming death on a cross. A booming voice from heaven spoke, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (verse 17)

Was that real? Did it really happen? Was it just a made-up story, a myth, religious propaganda? Peter wants you to investigate it. And so he starts where most of us would want or need to start. Who saw it? Who else witnessed it? "We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain." (verse 18) It wasn't just Peter claiming to be the sole eyewitness at the time. He says "we." The "we" are him, James, and John. Although James had already been beheaded by the time Peter wrote this, the Apostle John was still alive. It's a bit of an unspoken invitation by Peter of, "If you don't believe me, well, ask John. He was there too. I'm not the sole eyewitness, nor the only person communicating this."

But that's not all. Peter then wrote, "We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." (verse 19) Peter is saying: I didn't come up with this in a vacuum. The prophets of the Old Testament said this would happen – that one would come whose origins are from of old, from ancient times, that the virgin would be with child and give birth to a son and you would call him Immanuel, God taking on flesh and blood to be with us, to save us. What the prophets wrote hundreds of years ago goes together with what I saw, what I witnessed. This all goes together, and not in some kind of conspiracy theorist sort of way. This is the very reason the Magi showed up in Judea looking for the one who had been born King of the Jews, the one whose star they saw rise, a star that they were looking for based on God's Word recorded in the book of Numbers. They investigated based on the same words that had Peter looking to Jesus as the promised Messiah, the God made flesh for all people.

And if that wasn't enough investigation to convince of you the truthfulness of who Jesus is, if you are questioning whether or not Peter's mind had jumbled the observation from 30 years ago since we know that memories are unreliable, or that this was just Peter's interpretation of the events, he tells us, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (verses 20-21) This is just as Jesus had promised. He said that he would give the Holy Spirit to his disciples, to Peter, after he had ascended into heaven. God the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus had said and did. (John 14:26)

Also consider Peter's motive for writing this. He wrote so that his readers would have grace and peace in abundance through Jesus. Peter doesn't stand to gain fame or riches by declaring he was an eyewitness to Jesus' true God nature. There were no book deals to be had. No 15 minutes of fame. In fact, he lived pretty much a blue-collar income. In the end, he would be killed, crucified upside down for telling people this. Peter doesn't do this for himself. He does it for them, for us, so that we know that God really came in flesh for us, that he really lived a perfect life for us, that he really paid the price for all our sins, that he really rose from the dead assuring that God accepted that payment for us, that we are washed clean by God and made citizens of his kingdom to live with him forever in heaven. Because these statements impact our whole meaning of life, or whole eternity, how we live, this is a story worth investigating, and Peter is helping them and us do just that.

Now, you can take my word for it that the Bible is God's Word and that we can trust it completely, every word of it, that Jesus is really the one and only God who did everything for us and made us perfect already and adopted us into his family. But God, Peter, me, we want you to investigate it. We aren't worried that this will make you an unbeliever if you honestly investigate it to the best of your ability. But to investigate, you have to start somewhere. The Bible itself claims to be the eyewitness accounts. It's the best place to start, as we are doing here week to week. Lean also on other Christians and what they have found. View the impact in their lives, how the Word of God shapes them and their behavior. Ask them why they believe that the Bible is true, why they love unlovable people, people when they are at their best and when they are at their worst, why they help the helpless. Like Peter, don't investigate this story in a vacuum so that you avoid creating an echo chamber to reinforce preconceived ideas.

There are many resources to use in investigating this story. One resource that I have been reading is Lee Strobel's *A Case for Christ*. He and his wife were atheists, but then she became a Christian and she changed. So, he used his professional investigative journalist skills to deconstruct the Bible. His book delves into his research that shows that beyond reasonable doubt myth could not have crept into the Bible, that the manuscript copies of the Bible were not corrupted, that Jesus' words were not misinterpreted, that the Bible is not religious propaganda, that non-Christian eyewitnesses and archeology validate the information and message of the Bible, that the Jesus that we worship and preach today is the same Jesus who lived in Judea and Galilee in the first century AD, the person that Peter wrote to us about today, whom he saw glorified on the mountaintop, the same child the Magi worshiped in Bethlehem.

When you investigate this story of the Bible, you will have the objective truth of Jesus, that he is the fulfillment of thousands of years of prophecy, that he really is God come in the flesh for you and me, who lived perfectly for us and covers us with his righteousness, who died for us and removed every blemish of our sins and made us heirs of eternal life with God, citizens of his forever kingdom. When we investigate this story, like the Magi did, we find the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, our Savior, one that we can lead other people to investigate and find their perfect God Savior too. Amen.