

**Peter's Perspective on Persecution**  
***"Confidence in the Divine Revelation"***

Passages: 2 Peter 1:12–21  
 Matthew 17:1-13

Peter begins today's section of this second letter by writing about death—his own death. So, why does Peter talk about his own death? He was clearly convinced that his time on earth was quickly coming to an end. Indeed, he had three good reasons to believe this:

1. Peter was over 60 years old when he wrote this second letter. In those days, 60 was pretty old! Statistically, Peter knew that it wouldn't be long before he died.
2. Peter was well-aware that many leading Christians were being killed! Most scholars believe that Peter was in Rome at this time...in the city of Emperor Nero. Nero was increasingly opposed to Christianity and was beginning to use Christians as scapegoats. There was an increasing possibility that Peter (a very prominent Christian) could become the next victim!
3. In fact, as verse 14 indicates, Peter had been given a prophecy from Jesus saying that he would die! In John 21:18, the resurrected Lord said to Peter: <sup>18</sup> ***Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.*** John then goes on to make this comment: <sup>19</sup> ***Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.*** In John's view, the words, ***"...stretch out your hands"*** were a prophetic reference to Peter's own crucifixion, which took place sometime after AD 64. (By the way, tradition has it that Peter was, indeed, crucified, but he chose to be crucified upside-down to differentiate it from Christ's.)

Peter's acceptance of his own imminent death is important to keep in mind as we read today's passage from 2 Peter 1. You see, in these verses, **Peter is literally giving his final farewell speech!** His own inevitable death gives him the impetus to write down a few final reminders to his Christian brothers and sisters; to leave a legacy, a summary, of (what Peter believes is) the heart of the Gospel! In other words, Peter wants to remind them of the essentials of

the faith...the same simple truths that Jesus had revealed to him over the three years they spent together!

And so, Peter begins:

***<sup>12</sup> So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. <sup>13</sup> I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, <sup>14</sup> because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. <sup>15</sup> And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.***

Now, stop for a moment and imagine yourself as Peter. If you knew you were going to die soon, what would be your final words to your fellow Christians? What would you share with them to remind them of the key truths of the Christian faith?

Some of us might be surprised that Peter's final words do not mention the cross! Nor does he refer to Christ's death! Curiously, Peter's final words *are far bigger and far more simple* than that! You see, Peter chooses to focus on only one thing: **God's glory, revealed in Jesus Christ!**

Now, of course, this is not a new focus for Peter. The word 'glory' features 16 times in his 2 letters. (That's a rate of twice per chapter!) Obviously, Peter's theological understanding of the Gospel revolves around this concept of glory. In fact, I would go so far as to say that *Peter's Gospel* could be summarised in this way: **God's glory has come to earth in Jesus Christ...**a glory which has the power to transform humanity! It's a heavenly glory that, when we allow God to overwhelm us and fill us, we cannot help from being changed by it!

I say that "*this is Peter's Gospel*", because this is where Peter takes us in **verses 16-18** ...to a story that is obviously very dear to Peter's heart concerning the revelation of God's glory in Jesus Christ.

***<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> He received honour 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."<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>18</sup> We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.***

Peter's speaks about *the glory* that was revealed on the sacred mountain, on the day when Jesus was transfigured before Peter's eyes. On that day, Jesus' whole being shone with light! This was this *glory* that deeply marked Peter's memory. Why? Because, by seeing the glorified Jesus, Peter had proof that Jesus was the One who was bringing God's renewal to the whole world... a world that, through the corruption of sin, had fallen so far short of the glory of God but which, through Jesus (the glorified man) would now be renewed in God's glory once again! Jesus would *glorify* fallen humankind by reconciling her with God. Jesus would *glorify* this broken world as well, by eradicating all traces of sin in the fire of His glory. (Peter goes into this idea in chapter 3)

Indeed, the voice of God which Peter then heard simply confirmed this divine plan! When the Father said, ***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased..."***, Peter knew that the Father had sent the Son into our world to save it from the degradation of sin. God, the Father, had sent Jesus into the world *not only* to bring His glory to the earth, but to reinvigorate the whole world with God's glory!

This is Peter's Gospel—we might call it, ***"the Gospel of glory!"***

In fact, Peter would be aware that this was the same *glory* that was revealed throughout the Old Testament...even before Jesus came and died our sins! Think about Moses on Mount Sinai or standing before the burning bush. What did he see? What was it that so deeply transformed him into a man of God? **He saw the glory of Jesus!** And what about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Why did they believe in God and follow him despite their pagan surroundings? **Clearly, they saw the glory of Jesus!** And why did that little boy, David, have such a heart to follow after God? **He must have seen the glory of Jesus...**the same glory that caused him to repent after his sin with Bathsheba. It was the same glory that inspired him to write the Psalms!

Moreover, this same *glory* was meant to radiate from the Temple in Jerusalem, so that all the world might know that the God of Israel was the true King over all the earth! In Isaiah 6, there's a record of the day the prophet Isaiah saw that glory!

***"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:***

***“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.***

***<sup>5</sup> “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.<sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”***

Isaiah says he saw the glory of the Lord in the Temple! And what did he do? He fell down in worship, just like Peter, James and John did when Jesus was transfigured before them on the mountain. He cried out for his sinfulness! He was ashamed of the way sin had degraded humanity! *“Woe to me for I am a man of unclean lips, living in the midst of an unclean people!”*

But that’s not all that happened! Isaiah then made perhaps the most important decision of his life! *Because he saw the glory of the Lord*, and because he allowed that glory to touch him and begin the healing/transformation process, he was able to respond to God’s call to follow Him. When God asks, *“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”*, Isaiah cannot help but say, *“Here am I: Send me!”* The glory of the Lord had begun its work on him!

That’s exactly what happened to the Apostle Paul! How was Paul converted on the road to Damascus? Did someone explain how Jesus died for his sins? No! **Paul simply saw the glory of the Lord, Jesus!**

This is what the Apostle Peter is trying to say here! At the heart of Peter’s understanding of the Gospel is **the glory of Jesus**, shining from the Old Testament into the New! And this is why, in this farewell speech, Peter is so keen to place the focus on the glory of the Transfiguration as the central story of our salvation! This is the truth that Peter wants his fellow Christians to remember long after his departure—that God has come down from heaven in Jesus Christ to embrace us with His glory and to, thereby, change us in the likeness of His glorious image! (It also picks up on his words from last week’s passage. To ***“participate in the divine nature”*** is to share in God’s glory!)

Most importantly, this is the Gospel that Peter knew would resonate with the recipients of his letter-- those Christian believers scattered throughout Greece and Turkey and Asia Minor. Like Peter, these believers were suffering persecution and expecting to die! *Not one of them knew who would be the next martyr!* It was this Gospel of glorification that would, therefore, become a great source of comfort and inspiration to them! After all, how did Jesus get through His suffering? How did He push through to the cross? It was because, on the sacred mountain, He experienced a foretaste of the glory that awaited Him. (Hebrews 12:2, ***“Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame...”***)

In the same way, wasn't this the same glorious vision that pushed Stephen through the horrors of his stoning?

Wouldn't this same foretaste of glory encourage Peter and his readers to press on in their faith, despite the threat of death? After all, **if God's plan is to glorify His people, then it doesn't matter whether we live or die—the outcome is the same.** We are being glorified in (and with) Jesus in both life and death!

The Apostle Paul clearly understood this idea! In his letter to the Philippians, he writes: ***“For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain!”***. Either I live for His glory (and am gradually glorified in Him) or I die for His glory (where I will be perfectly glorified in Him). In other words, like Peter, Paul saw our *glorification in Christ's glory* as a central focus of the Gospel; he saw it as a process that goes on in our life until it is perfected in our death. Paul also spoke about in 2 Corinthians 3, when he encouraged his readers to allow the Spirit of Jesus to change them ***“from one degree of glory to another!”***

But, of course, Jesus' glory is not something reserved only for those who were privileged enough to see it physically. Sure, many did see it personally-- Moses and Abraham, David and Isaiah saw it. So did Peter, James and John.

Nevertheless, says Peter, **that same glory is now available for us all to see!**

How? **Through the Scriptures!** Listen to Peter's words in verse 19.

***<sup>19</sup> 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.***

The point Peter is making here fits perfectly with the story of the Transfiguration. Although the glory of **God's Living Word**, Jesus Christ, may no

longer be seen today in the same way it was (ie. ‘face to face’), yet the glory of **God’s written Word** is now available for all. This is what Peter means in verse 19 when he speaks about **“the word of the prophets made more certain”**. For him, the word “prophet” goes beyond the prophets of the Old Testament to include everyone whose prophetic insights have been recorded in Scripture for God’s people. Indeed, he is including his own letters and the letters of Paul (which he will refer to in chapter 3) in this category.

*These prophetic writings, says Peter, are so filled with the glory of Jesus that it’s as if Jesus Himself is standing transfigured before you!* That’s why Peter encourages his readers to **“pay attention to it, as to a shining light in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”** These 3 images (a ‘light shining’, a ‘day dawning’ and a ‘morning star rising’) are all metaphors which refer back to **the glory of Jesus** ...the same glory that Peter saw on the sacred mountain, but which can now be seen by anyone who reads the written Word of God. In other words, the glory of God’s written Word can be now trusted to reveal the glory of the Living Word. So, pay attention to it!

**One final point needs to be drawn out here.** So far in this passage, Peter has spoken about **God the Father** who, out of His Majestic *Glory*, sent **God, the Son**, into the world, and bestowed on Him with that same *glory*. Now, through the *glory* of the Son, God is at work to *glorify* the fallen race of Adam by raising us up in that same *glory*, and inviting us to participate in it both now and forever.

Peter, however, is fully Trinitarian in his understanding of God. It’s not surprising, then, that Peter concludes this passage by referring to God, the Holy Spirit as the One who *glorifies* the prophets, inspiring them to speak with words that come down from God.

***<sup>20</sup> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. <sup>21</sup> 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.***

Peter, through his Trinitarian understanding of God, sees a divine flow...a movement of God’s glory from heaven down to earth, and then back up again— a movement of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now, is there an application of this passage to us today?

As I see it, the fact that Peter's Gospel essentially centres around *Jesus and His Glory* means that, perhaps, we have complicated the Gospel far too much! Perhaps we talk too much about sin! Perhaps all the modern arguments and in-house debates about the atonement are really not that important! That is not to say that the cross is unimportant. Of course it is an essential detail of the story, but perhaps we need to follow Peter's lead and start our presentation from a far bigger base, by first expressing the Trinitarian picture of the Gospel in terms of the Glory of God!

Indeed, this might be the only way to touch the hearts and minds of our post-modern world, by lifting their eyes to the Father's glory... the Majestic Glory of heaven revealed in the face of Jesus Christ! Only when you see this glory will you ever understand your sinfulness (just how far we have "fallen short of the glory of God"! ). It is this glory in Jesus that also declares to us God's determination to restore fallen humanity to glory by lifting us up in Christ and changing us back into His glorious image. This is the Gospel which will enable people finally to bow the knee and allow this glory of God in Christ (ultimately seen, for those with eyes to see, in His cross) to change them and their world through the glorious power of the Holy Spirit!

In the end, it is to this glory that the Scriptures point and, hence, the reason why we must encourage the world to read the Scriptures! The glory of this written Word is God's instrument to lead us to the glory of the Living Word! That's why Peter final words bear repeating: **"You will do well to pay attention to it."**

Let's pray.