

How Can We Be Certain Jesus Is The Christ?

Series: Living Godly In A Corrupt World!

by Ron R. Ritchie

Every generation for the past 2,000 years has sought to answer the question, Who is Jesus, really? Was he a prophet and nothing more? Was he merely a good teacher? One of the masters from the East, perhaps? Even Christians have asked, How can we be certain that he is the Christ? The apostle Peter had to answer these questions for his spiritual children living in Asia Minor in the first century as they were being harrassed by false teachers and by mockers who held there would be no second coming of Christ. Here in his second letter, therefore, the apostle responds to these questions for the benefit of those second generation believers and also for Christians in this 20th century day.

A few year ago someone gave me a three-volume copy of "A Course in Miracles," published by a group known as the Foundation for Inner Peace. I immediately turned to the section in one of the volumes that spoke of Jesus to see how this group regarded him. Here is what it said about "Jesus Christ":

The name of Jesus is the name of one who was a man but saw the face of Christ in all his brothers and remembered God So he became identified with Christ, a man no longer, but at one with God The man was an illusion, for he seemed to be a separate being, walking by himself, within a body that appeared to hold his self from Self, as all illusions do Yet who can save unless he sees illusions and then identifies them as what they are? Jesus remains a Savior because he saw the false without accepting it as true And Christ needed his form that He might appear to men and save them from their own illusions.

In his complete identification with the Christ_the perfect Son of God, His one creation and His happiness, forever like Himself and one with Him--Jesus became what all of you must be.

This was written by a woman who claimed to be the medium of a spirit from whom she said she got these insights. People who believe this kind of thing are without hope. They will die in their confusion. Here we find no forgiveness of sin, no freedom from guilt and shame, and no resources to cope with life in this world. This is a course in death, not a course in miracles.

Is Jesus the Son of God, the Messiah? Did he die for our sins, rise again, and will he come again in power and glory? In the section which we will cover today we will see that Peter answers yes to these questions. The first reason he answers yes is

I. Because We Were Eyewitnesses of His Majesty

2 Peter I :12-16:

Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

Looking back over what he had already written to these believers, Peter concluded that they needed to be

reminded (12), they needed to be stirred up (13,14), and they needed to recall basic truths (15).

First, they had a need to be reminded. Writing from his prison in Rome, Peter is concerned that his flock are being led astray from the basic truths that were part of their first experience as believers. The voices of the false teachers and the mockers sought to lure them away from their peace, joy, wholeness, and commitment to Christ. Thus Peter reminded them that they had become partakers of the divine nature, and they were channels of divine power which enabled them to cope with their circumstances. Then, having been born again, they were embarked on a path which led to spiritual maturity, a path that demanded both truth and time. As they matured in Christ, their lives would become useful and fruitful. At those times when they needed to evaluate where they were spiritually, Peter encouraged them to look to their spiritual calling and election. They should not take their new life in Christ for granted but should use the Scripture as a mirror held up to their lives for the purpose of evaluating their walk in Christ.

Secondly, these believers needed to be stirred up (13, 14). Peter knew that his life was drawing to an end. Like Paul, he regarded his body as a tent, and saw death as nothing more than breaking camp. Far from making them fearful, anxious or angry, the thought of death should encourage them that everything was right on schedule.

Thirty years earlier, Jesus had told Peter about how he would die. In the upper room the apostle had asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow later" (John 13:36). Following Peter's denial of him that very evening, at a breakfast by the Sea of Tiberius after his resurrection, Jesus forgave Peter and gave him back his ministry. We pick up the story in John's gospel:

Then Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this he said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God (John 21:13,19).

As a servant of God, the apostle would glorify his Master both in his life and by the manner of his death. Have you ever wondered how God would be glorified by your death? Are you preparing your heart for that day? This is what Peter was doing. With but a little time left to him, the apostle was stirring up and awakening these believers to the truth they had already been taught.

Thirdly, they had a need to recall these things. As a faithful pastor, Peter was preparing ways to ensure that the gospel would be heard and known in the next generation following his death. He accomplished this by training and teaching men and women, by his letters, by sharing with Mark his experiences with Jesus (which Mark later wrote about in his gospel), and by his experiences recorded by Luke in Acts, as well -as his first and second letters. Thus his contemporaries, together with generations of future believers, would know how to walk in righteousness.

After the first service this morning, two elderly gentlemen came up to me and we had a conversation. The older of the two told me he was visiting PBC for the day with one of his spiritual sons (who must have been at least 60 years old). The older man shared with me that he had been in the ministry for 60 years and now felt ready to "break camp." These men were both doing what Peter was doing in this letter--ensuring that the gospel would be passed on to the next generation.

Are we preparing others to do the same, reminding them and stirring them up so that future generations will hear the good news? I love to visit graveyards and read the headstones of the faithful believers who have handed on the faith to us in our generation. I am always thrilled to read something like, "Died in Christ, 1789."

At this point (verse 16), Peter shifts his emphasis from reminding, stirring up and recalling for believers the things listed in verses 1 through 11, to encouraging them by showing why he had remained faithful to the Lord even in the face of imminent death. He says, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and [second] coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . ." The apostle is saying that when

he told them about the living hope which they had and about the second coming, his word was not some artfully-spun fable. The false teachers demanded, "Where is the promise of His coming?" so as to keep them off balance. No, the apostle says, we were sharing and talking about something we have already seen.

Here Peter is making reference to what he saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. Let's look at the gospel of Matthew and learn the context of this event. In chapter 16 of that gospel we read that Jesus asked the disciples the question,

"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

Then Jesus went on to share with them about his coming suffering, death, and resurrection. Quoting from Psalm 62, he said to them, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father and with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." Later at his trial, the high priest said to Jesus, "I adjure you by the living God that you tell us whether you are the Son of God." Jesus answered, "You have said so yourself. Nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven." Our Lord was here quoting Messianic passages from the book of Daniel and from Psalm 110. Jesus' answer was, "Yes! I am the Son of God and the long-awaited Messiah." Thus we see that Jesus here begins clearly to proclaim that he is the Christ, and that he would come again in glory and power.

In these verses, therefore, Peter lays out the reasons why he still believes Jesus to be the Christ and why he believes that he will come again. He reflects on the transfiguration, which is recorded for us in Matthew 17. Six days after the events we have just discussed about Jesus' questioning of the disciples regarding his identity

...

Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; hear Him!" And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid. And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone.

Here in his letter Peter is saying that he and James and John did not conspire together in the writing of a cleverly designed fable. No, they went up on a mountain with Jesus to accompany him while he prayed and the Lord was transfigured before them. Jesus underwent a metamorphosis; he changed into another form. His face shone like the sun, his garments became as white as light. Note this was not the same thing that happened to Moses, whose face shone brightly after his conversations with God during the wilderness experiences. Christ's change of appearance resulted from an internal transfiguration which revealed the reality of the glory of his character, permitting for a moment that glory to shine through the veil of his flesh. The disciples saw Jesus as he truly is. The transfiguration thus was a foretaste, not of the resurrection of Jesus, but of his second coming in glory and power. That is why Peter says, "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty."

This is the only time the word for "eyewitness" is used in the New Testament. This word was used of spectators to the passion plays put on by the mystery religions of Peter's day. These plays related the story of a god who suffered, died and rose again.

After a long period of instruction, the new worshiper was finally allowed to be present at the play and was

offered the experience of becoming one with the dying and then resurrected god. When he was ushered to this stage and initiated, he was classified as a privileged "eyewitness" of the experiences of the god.

Here Peter is saying that the apostles were not eyewitnesses to a play, but eyewitnesses of the Son of God. The word "majesty" suggests splendor, overwhelming glory and beauty that compels the viewer's mind and heart to adoration and worship.

How can we be certain that Jesus is the Christ, and that he will return again in power and glory? Peter says, first, that he, James and John were eyewitnesses of his majesty; and secondly,

2. Because of the witness of the Father's voice

2 Peter 1:17-18:

For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am gospel, following well-pleased" _and we ourselves heard this utterancemade from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

At the moment of his transfiguration, Jesus received honor and glory from what the Father said of him to the disciples, to Moses and Elijah. We find the same words in Isaiah 42 when, speaking through the prophet, God said, "Behold My Servant whom I uphold, My Chosen One in whom my Soul delights." At his baptism by John the Baptist these words were again uttered by God concerning Jesus, "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased." Jesus himself quoted these words of Isaiah 42 during his public ministry, confirming that he was God's chosen one (Matt.12:15-21). Now, nearing the final days of his ministry on earth, once again the Father says of Jesus at the transfiguration, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

Why was the Father so pleased with his Son? God was satisfied with the life Jesus lived in private in Nazareth. He was satisfied with his honest toil in the carpenter's shop, with the years of public ministry, with his willingness to face the cross so that we might be saved. He was pleased with his Son because Jesus said, "My will is to do the will of my Father in heaven." Jesus never did anything without first checking in with his Father. His will was swallowed up in the will of the Father. His example demonstrates how we should live on this earth in our humanity.

How can we be certain Jesus is the Christ and that he will return again in power and glory? First, Peter says, because we were eyewitnesses of his majesty; secondly, because we were witnesses of the Father's voice; and thirdly,

3. Because of the witness of the prophets

2 Peter 1:19-21:

And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Keep in mind the flow of Peter's argument. He is encouraging believers to remain faithful to Christ; to be diligent to grow spiritually; and to fill their hearts with the promise of the second coming. In response to the mockers who challenged Christians about the second coming, Peter says they did not follow cleverly devised tales when they told of the power and glory of that event. We saw, we heard, and we are supported by the partial fulfillment of this at the transfiguration, he says. Further, we are supported by the witness of the Father to the Son of his Messiahship and his second coming glory. But God also spoke to us through his prophets concerning his return.

In these verses, then, the apostle makes three points. "And so we have the prophetic word made more sure." Old Testament prophets were chosen by God to be his mouthpiece, declaring his message for immediate or future needs, or both. They were given message after message concerning the life, character, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming of Jesus in his glory to rule on earth in righteousness.

Let us look at one example in Matthew's the disciples' question to Jesus about his second coming. Here is what Jesus said in reply:

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." (Matthew 24:29-31)

Here Jesus quoted four prophets, four spokesmen of God: Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah. Go to the Scriptures, is the apostle's advice to those who struggle with the significance of the apostles' private and personal experiences with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and its significance to his second coming in power and glory. Check what the prophets had to say, the apostle counsels. We haven't added one new thing to what they have written.

Then Peter gives an admonishment: ". . . to which you do well to pay attention as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts." As the psalmist says, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119). In this case, the prophetic word concerning the second coming of Jesus is a light of hope as we walk through a dark, corrupt world. This lamp will keep us from stumbling, and it will burn until "the day dawns."

But, Peter says, there is no need for this lamp once the sun comes up, "when the day dawns and the morning star arises." When we see the morning star (who, by the way, is Jesus, according to Revelation 22:16), we can put our lamps down. Then the second coming will have been fulfilled. Peter is saying that the prophets foretold Jesus' first coming, and we don't need that particular lamp of prophecy any more because all of those prophecies had already been fulfilled. Now we are to lift up the lamp of prophecy concerning his second coming and carry it with us everywhere we go so as not to stumble in this dark world. But when the "morning star arises in your hearts" we have no need for that lamp any more.

"But know this first of all. . . ," Peter continues. The experience of the transfiguration of Jesus gave them a partial glimpse of the power and glory of Christ's second coming. We did not invent cleverly devised tales, the apostle says. We checked the prophetic word, for that word has certain characteristics.

The apostle now shares these characteristics. ". . . no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (which means "to unravel a problem," one which is not self--unfolding). There are two views held concerning this passage. The first says that God works through a variety of prophets who all concur in truth over the years--but none are given private views unrelated to the whole of God's plan of redemption, for all are guided by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 14, I Peter 1:10, 11). They would say on the other hand, that false prophets do not have the Holy Spirit, thus they would misinterpret Scripture (II Peter 2:1; 3:11). The problem with that particular view as it relates to this passage is that Peter is talking about the transfiguration, not the false prophets of chapter 2. The second view holds that interpretation is not the issue in this context, rather that Peter was seeking to show the authenticity of the second coming of Jesus. The God who spoke at the transfiguration is the same God who spoke to the prophets to prophesy about Christ and his second coming. They did not originate its content or unfold it for their own gain. The issue is divine origin, not interpretation.

In verse 20 Peter explains what he meant by the words "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation." "For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will." The prophets did not speak from their own wisdom. Everything came from God. The false prophets, on the other hand, according to Jeremiah

and Ezekiel, were men who "spoke a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of God."

Then how did the prophecies come to them? Peter says, ". . . but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." The Lord said to Jeremiah, ". . . everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak" (1:7); ". . . arise and speak to them all which I command you" (1 17). The prophets were moved to speak by the Holy Spirit, just as sailboats begin to move when the wind comes up and fills their sails.

In summary, Peter here reminds his readers, he stirs them up, and he encourages them on their need to recall basic truths, truths that they are partakers of the divine nature and channels of his divine love; that to be born again means that we are going to grow spiritually, and as we grow our lives will become useful and fruitful. At the same time we need to remember that spiritual growth includes time as well as truth. So remain faithful because Jesus is the Christ.

In summary, then, we need to ask, how can we be certain that Jesus is the Christ and that he will return again in power and glory? We cannot say, as Peter can, that we were there on the Mount of Transfiguration, that we saw Jesus in his glorified state and that we heard God's voice say, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." But we do have the prophecies of the Scriptures. All the prophecies with regard to our Lord's first coming, his birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection were filled to the letter. So what should prevent us from believing all the prophesied scriptures, as well as the witness of the apostles, that our Lord Jesus Christ will one day return in power and glory? We should be ". . . looking for and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord . . ." (II Peter 3:12). But until "that day dawns," the words of the apostle John hold great comfort in the midst of the mockers' voices--1 John 3:2-3:

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And every one who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Catalog No. 3889
2 Peter 1:12-21
Third Message
Ron R. Ritchie
September 29, 1985

[Back to Index Page](#)

Copyright© 1996 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.