



2 Peter 1:12-21
Undistracted: 2 Peter
“Passing the Faith Along”

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Last week we started a new series going through the book of 2 Peter, continuing an on and off journey through some of the more overlooked parts of the New Testament. The series title is “undistracted” which comes from within the letter itself – Peter says himself he’s writing to help them stay centered on Jesus, and not get caught up in other distractions that pull them away from Jesus.

And today we come to a stretch where Peter gives some attention to passing along the faith. This is a topic that perhaps weighs upon him in particular as he writes the letter, because he senses he is near the end of his life. He doesn’t explicitly tell us how he knows this, but somehow Jesus has made it clear to him that he’s not living much longer. We’ll get into that more in a few minutes.

So, whether you are on the younger side of life and anticipate living a few more decades, or you’re on the older side of life and you have...less than a few decades, the fact is we all face death eventually. It is unavoidable, even if we avoid the thought and avoid the topic about as much as possible. And, the reality is: no matter our age, we just don’t know when the end might come. Tragedies happen at any age – from car crashes to cancer.

And when we consider the fact that we will die, it’s worth considering: **What am I passing along to others, and to whom am I passing it?** When the day comes that people are gathered for each of our memorial services, what will people say, especially those who are closest to us, about how we impacted them...about what they learned from us and how we have left a mark on them? All of us will have a variety of ways we’ve impacted people. My kids would probably talk about some of the athletic things I’ve passed along such as teaching them to ski and water ski and wakeboard...rooting for Seattle-based sports teams and rooting against others, especially the Yankees; They’d probably talk about how I passed along the gift of appreciating and making music – whether that’s the piano, the drums, or other instruments they’ve learned.

But the most important thing I've passed along to them, and thus far in their lives they would agree with this and I pray they always do, is the Christian faith. Trusting Jesus in this life and the life to come... Giving all praise and glory to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... this is the most important thing I've (and Gwen with me) sought to pass along to them. This rises above the skiing, basketball, piano, percussion, and all the rest. In fact, a lot of those other things we've sought to share with our kids in the context of faith, and in the context of gifts and talents that God has given through which to bring Him glory, and connect with others so my kids can now share the faith. So, what are you passing along to others, and to whom are you passing it?

And in today's passage, Peter puts some emphasis on how he is passing along the faith to these believers he writes to, and how he wants to continue to do that. It's important. So, let's dive into **2 Peter 1:12-21** as we continue in this second letter of Peter's....

So: His comments in verses 13 to 15 make it clear that he doesn't think he's going to be around much longer. That seems to be a bit of an impetus for why he writes, though clearly he has a relationship with the people he's writing to, and he's written to them previously and had been with them before that... and all of it is geared toward helping them know and follow Jesus. So, it's not like he waited until the end is in sight and then started to share Jesus with them. That's what a procrastinator would do, right – wait until the last minute to pass along the faith? But that's not Peter. All you have to do is read any of the Gospels and realize that Peter doesn't procrastinate on things, especially things he wants to say. 😊 Same thing here: He's talked with them about this and written to them about it before.

And yet, his death seems to be near. Scripture does not record for us how Peter died, but other people who recorded historical events tell us he was crucified, and that he was crucified upside-down. There are a number of documents from as early as about 100 A.D. to as late as like 600 A.D that mention his death, with varying degrees of agreement and disagreement on aspects of his death such as date and place. But the upside-down crucifixion

piece is the most consistent. The choice to be crucified upside-down is said to be Peter's because he didn't feel worthy to die the same way as Jesus.

As some of you probably know, Jesus gave a word of prophecy about Peter's death near the end of John's gospel, **“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.”** Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God” (John 21:18-19). While the date of Peter's death is not totally agreed upon, the most commonly proposed year is 64 A.D., when the Roman Emperor Nero intensely persecuted Christians in the city of Rome, using them as a scapegoat for a fire that ravaged the city of Rome which most people actually (then and since) blamed Nero himself for. He had Christians killed in a variety of ways, and many believe that this is probably when Peter died. It's possible that this is when Paul died, as well, also for his faith.

But this quote from Jesus about Peter's hands being stretched out, certainly fits one aspect of crucifixion; and the statement about being led “where you do not want to go” indicates it happening against his will. And so, with this intense persecution of Christians in the city of Rome, and the other historical information, it all kind of fits together as the most likely possibility. Most scholars believe Peter is likely in prison in Rome (for his faith, because of the city-wide persecution) when he writes this letter, which would contribute to his sense that death is not far away.

So, with his death imminent: **Peter is particularly focusing in on passing the faith along to these Christians to whom he writes.** It will impact them now, and even beyond his death, as they continue to turn to this letter. And there are a couple things in particular he mentions that give us instruction when we think about our own efforts to pass along the faith to others – whether that's kids in your home, grandkids, a neighbor, a friend, or whoever. We all have the opportunity to pass along the faith...to lead someone toward Jesus and impact their faith in Jesus.

I want to first highlight Peter’s repeated stated intention to remind them of the gospel message. In verse 12 he writes, “So I will remind you of these things;” verse 13 he writes of refreshing their memory; and in verse 15 he writes that he intends to make every effort so that even after his departure, after his death, that they will continue to remember these things. We all need reminders. We tell kids, over and over, “look both ways before crossing the street.” Our cars remind us every time we get in and start driving, to buckle our seatbelts. We need reminders about important things in life sometimes, even in potential life and death matters. And it’s true in our faith as well. We need reminders about the truth of Jesus, even when it’s stuff we do know. That’s the first thing to take away here, and even it is probably a reminder about something you already know. So you just got a reminder about needing a reminder. Maybe it wasn’t a reminder you needed...but there you go. 😊

Second, is the content of what he’s reminding them about – “these things.” “These things” that he reminds them of certainly pertain to what he wrote just before this, that we looked at last week – God’s provision and them living into that provision. But it’s all rooted in Jesus. And so what he primarily wants to remind them of is Jesus, and the truth of who Jesus is. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is not a “cleverly devised story” as he writes in verse 16. Peter says he was an eyewitness to Jesus and his majesty and the power with which he came. He saw this himself; it’s not made up.

So, Peter wants to make sure they – and now us – stay centered on Jesus. And out of all the things that Peter experienced with Jesus that he wants to share so they might be reminded of the truths of Jesus, he shares about the Transfiguration. Peter could have picked anything. He could have shared about any of the miracle healings or feedings he witnessed; he could have picked Jesus walking on water or Peter getting out of the boat in a step of faith to walk with him until fear invaded his head and he started sinking. **But out of all of them, the Transfiguration of Jesus solidifies the reliability and trustworthiness of Jesus because of His heavenly Father’s voice.** (Summarize the Transfiguration event. Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9.)

I’m well aware that in general, “hearing God’s voice” (the centerpiece of the transfiguration, which Peter reiterates here in his letter) is something we

might view with a certain degree of skepticism – the non-believing world for sure, but even in the Christian faith. And when Peter writes in the last few verses of today’s passage about prophetic messages, we probably associate this kind of event with those prophecies: “God told me,” “God said,” etc. And oftentimes we’re skeptical about these kinds of things, and I would say: rightly so. “Hearing voices” is oftentimes a sign of mental health concerns. So, when someone says, “God spoke to me...” or “I heard the voice of God...” most of us are a bit skeptical. It doesn’t help that in today’s world, it seems like most people who claim to hear God’s voice then follow it up by telling you to give them money or telling you that something like a solar eclipse is a sign of the end of the time and that Jesus is returning any moment...and God told them so.

For instance: Did you read about the lady who ate at a restaurant a couple times in the day or two before the eclipse last week (\$25 meals or so), tipped over \$1,000 between the two meals, and left notes with each essentially saying she wouldn’t need the money anyway because the end of the earth is around the corner as proven by the coming eclipse? And then a day or two after the eclipse she tried to get her money back because the end didn’t come. I just about guarantee you that someone told her they heard God say the end is coming, or maybe she thought she heard it herself. So, we’re skeptical.

Let me share a similar thing from my life, however. I would like to think that you all trust me to tell the truth, and that you don’t think I’m given to delusions. 😊 17 years ago, I got a “prophetic word” from God, and though it wasn’t an audible voice kind of thing, it’s probably going to sound just as odd to most of you. It was in a worship service in Tacoma at a church a few days before I was beginning my first pastoral position as a head pastor (I’d been an associate pastor in Salt Lake City previously), down in Chehalis. I was going to be preaching every Sunday for the first time.

And at this service in Tacoma, during a few minutes of an open prayer time where the entire congregation was invited to pray out loud or in their heads all at the same time...as I sat there praying, with others all around me praying their own prayers (mostly out loud, it seemed), I literally felt my throat physically begin to change. It was bizarre. It became more “open” is the only

way I can describe it; and to this day, it hasn't gone back to the way it felt the first 34 years of my life. And the sense I had about this – again, I didn't hear a voice, but it was more of an impression or an understanding of what God did in my body and why – the sense I had was that it was God's way of confirming my calling to preach, and anointing me for the task before me, and reminding me that He is with me in that task and I can trust him. All that was kind of rolled together. I remember telling Gwen about it afterwards. The point is, it was unusual, for sure...but like the Transfiguration, it is a reminder that Jesus is trustworthy.

Much the same: **The Transfiguration of Jesus was an event to convey the authority and reliability of Jesus.** Yes, it was a mystical, unusual thing that happened. But that doesn't mean it's made up, even if it is a bit different. Peter was there. He was an eyewitness to it. And God does do unusual things in our lives sometimes – with my own throat as exhibit A this morning (some of you have heard me share about the healing in my back where I felt things move...that's another odd one where God moved!). And so, as a way of reminding them about who Jesus is, reminding them to stay centered on Jesus, that he is trustworthy...that he has the authority of God the creator of the universe...Peter reminds them of this event that conveys Jesus' authority and trustworthiness, and the seal approval on his life from God his heavenly Father. He wants to pass this along to them, so they will stay strong in their faith in Jesus.

This is part of the calling upon us in our own journeys of faith: **Whether young or old, whether we think death is decades or days away, God invites us and commands us to pass the faith along.** It may be introducing people to Jesus, or as Peter is here with these folks, it's reminding them of things they already know – more “discipleship-oriented.” Most Sundays, that's what I'm doing. Most of you know Jesus. You've heard these things before. Sometimes some of you will say after a service, “I've never heard that before. Thank you.” Yes you have...it might have been 30 years ago and you forgot, but what I said certainly wasn't new. 😊 I'm just reminding you of the truths and the reliability and trustworthiness of Jesus, just as Peter does here, and exhorting you to live into your faith more. And we're each called to do the same (it's not a pastor-thing only) – to pass along the faith,

encouraging and reminding people of the authority and trustworthiness of Jesus, and to live into it. Whether it's in your own home or where you work, or with your neighbors, in your social circles, or somewhere else: the people around you are the ones God is inviting you to pass along the faith to, and to remind them of who Jesus is, just as Peter does here.

So, keep passing along the faith. No matter your stage of life or age in life, it's something we can do. Peter does it here, even with death on the horizon - perhaps even in prison as he writes. Most of us probably have less significant obstacles to overcome. Our obstacles are our own fears and desires to please people and be liked by others, or lack of confidence in our knowledge and understanding. Those are the things that usually keep us from passing the faith along and discipling people. But it's still what God calls us to do, and I pray that you and I would be passing the faith along, sharing how God has impacted us and touched us just as Peter does here (that's the key to it - Bible knowledge is not!), so that people would be reminded of just how trustworthy Jesus is. Let's pray...Amen.