

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 15 November 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **“A More Sure Word”**

### **2 Peter 1:15-19**

All of us have heard fairy tales before; and usually, fairy tales have certain kinds of words which clue us in, from the very start, that they are fairy tales. For instance, children’s fairy tales often begin with words like this: “Once upon a time, in a land far, far away.” Fairy tales for adults (which we call “fiction”) start in a more sophisticated way; but usually, you can still tell that they are fiction. For example, when you hear an opening such as, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of despair,” you know that you are about to read a realistic-sounding fiction--but a fiction nonetheless. Then, of course, there are fairy tales that (we are told) are real science! A perfect example is when a National Geographic nature documentary starts off by saying, “Sixty million years ago.” When you hear about “millions of years,” you know that you are about to hear a fairy tale.

Now, it would be nice if fairy tales didn’t affect people’s lives and eternal destinies; but, tragically, they do. Most people in this world are building their lives upon fairy tales—fairy tales that they have learned in science class, or from a false religion, or from their own deceitful imaginations. The result of these deceptions is tragic! The Bible says that ***“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”***

The words of this Book, on the other hand, are truth; and they are *life*. The revelation that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in human flesh, and that He died on a cross for our sins and rose again, is mocked and scorned by most of the world, and is regarded as a fairy tale. Notwithstanding, the Bible’s record stands up to the toughest investigation.

Take, for instance, the resurrection of Christ. All kinds of theories have been concocted to explain away Jesus’ resurrection. For one, there is the **“swoon theory.”** This is the idea that Jesus never actually died, but only fell into a “swoon” from the shock of His beating, and later “revived” in the cool air of the tomb. (Of course, this theory doesn’t answer the question of how this severely beaten man could have moved the stone, which weighed at least a tonne, and gotten out of the tomb!) Then there is the **“hallucination theory,”** which claims that all the witnesses of Christ’s resurrection were merely hallucinating. (This theory doesn’t account for the fact that *hundreds* of people saw Christ after His resurrection, and that, at one point, 500 people saw Him at one time! Could they *all* have been hallucinating?) There is also the **“wrong tomb theory,”** which states that the women, and all the other disciples, went to the wrong tomb, and found it empty, because Jesus never was placed in that tomb at all. (This theory doesn’t account for the fact that the women, and a number of other disciples, carefully observed and participated in Jesus’ burial, and knew exactly where He was laid.)

Then, of course, there is the oldest fairy tale of all--the **“stolen body”** theory. The origin of this lie is recorded for us in **Matthew 28**. The chief priests and the Sanhedrin bribed the guards who had the watch over Jesus’ tomb to say that Jesus’ disciples had stolen His body while they were sleeping, so that they could make it appear that He had risen. This theory is, perhaps, the most absurd of all. How could

sixteen Roman soldiers, who were forbidden, *on pain of death*, to fall asleep during their night watch, have all fallen asleep? Also, how could a couple handfuls of disillusioned, emotionally crushed men, who had just seen their Master die a brutal death, have had the inclination or courage to roll away the extremely heavy stone that blocked Jesus' tomb, without waking up the soldiers? Furthermore, what would motivate these twelve lowly peasants to spend the rest of their lives running around the world, in the face of sure torture and death, to proclaim that a Jewish carpenter, who had died a criminal's death on a cross, had come back to life? What did they have to gain? In this world, they had nothing to gain. These people sacrificed their lives for one reason: *they had seen the risen Jesus!*

This morning, we are going to read the testimony of a man who knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Jesus is the Son of God; and we are going to see *how* he was so sure of this. In so doing, we will see how *we* can be sure of these truths. The title of this message is *A More Sure Word*.

### **Read 2 Peter 1:15-19.**

From this passage, I would like to point out two testimonies of which we can be "sure."

#### **I. Peter, James, and John's eyewitness testimony is sure (vv. 15-18)**

If you were here last week, you'll remember that we studied **2 Peter 1:10-14**. In these verses, the Apostle Peter strongly urged Christians to remember the reason for which Christ has called and chosen us. Christ has called and chosen us so that we might live lives of holiness and spiritual fruitfulness. Peter also reminded his readers of the reward that God's people will receive in Christ's future Kingdom *if* they would keep adding faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity to their lives. Peter then expressed his heartfelt desire. His desire was that he might "stir them up" to remember these things.

With this in mind, we now come to **verse 15**. In this verse, Peter once again expresses his desire for his readers. Peter's desire was that he might remind his readers, once again, to live for God! (**Read verse 15 again.**) Why was Peter so urgent about stirring up God's people? He knew that his life's journey would soon end; so why didn't he just "enjoy the ride," and take it easy for a change? Well, here's why. (**Read verse 16 again.**) Look at this statement. Peter says, "*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables.*" Simply put, Peter is saying, "I am stirring you up to live a life of fruitfulness for God, *because* all these things that I've taught you about Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection are *not* a made-up stories! They are true! You are *not* serving God for nothing. Because Jesus lives, your labour is not in vain!"

Brethren, if Jesus' resurrection from the grave were not true, we would be wasting our time in being here this morning. What would be the point? If Christ be not risen, we may as well behave any old way we please, and live life for ourselves. We may as well eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. On the other hand, if Jesus be who He claimed to be (and He *is*), then He deserves our *utmost* (not half-hearted, but *utmost*) devotion and service!

Peter *knew* that Jesus is the Son of God; and he was prepared to testify of Him. Now, there are many testimonies that Peter *could* have given concerning all the things that he had seen and heard Jesus do. However, there is one particular incident of which Peter gives testimony here.

Let's read it. (**Read verses 16-18.**) What event is Peter talking about? And who are the "*we*" that Peter keeps mentioning? Let's look at a couple Scriptures that record this event.

**Read Luke 9:27-36.**

**Read Matthew 16:28 - 17:9.**

At some point in the last year of Jesus' ministry, Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a mountain somewhere in northern Israel (possibly Mount Hermon); and on that mountain, they had the incredible opportunity of seeing Christ in His divine, resurrected glory. What they saw was not an event that was actually occurring at that moment; rather, what they saw was a "*vision*" of a *future* event. (**Read Matthew 17:9 again.**)

Everything that Peter, James, and John saw on the mountain that day was a vision. In this vision, they were being given a little glimpse of the future Kingdom age. They saw Christ in His resurrected, glorified body, speaking to Moses and Elijah in *their* resurrected, glorified bodies, at some point during the coming 1,000-year Kingdom!

Now, how do I know that this is a vision of the Kingdom age? Well, for one thing, Jesus clearly said that this was a "*vision*." Secondly, Jesus had just promised the disciples that *some of them* would not taste of death until they had seen Him coming in His Kingdom. If this were *not* a vision of the Kingdom age, then Jesus' promise would not have been true. Obviously, the Apostles didn't *live* to see the Kingdom age. (They are all long dead, and the Kingdom hasn't come yet.) However, three of the disciples *did* see the Kingdom--*in a vision*!

Thirdly, God expressly forbids men to attempt to communicate with the dead. Why, then, would God have allowed Moses and Elijah to go to earth, as departed spirits, to speak to Jesus? The answer is: they *didn't* come to earth as departed spirits! Peter, James, and John didn't see the "ghosts" of Moses and Elijah; instead, they were seeing a *vision* of the future!

The other reason I know that this is a vision of the Kingdom age is that in this vision, Elijah and Moses were both shining like the sun. The Bible tells us that after the resurrection of our bodies, "*the righteous*" will "*shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*" Clearly, then, Moses and Elijah (in this vision) were in their resurrected bodies--which means that the resurrection had already occurred, and it was now the *Kingdom Age*! As Elijah and Moses talked with Jesus, they were discussing Jesus' crucifixion as if it were something that had already happened--because it *had* already happened! In the Kingdom age, all the saints from past ages will be in their resurrected, glorified bodies, speaking and interacting with the Lord, and remembering what He did on Calvary so long ago! Peter, James, and John got to see just a little glimpse of that future time!

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be part of this vision? This event made a *powerful* impact on these men's lives! John spoke of it in **John 1:14** when he said, "*And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (The "*we*" of whom John was speaking were Peter, James, and himself.) These men were so stunned by what they saw on the mountain, that the only thing that Peter could think of to say was that they should build three tents--one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!

By the way, many people believe that Peter was so terrified, that he didn't even know what he was saying. However, there may have been a logical reason why Peter said this. It is possible that this event happened during the week of the Feast of Tabernacles. If so, *every* Jew would have been living in tents for seven days. Perhaps Peter figured that it was only appropriate for them to build a tent for Moses and Elijah, since it was Tabernacles week.

However, that isn't why Jesus brought Peter, James, and John up the mountain. They weren't there to build tents! Jesus brought these men here so that they could see this spectacular sight, and later *testify* to the world of what they had seen with their own eyes! God commands in Scripture, "***At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established***" (Deuteronomy 19:15). True to His own standard, God provided three eyewitnesses of this event—Peter, James, and John.

Now, let's look at this event carefully. Peter, James, and John were brought up on the mountain to be witnesses, right? But of *what* were they to be witnesses? Well, there are several things that God confirmed to these men.

First of all, **Jesus was giving them confirmation of the future Kingdom Age.** All their lives, they had heard about the coming Kingdom, through the testimony of the Old Testament prophets. But now, Christ was commissioning them as His Apostles; and if they were to testify of the coming Kingdom, it was only appropriate that some of them "see" the Kingdom for themselves--just as some of the Old Testament prophets had done! (By the way, John got to see the Kingdom one more time, when he was on the Isle of Patmos! In this vision, God revealed to John that the Kingdom of Christ will be for 1,000 years!)

What else did Jesus confirm to these men? He confirmed **the Gospel message--the message of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.** Let's go back to **Luke 9**, and read again about Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah.

### **Read Luke 9:28-31.**

Jesus had told His disciples, from very early in His ministry, that very soon, He would be put to death on a cross, and rise again three days later. Now God was giving Peter, James, and John a "three-fold witness" of this message! One witness was Jesus Himself; and the other two witnesses were none other than Moses and Elijah! Now, remember--this was a vision: and in this vision, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were speaking to each other in the future Kingdom Age. To them, Calvary was in the *past*. Yet, to Peter, James, and John, Jesus' death and resurrection was still in the *future!*

How's *that* for a "witness"? God transported Peter, James, and John to the future (by way of this vision) so that they could see and hear a three-fold witness from Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. And now, Peter, James, and John are a three-fold witness to *us* that the Gospel message is true!

What else did Jesus confirm to Peter, James, and John? **Jesus confirmed the promise of the resurrection.** Remember, this was a scene from the future Kingdom Age. This means that Peter, James, and John were seeing a vision from a time *after* the resurrection of the Old Testament saints. New Testament age saints will be resurrected just before the Tribulation;

and Old Testament age saints will be resurrected just after the Tribulation, when Christ returns to earth to set up His Kingdom. This means that Peter, James, and John were seeing Moses and Elijah in their resurrected bodies.

Jesus promised, again and again, that one day all the saints of all ages will be resurrected into sinless, immortal bodies. Jesus said, “*And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day*” (John 6:40). Jesus also said, “*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live*” (John 11:25). Peter, James, and John were given *eyewitness proof* of this promise. They were permitted to see the resurrected bodies of two men who, in their lifetimes, were sinners, but who were now resurrected to sinless immortality! God was telling them, “This is what the resurrected body will look like!”

What else did Jesus confirm to Peter, James, and John? Jesus gave them confirmation of the **rewards that believers will receive for their service to God.**

Now, maybe you’re wondering, “Pastor, where is there any mention of reward in this passage?” The answer is: Peter, James, and John *saw* the rewards! Remember what we read in **Luke 9**? Luke recorded that Moses and Elijah appeared “*in glory*”! Jesus was radiating glory from His body; but Moses and Elijah were radiating glory from their bodies, too!

**Read Daniel 12:2-3.**

**Read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.**

Look at what Jesus said there in **verse 43**! This is part of the “reward” that God promises to those who love and serve Him. Believers’ resurrected bodies will actually shine! Yet, how *great* a degree of light you will emit, Christian? This depends on how faithfully you serve the Lord *now*. The angel that was speaking to Daniel in **Daniel 12** said that they who be “*wise*” will shine like the “*brightness of the firmament*”; and those who “*turn many to righteousness*” (in other words, those who are “soul-winners”) will shine like the “*stars*”! Paul says the same thing in **1 Corinthians 15**. He says that the resurrected bodies of Christians will be like the sun, moon, and stars. They will emit differing levels of light!

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-44.**

When Katie and I moved into our first house here in Athlone, there was a lightbulb upstairs in our hallway that was very dim. We didn’t bother to change it until it had burned out; but we were constantly amazed at how dim it was. When I finally changed the bulb, I discovered that it was a 12-watt bulb! I didn’t even know that there *is* such a thing as a 12-watt bulb anymore! (I know that there were 12-watt bulbs a century ago; but I didn’t know that they still made them today!) Now, what’s my point? My point is that I don’t want to enter into the Kingdom with a “12-watt bulb” body. I want to enter into the Kingdom with a 12,000-watt bulb body! I want to display, for all eternity, the mercy and grace that Jesus wrought through my life!

By the way, when it comes to rewards, God sees things very differently from how we see them. Far too often, we think that acts of service are “beneath” us, and not fitting for our “talents.” Yet, Jesus said that if a believer give so much as a cup of cold water to a prophet (in

other words, a “preacher” or “pastor”) in His name, that Christian will receive a **“prophet’s reward.”** In other words, he will receive the same level of reward that the preacher will receive for *his* service. Guess what, Christian? When you make a cup of tea for others at church, and you do it out of a true motive of wanting to please God and serve others, you’re laying up reward for the Kingdom! When you go door-knocking, or tract distributing (not because someone is pressuring you to do it, but because you want to please God), you are laying up reward. When you give someone a ride to church because you love God, and you love others, and you want that person to hear the Word of God, you are laying up reward for the Kingdom! When you use your tongue to glorify God, and to edify others, you are treasuring up reward for the Kingdom! God sees your heart; and if you serve Him faithfully, out of the motive of love for Him, He will reward you.

Just as surely as you will get up tomorrow and go to work or to school, you *will* appear at the Judgment Seat one day, Christian. **First Corinthians 4:5** says that when the Lord comes, He will **“bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”** (In other words, we will receive rewards for what we did for the Lord.) Christian, are you doing your utmost to serve God? Do you do things only because someone pressures you to do them, or because you are seeking praise and admiration from others? Or do you serve God out of a cheerful, genuine heart of love for Him? If so, you will “shine as the firmament,” and as “the stars”!

Now, there is one more thing that Jesus confirmed to His disciples that day on the mountain. On that day, Peter, James, were given **confirmation from the Father that Jesus is His beloved Son.** (Read **2 Peter 1:17-18** again.)

I don’t know how many times I’ve heard unbelievers mockingly ask, “If God is real, why doesn’t He just talk to us from Heaven?” Well, He *has* spoken from Heaven! He spoke to Peter, James, and John on the mountain; and this wasn’t the only time that He spoke, either. He spoke from heaven at Jesus’ baptism, in the hearing of a great multitude of people! He spoke from heaven to multitudes of people on a couple other occasions, as well. Yet, imagine the impression that the Father’s voice from heaven, combined with this amazing vision of the future, made upon Peter, James, and John! They never forgot it! After Christ’s resurrection, everything that Moses and Elijah had testified of Jesus was confirmed; and they went out and *turned the world upside down* with this message. They wouldn’t shut up about it!

God gave us a sure witness in the three-fold, eyewitness testimony of Peter, James, and John. By the way, have you ever wondered why Jesus did not permit them to tell about this vision until after His resurrection? Well, for one thing, if Peter, James, and John had gone around telling about this vision, people probably would have asked, “If Jesus appeared in this state of glory to *you*, why doesn’t He show Himself in His glory *now*?” You see, Jesus wanted people to believe on Him *even in His present state of humiliation*. He wanted them to believe *His word*, even though He *wasn’t* radiating light. He wanted them to believe on Him even though the Kingdom *wasn’t* there yet. The people had to understand that He had come to save them from their *sins*; and they needed to see their need of *repentance and faith* in Him, before they could even *enter* the Kingdom.

Probably another reason why Jesus didn’t want them to tell about this event until later is that Peter, James, and John had lessons in humility to learn first. Telling of this event would have

given them opportunity to brag. Now, they certainly could have struggled with *inward pride*, even though they didn't tell anyone about it. However, whatever inward pride they may have had was destroyed after their miserable failure on the night of Christ's crucifixion! When you think you're spiritually strong, but then you stumble and fall in a big way, it tends to "let the air out of the bag," doesn't it? After Christ's resurrection, Peter, James, and John understood, as they had never understood before, just how unworthy they were, and how *all-worthy* their Master is; and they went out and testified to the world that Jesus is the Son of God!

## II. The Scriptures' testimony is even "more sure" (v. 19)!

**(Read verse 19 again.)** You would think that Peter, James, and John's testimony is as sure as a human testimony can be, right? Yet, according to this verse, there is an even "*more sure*" testimony. That testimony is the "*word of prophecy*." In other words, **the Word of God!** Peter is saying that the Word of God is even more sure than his own eyewitness account!

Why is the Scripture even more sure than something that Peter saw with his own eyes? Because the Scripture isn't merely the word of man; it is the Word of God. The Old Testament is filled with hundreds of prophecies of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; and they were all fulfilled to the letter. The Old Testament is "*more sure*" than any eyewitness account. The New Testament (including this letter that Peter was writing), is "*more sure*" than the any eyewitness account, as well. Undoubtedly, Peter had told this story to people thousands of times; but until Peter wrote this letter, he had told it in his own uninspired words. However, when Peter wrote about his experience *in this letter*, he wasn't telling it in *his* words; *God* was telling it in *His own perfect words*, through Peter. The words that we are reading here have the *power* to transform the soul, because they are the words of God!

That is why Peter says, "*Ye do well that ye take heed*" to this "*sure word of prophecy*." We should earnestly, passionately desire to know and understand this Book. We should believe it with all our hearts, and obey it. As we do so, the "Daystar" arises in our hearts! In closing, let's look at the Old Testament Scripture that Peter is quoting.

### Read Proverbs 4:18.

The path of the just is like a growing light, because believers are ever growing in their knowledge of the Word of God. When you are first saved, God's Word is like the earliest light of morning dawning in your soul. It's like the "daystar" arising in your heart. However, as you grow in Christ, and heed His Word, the daylight becomes greater and greater. By the way, that word "Daystar" is one of Christ's names. To be led by the Word of God is to be led by Christ Himself—because He is the *living Word*. People who claim to be saved, yet who have no desire to read or learn God's Word, do not truly know the Lord. The Light has never dawned upon their souls. In contrast, true believers give evidence of their salvation by their love for the Word of God. The Word of God is a "*more sure word of prophecy*"; and God's people love to hear it.

**Conclusion:** We can barely comprehend what Peter, James, and John saw on the mountain. Yet, as powerful as their experience was, it is not as powerful as the words of this Book! Have you believed its testimony? This Book testifies that the Son of God left the glory of Heaven, took on human flesh, died on

a cross, and rose again *to save you*. To try to get to heaven by any way other than Christ is to reject the salvation that He has provided for you! Won't you turn to Him today, while He is still calling you?

**If you *are* saved**, there is much work for you to do for Him! Peter, James, and John saw the Kingdom; and some day *you* will see it, too. But until then, the fields are white unto harvest! Throw yourself into the work with your whole heart, so that one day you may shine as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father!