

# Listen to the Eyewitness of His Majesty

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon emphasizes the necessity of confirming one's election through growth in faith, reliance on God's power, and the assurance of Christ's second coming.*

**Scripture:** Luke 22:32, Acts 3:6, 2 Corinthians 5:8, 2 Peter 1:3-19, 1 John 3:3, 1 John 4:8, Revelation 22:16

**Topics:** "Faith Assurance", "Second Coming"

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## Description

John Piper preaches on the importance of confirming our call and election by standing firm in faith and advancing in virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. He emphasizes that our efforts are empowered by God's Spirit and His promises, not by our works. Peter's reminder to believers includes the assurance of Christ's second coming, based on his eyewitness experience of Christ's majesty on the mount of transfiguration. The prophetic word of Christ's coming is likened to a lamp shining in a dark place, urging Christians to pay attention to it until the day dawns and the morning star rises in their hearts.

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## Transcript

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2 Peter 1:12-19

In what we have seen so far in 2 Peter (up through 1:11) the main point has been to urge Christians to make sure that they are truly saved. Verse 10 says, "Therefore, brethren, be more zealous to confirm your call and election." Peter is aware of people who have made a kind of start in the life of faith and obedience, but who have then quit growing and drifted away into destruction (2:20). He does not want that to happen to us. So he tells us how to make sure that we are among God's elect who are "called to his own glory and excellence" (v.3). The way to confirm your call and election is to stand firm in your faith and to advance in virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly affection and love. These are the things that certify the genuineness of your faith and confirm the reality of your conversion. If you have them and are growing in them you will never fall or be fruitless (vv. 8,10).

That's the main point so far: Confirm your election by pressing on in all the obedience of faith. But there is a subordinate point just as important as this one, namely, "God's divine power has already given us all things which lead to life and godliness" (v.3). All our efforts to press on to the goal of perfect love are possible only because God has already given us the power of his Spirit. We do not work to earn his favor.

We work by the power of his favor which has gone before all our labor. And, what's more, his power always flows into us when we trust his precious and very great promises (v.4). Therefore, when the power of God enables us to obey Christ, it always does so through faith in God's promises. And that means that the obedience which confirms our election is the obedience that comes from faith. We do not secure our lives by trying to merit the grace of God through works of the law. We secure our lives by trusting in the gracious promises so much that we desire nothing more than to love people the way God does. "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Today we will follow Peter's thought on through verse 19. So let's walk through the text and apply it to our lives as we go. Verses 12-15:

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these things, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in the body, to arouse you by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. And I will see to it that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

I see four steps in Peter's thinking here and I'll mention them, not in the order they come in the text, but in their order from the most basic observations up to the conclusions he draws for his own action.

First, in verse 12 he observes that the things he is writing about are already known. His readers are well grounded and established in the truth. Do you remember that just before Peter denied Christ three times Jesus said to him (in Luke 22:32) "When you have turned again establish your brethren." This is the same word used here in 2 Peter 1:12. His readers are established, perhaps by Peter's own ministry (cf. v.16). Therefore if we consider ourselves at Bethlehem established in the truth of God, let us take heed. This letter is for us. It's not just for beginners.

Second, in verse 14 the Lord is almost ready to take Peter away from his body. "I know that the putting off of my body will be soon as the Lord Jesus Christ has showed me." His death is near. The Lord has shown him it will not be long. This has two clear and comforting implications for us whose calling and election are sure. It implies that when we die we go to be with the Lord. The words Peter uses in verse 14 imply that the body is like a tent or a garment and that death means we lay the garment aside for a while and leave. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." We should all take courage as this old fleshly garment wears out. We will not go with it to corruption. The second comforting implication of verse 14 is that the death of a believer is never accidental from God's perspective. You recall from John 21:18,19 how Jesus predicted the way Peter would die by crucifixion. Now here Peter says the Lord has told him when--not long. The reason the Lord knows when and how Peter will die is because he is in control of the world. God could send an angel to let Peter escape when he is imprisoned in Rome. He did that in Acts 12:6-11. But he is not going to do that. Peter will die, crucified upside down, according to tradition. But neither he, nor his precious friends who were reading this letter, nor we should waver thinking that evil has the upper hand. God's hand is always the upper hand. No matter how tragic the death of a believer seems to us, God has universal perspective and does all things well. My father captured this thought perfectly in a poem he wrote this Mother's Day in memory of my mother, who was killed in a bus accident.

#### A SHORT POEM OF MOTHER IN PRAISE OF MEMORY

Though now the pain has long since ceased

The mysteries remain  
How one so full of life and joy  
Could suddenly be slain.  
How easily the heart cries, "Why?"  
"Why, Lord; why not me?"  
The purpose of his sovereign will  
Is difficult to see.  
Yet, in the shadow of his wings  
One feels the love and care  
That mend the wounded, broken heart  
And shatters grim despair.

Bill Piper

5-9-82

The third step now is in verse 13. Since the readers are already established in the truth, and since Peter's time is short on earth, Peter thinks that the right thing to do is spend his remaining time arousing their memory of these things. If the Lord told you this afternoon that your time is short, what would you devote yourself to? Peter answers: I am going to devote myself to increasing the lively memory of Christian truth. He is convinced that if he can keep the greatness of Christ's work and promises in the memory, believers will be awakened and aroused to hope in those promises and be diligent to grow in godliness and thus confirm their call and election.

Do you see what this means for us at Bethlehem? It means that even we who know the truth and are established in it need repeated reminders of its greatness lest we fall asleep or forget (cf. v.9). We must get out of our heads the notion that our eternal security is mechanical or automatic. God is faithful and will preserve his children from stumbling (1 Thess. 5:24; Rom. 8:29ff); but the way he does this is personal and living and dynamic and involves real interaction between the saints and Christ. God uses reminders to rouse us from the slumbers of indifference. We prove the genuineness of our salvation by availing ourselves of these reminders and being stirred up to add to our faith virtue and knowledge and patience and godliness and brotherly affection and love. Peter regards these believers who are established in the truth as people in great need of rousing reminders. If we need one day a year to arouse and awaken us to the tremendous value of our mothers whom we have seen, it is not surprising that we need weekly and even daily reminders that the promises of God are infinitely more valuable than the dearest relation on earth.

The fourth step in Peter's thinking takes the third one just a bit further in verse 15. Since he thinks it right to devote the rest of his few months on earth to the ministry of reminding, he resolves to leave behind a letter that will go on reminding the church of these things until Jesus comes. "I will see to it that after my

departure you may be able at any time to recall these things." The reason a Christian should write a last will and testament is to see to it that what he has accumulated and learned will be put to use for Christ's sake when he is gone. This letter is Peter's last will and testament. It's as if he were reliving that day at the Temple gate in Jerusalem when he said to the cripple, "Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give to you" (Acts 3:6). He still didn't have any silver to will to anyone, but what he had was infinitely more valuable and that he wills to the church: an authoritative reminder of the precious and very great promise that Christ is coming again. I think if Peter could see us now he would be delighted that his letter was preserved in Scripture and that 1900 years later he is still reminding and arousing the saints to confirm our call and election.

So we see four steps in verses 12-15: first, Peter is concerned about people who know the truth and are established in it; second, his days are numbered--according to God's plan; third, established believers need repeated reminders about how "great and precious" God's promises are; fourth, Peter gives us this letter as his last will and testament. His bequest to the church is not money, but a reminder of Christ's power and his glorious second coming.

Now in verse 16 he tells us why this reminder is so weighty. "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." In other words, the reason my reminder about the precious and very great promises of God (which are all summed up in Christ's second coming)--the reason my word to you is so weighty--is because it is not based on a myth but on an eyewitness account of Christ's majesty.

There are three important observations to make here. First, the word "coming" in verse 16 does refer to Christ's second coming, not just his first coming. The Greek word *parousia* refers to the second coming 18 times in the New Testament and never to the first coming. The same word is used in 2 Peter 3:4 and 12 where it certainly refers to his future coming. Second, the power and coming of Christ were part of Peter's earlier teaching to these people. Verse 16 says he had already "made it known." This is not peripheral doctrine tacked on at the end; it is essential. Christ has all power and authority and he is coming. One of the marks of a living evangelical faith is that we reckon seriously, earnestly and joyfully with the personal, visible return of the God-Man Jesus Christ. The second coming is at the heart of our faith and our confidence in it should be the faith of our heart. We should long for it.

And the third observation from verse 16 is that confidence in Christ's future coming in power is based, not on a myth, but on an eyewitness experience of his majesty in the past. The difference between mythical speculations and Christian faith is history. Our doctrines are not the result of clever head-work. They are the result of historical observation. This is why knowledge plays such a crucial role for Peter. Notice verse 2: "Grace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God." Verse 3: "His divine power has been given to us ... through knowledge." Verse 5: "Make every effort to add to your virtue knowledge." Verse 8: "If you have these things you will not be unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (see also 2:20; 3:18). Full-blooded Christian faith does not flourish in ignorance. Sects flourish in ignorance. Two things have always followed in the wake of Christian missions: hospitals and schools. If our faith is not grounded in reliable observations of historical reality, it is a "cleverly devised myth" and unworthy of acceptance.

Now in verses 17 and 18 Peter tells us in particular what historical event has given him such confidence in Christ's power and second coming, namely, his eyewitness experience with James and John on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). You recall from the gospel accounts how they went up to pray with Jesus and he was transfigured before them in great light and glory and then from the

overshadowing cloud God spoke of his Son. Peter describes the event in verses 17 and 18 like this: "For when Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased,' we heard his voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." We were there, we heard the voice, we saw the glory. And so we now know with what power and glory and authority Jesus will return. The eyewitness experience of Jesus' transfiguration was a preview of the glory of the second coming of Christ.

Peter could have told how he saw Christ after his resurrection or how he saw him ascend into heaven. But in neither of these did Jesus appear in his majesty as verse 16 says. And it is the majesty and the greatness of his coming that Peter wants to remind us of. Recall that in verse 4 he refers to precious and very great (or magnificent) promises. Thirty years after the event the revelation of the majesty of Christ fills the mind of Peter with awe and he wants more than anything to share the hope of that vision with us before he dies.

And so in verse 19 he emphasizes again that the word about Christ's coming is sure, and then he calls us to give heed to it until the end. "We have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Peter calls the word of Christ's coming a "prophetic word" because the glorious coming of the Messiah is predicted in the Old Testament prophets (e.g. Mal. 4:2; Is. 60:1). And he speaks of it as "more sure" now because it has been confirmed on the mount of transfiguration in an eyewitness preview of its fulfillment.

And so in the last half of verse 19 Peter returns to his admonition in verses 12-15. There the point was that all Christians need to be reminded repeatedly of the precious and very great promises. Here the point is that all Christians need to pay attention to the prophetic word. And he uses a picture to show us the urgency of his admonition. It is night time. The world is covered with the darkness of sin and deceit and fear and greed (cf. Col. 1:13). Everyone who inhabits this age of darkness is in danger of stumbling over some unexpected temptation or falsehood. Our only hope to survive the night is to have a lamp going before us. And Peter says the prophetic word, the promise of Christ's coming, is that lamp. And he pleads with us: keep your eyes on it; don't fall asleep; don't turn away after some bewitching song in the night. The hope of the coming of Jesus Christ is the lamp to our feet and a light to our path in a very dark world.

For two weeks I have said, put in front of you the carrot or the hot fudge sundae of God's promises, and let it lure you on in paths of righteousness into eternal life. Now I can change the image and let Peter say the same thing. Hang in front of you the lamp of the promise of Christ's glorious coming and let it guide you through the night, away from every temptation to sin, until the dawn. "Everyone who thus hopes in Christ purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). The power of God for godliness flows in the channel of his promise.

And what is the hope that lures us on to walk in the light as he is in the light? Two things: dawn without and daystar within. The lamp will shine "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." His glory shall appear and cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. And we shall be like him. In Revelation 22:16 Jesus says, "I am the bright and morning star." And in Revelation 2:28 he promises, "To him who conquers and keeps my works unto the end ... I will give him the bright and morning star." The light will rise over the world and the light will rise in our hearts. There will be glory without and glory within.

Is bright the sun that you behold?

Then let imagination fly,  
And multiply ten-thousand fold,  
Then let the answer fill the sky.  
The Lord Majestic will return  
Ten-thousand brilliant suns ablaze,  
And in my heart a star will burn  
With endless worship in its rays.

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"The whole creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19). "The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43). If these things are so, what manner of persons ought we to be in all hope and joy and godliness!

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