MESSAGE SUMMARY

Truth is a slippery word. Definitions get assigned to it that are contradictory, purely individual, and without any validation. Peter wanted his readers to know things. He was giving them truth that was both personally familiar and prophetically verifiable. How can we today know that what we believe in and hope for is actually true?

STUDY GUIDE

No one can say absolutely that there is no absolute truth—that would be an absolute statement and therefore a self-contradiction. Yet one of the most common questions posed by unbelievers is how can anyone say they have a corner on the market when it comes to absolute truth? The Bible makes truth claims in absolutes; how can we know if it is true? In 2 Peter 1:16-21, Peter addressed this issue, countering falsehood through three lines of reasoning: what he had seen, what he had heard, and what he had read. We can boil his reasoning down to two types of evidence: subjective and objective.

Peter's subjective evidence was his personal experience (see vv. 16-18). Peter referred to the prevailing falsehood of the day as fables. This word has a negative connotation in the New Testament, identifying stories that were made up and not based on facts. Conversely, while the Bible also records some incredibly outlandish events, every one of them is based on actual places, real people, and definite dates, all producing events that are verifiable. Peter reported what he himself saw. He referred to being one of the "eyewitnesses of His majesty," effectually saying, "We saw it with our own eyes!" Peter saw and heard many amazing things as he walked with Jesus for three years, but Jesus' majesty was never clearer than at His transfiguration. When Jesus temporarily took on the glory He will have at the second coming, Peter wasn't the only witness. James and John were there too, along with Moses, Elijah, and Jesus—plus God Himself bearing witness! Peter heard God claim Jesus as His beloved Son (see v. 17). When other witnesses are involved in an event, the chance of fabrication is diminished. Hallucinations are individual, not collective. John echoed Peter's words of eyewitness, too (see 1 John 1:1-3). Furthermore, one of the strongest arguments for the absolute trustworthiness of the gospel is the way most of the disciples died—as martyrs, their deaths testifying to the certainty of what they saw and heard. No one dies for what they know is a lie and a conspiracy; the disciples died for the truth they had seen and heard.

As powerful as their eyewitness is, it's still subjective; you need an outside account to corroborate it. Peter's second line of evidence, then, was objective, and it came from what he read: the scriptural evidence (see vv. 19-21). Over and over again, the Bible confirms truth. Peter said, "[W]e have the prophetic word confirmed," literally, made more certain. Predictive prophecy is one of the most confirming proofs of Scripture's claims. Additionally, the Bible is enlightening. It truly is the "light that shines in a dark place" (v. 19). The Scriptures are the only dependable light we have in this dark world.
Psalm 119:105 declares, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." As dark as this world is, the light of God's Word is sure and unerring. Furthermore, Peter declared that "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (v. 21). This verse and 2 Timothy 3:16 are the two most important verses regarding divine inspiration. When Peter said the Bible's writers were "moved," he used a sailing metaphor denoting how wind carries a ship along to a destination. The inspiration of the Bible was not mechanical dictation (robotic repetition), conceptual inspiration (God planted the general idea, and the writer wrote it as he understood and/or preferred it), or natural inspiration (from high levels of creativity). Rather, the writers wrote with their own personalities and styles—raised their sails, so to speak—and the Holy Spirit filled those sails and carried them to God's intended destination of recorded truth as they wrote under divine control. When we add human experience to divine revelation, we have a powerful combination: truth set on fire!

When you study the Bible, do you resemble a butterfly—flitting from Bible study to Bible study, as long as it is not too heavy or deep? Or do you study like the botanist who comes in with a magnifying glass, takes detailed notes, and studies the intricacies, but whose life remains unchanged by the truth discovered? Or are you like the bee that comes in empty, dives in, and drinks deeply of each flower, probing Scripture and coming away full of truth to use as fuel to live the Christian life?

Adapted from Pastor Skip's teaching

The BIG Idea

- When has your experience combined with God's Word to set the truth on fire in your life and in someone else's life?

- When temptation and opportunity converge, we are faced with choices. How do you allow the certainty of God's truth to influence you in those moments?

- When your parent, your child, or your friend disappoints you, how does truth anchor you and act as your compass so that you maintain Christlikeness toward them?

- When you are tempted to pursue a person, place, or thing that the truth clearly tells you is not in the will of God, how does truth come to your rescue in that moment?

DETAILED NOTES
I. Introduction
   A. Is there such a thing as absolute truth?
   B. A significant number of people say there is no such thing as absolute truth
      1. But this is self-contradictory
      2. How can you absolutely say there is no absolute truth? That statement is an absolute statement
   C. Epistemology: a section of study that deals with truth
   D. The Bible makes truth claims, some of which are absolute
      1. John 14:6
      2. How can we know the message we have received is really true?
   E. The setting of 2 Peter: the persecution of Christians was at an all-time high
      1. Peter wrote to these people and told them there were certain things they should know in their situation
      2. Know, or knowledge, is one of the key words of 2 Peter
         a. Mentioned sixteen times
         b. 2 Peter 1:2, 5, 8
   F. In the next chapter, Peter addressed false teachers and prophets in the church
      1. The Gnostics claimed to know what others didn't know
      2. They also denied the claims and coming of Christ
      3. Peter counteracted these false teachings by saying he knew what was true because of:
         a. What he saw
         b. What he heard
         c. What he read
      4. Boil these down into two categories; how do we know something is true?
         a. Personal experience—subjective
         b. Scriptural evidence—objective

II. By Personal Experience (vv. 16-18)
   A. The word fables could be translated myths
      1. Greek word muthos
      2. Always used in the New Testament in a negative or derogatory sense
      3. Usually referred to pagan mythology—crazy, nonhistorical fables
   B. Stories in the Bible are based on historical places, actual people, and certain dates—verifiable events
   C. What Peter Saw
      1. Peter referred to the transfiguration, one of the highlights of his life (see Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36)
      2. Peter was an eyewitness; in a court of law, eyewitnesses are crucial
      3. What Peter saw was a preview of coming attractions
         a. A preview of the second coming
         b. Coming (v. 16) is the Greek word parousia
            i. Almost always used to refer to the second coming of Christ
            ii. It literally means the arrival or actual presence
         c. Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27—the disciples didn't know what Jesus was talking about until He took a few of them up on a mountain and this transfiguration happened
         d. Peter saw Jesus in second-coming power and glory
e. Revelation 21:23

4. God can and does speak to people supernaturally—especially in restricted countries

D. What Peter Heard

1. God the Father said this (see v. 17) twice in Jesus' ministry (see Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22)
2. The vision Peter saw was accompanied by a soundtrack
3. Verse 18 could better be translated, "We ourselves heard this voice and others did not"
4. Peter, James, and John saw and heard the same thing at the same time—and Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were there, too
   a. The more people who hear and see the same thing, the chances of fabrication are greatly diminished
   b. Experts say groups cannot have the same hallucination
5. 1 John 1:1-2

E. The problem with personal experiences is that they are subjective

1. Experience itself is not valid
2. Are there any others throughout history who have had a similar experience?
   a. All of the disciples' lives were radically changed
   b. One of the strongest evidences for the gospel is that every apostle (except for Judas) went to a martyr's death because of their testimony

III. By Scriptural Evidence (vv. 19-21)

A. The Bible Is Confirming

1. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19, KJV)
2. As you read the Bible, you find case after case of fulfilled prophecy
3. When you have a book with predictions that actually happen, you may want to think twice about that book
4. Example of fulfilled prophecy: Isaiah 45
5. There are about twenty-five books that claim to be God's very word, but all of them lack fulfilled prophecy
6. Experience is not valid by itself, but when you combine it with Scripture, it's objective and verifiable

B. The Bible Is Enlightening

1. Some of the events happening in our world today were taking place when Peter wrote this letter
2. We know what the Bible predicts is coming; we have a dependable light in a dark world
3. Psalm 119:105; Matthew 4:16; Isaiah 9:2
4. "Until the day dawns" (v. 19)
   a. Until the second coming of Christ
   b. When Jesus comes, all spiritual, social, political, and moral darkness will give way to a bright day
5. Morning star (v. 19)
   a. Greek word phósphoros
   b. A technical term for the planet Venus, the bright light just before the dawn

C. The Bible Is Unerring
1. This is one of the two most important New Testament verses on divine inspiration
   a. 2 Timothy 3:16
   b. *Inspiration* = *theopneustos*, God-breathed
2. *Interpretation* (v. 20) is an unfortunate translation
   a. It makes you think of understanding the Bible
   b. The word *interpretation* in Greek refers to the origin of the text
   c. "No prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophets themselves" (2 Peter 1:20, NLT)
3. *Moved* (v. 21) is a sailing term that speaks of a ship being carried along where the wind determines
   a. The biblical authors hoisted their sails
   b. The Spirit, or breath, of God filled those sails and carried them to the destination God wanted using the author's individual style and personality
   c. The destination was under the control of the Holy Spirit
4. Not mechanical inspiration: God dictated what to write
5. Not concept inspiration: God gave the author the general concept or idea
6. Not natural inspiration: the kind great artists and musicians have

D. When you add human experience to divine revelation, now you have a powerful combination; you have truth set on fire

IV. Closing
   A. When it comes to Scripture, are you like the butterfly: flitting from this church to that church?
   B. Or are you like the botanist: you take intense notes at church, but leave forgetting what you wrote?
   C. Or are you like the bee: you go in empty and come out full, and it's fuel for your life?

Greek words: muthos, parousia, phósphoros, theopneustos


Topic: Truth

Keywords: truth, absolute truth, knowledge, experience, evidence, second coming, transfiguration, prophecy, Scriptures, the Bible, divine inspiration, revelation