

**Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL**  
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**Service Theme: *Transfiguration: The Glory of the Lord***  
**Sermon Theme: *Transfiguration Certainty (February 19, 2023)***  
**2 Peter 1:16-21**

In the 1980s, psychologist and memory expert Elizabeth Loftus conducted an experiment. She selected two separate juries for a mock trial about a hypothetical robbery and murder. The first jury heard a description of the hypothetical crime, followed by the prosecutor presenting only circumstantial evidence. In the end, only 18% of the jury found the imaginary defendant guilty of the hypothetical crime. The second jury heard the exact same description of the hypothetical crime, followed by the same prosecutor presenting the exact same circumstantial evidence. However, this time, the prosecution included an additional element—testimony from an eyewitness. This time, 72% of the jury found the imaginary defendant guilty of the hypothetical crime. A 54% swing, just because there was an eyewitness.

Loftus conducted this experiment to confirm her hypothesis that eyewitness testimony majorly impacts people's perception of the truth. And it makes sense, right? When we hear someone describing what they saw and heard at an event, their testimony feels reliable and trustworthy. Since they were there, we tend to take them at their word.

Today, we hear the Apostle Peter's eyewitness testimony of the Transfiguration of Jesus. And because of Peter's eyewitness testimony of the Transfiguration, we can have **Transfiguration Certainty**. Not just certainty about the Transfiguration, but certainty because of the Transfiguration!

Peter references his eyewitness testimony as a way of encouraging Christians to stand firm in their faith against the attacks of false teachers. He assures them, ***“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.”***

Peter takes us to the day when Jesus took him, and the two brothers, James and John, up on top of a high mountain. There, Jesus ***“was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.”***

To be “Transfigured” means to change appearance, and certainly that's what happened to Jesus! His appearance went from ho-hum, humble, human Jesus to glorious, majestic, blinding light Jesus, gleaming with divine glory! In that momentary glimpse of glory on the mountain, God was giving Peter, James, and John an unforgettable reminder of who Jesus really is: the holy Son of God.

Peter continues, ***“[Jesus] received honor 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.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”***

As Peter, James, and John stood blinking at Jesus' divine glory, a bright cloud covered them, like the one that had enveloped Mount Sinai when God gave the law to Moses. And they heard the voice of God reiterate that Jesus is his dearly-loved Son, to whom they should listen!

Peter shares his eyewitness testimony to verify that the message he and the other Apostles were preaching about Jesus wasn't mythology or fan fiction. Jesus' transfiguration was irrefutable evidence that he really was the Savior of the world, because at the Transfiguration, we see everything come together. With Jesus' divine glory on display, and the voice of the Father booming his approval, who could doubt that Jesus really was the Son of God?

And yet, Jesus' divine glory was just a momentary glimpse. After, Jesus again set aside his godly glory in order to go back down from that mountaintop so he could carry out the humble purpose he'd revealed to his disciples six days earlier: To ***“go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and that he must be killed and on the third day***

***be raised to life.***” Who could deny that Jesus was also true man; a humble, inglorious human, able to suffer and die?

So, Peter’s eyewitness testimony of the Transfiguration gives us certainty that Jesus really is who he and the Apostles said he is—true God, and true man; the Savior of all, who takes away the sin of the world, and gives eternal life to all who believe in him!

But is Peter’s eyewitness testimony reliable? Elizabeth Loftus, the same psychologist who conducted the mock trial referenced earlier, also conducted research that revealed that about 50% of wrongful convictions in the United States stem from mistakes made by eyewitnesses. Loftus found that certain factors can affect the accuracy of an eyewitness’s recall of the event!

Certainly, there are plenty of skeptics who claim that about Peter and the other Apostles. They’ll say that all these Gospel accounts about Jesus’ life, ministry, and miracles are just fantasies and myths intended to convince people that Jesus was the Son of God when he was just an ordinary human being.

If all we can rely on are eyewitness claims of humans like Peter, we can’t really be certain, can we? That’s why, along with his eyewitness testimony, Peter verifies his claims by pointing to the reliability of Scripture! ***“We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable. You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. 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.”***

We call this Verbal Inspiration—the teaching that all of the words of the Bible were “inspired” by God. Not inspired like, “I saw myself in the mirror, and it inspired me to get back to the gym.” That’s inspiration as motivation to act. But Biblical “inspiration” comes from two Latin words: *in* and *spiro*, which means, “breathed into.” Like we read in 2 Timothy, ***“All Scripture is God-breathed.”*** Meaning, God the Holy Spirit breathed into the human writers of the books of the Bible

the very words he wanted them to write. So, while the Bible has human authors-- like Moses, Peter, John, and Paul—God is really the author of the Bible.

Like Peter said, ***“Prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*** The Greek word for “carried along” is the same word for what wind does to a sailboat. While the sailboat is the vessel, without the wind blowing into the sails to “carry along” the sailboat, you won’t reach your destination!

The implications of that are immense. If the Bible is just the writings and opinions of some dudes, then you can take it or leave it, like some might claim Charles Dickens is the greatest author ever, while others might say, “I’ll wait for the movie.” And if the Bible is just written by human authors, you’re warranted to do that with it too!

But if the all-powerful, all-knowing, God who created and sustains the Universe is the author of the Scriptures, then it becomes the most important, impactful, powerful thing in your life, that must govern everything you believe and do, even when it conflicts with our logic, personal feelings, or societal whims. If God is the author of Scripture, then I have to bend my life to fit Scripture, not vice versa. If God is the author of the Bible, then we can trust the eyewitness testimony of men like Peter with complete certainty!

Elizabeth Loftus found that eyewitness testimony can become unreliable when seen from a distance. But Peter, James, and John saw Jesus’ divine glory up close and personal, from within the cloud of God’s presence! Loftus found that eyewitness testimony can become unreliable when the lighting is poor. But Peter, James, and John saw everything in the purest light of divine glory! Loftus found that eyewitness testimony can become unreliable if the eyewitness has biases about who or what they see. But Peter wasn’t seeing these things according to some bias he had about who Jesus was. Leading up to the Transfiguration, and even after the Transfiguration, the accounts of Peter’s grasp of who Jesus was and what he’d come to do are a tragic comedy of beautiful confessions, followed by abject failures, and outright denials. Peter didn’t record what he thought he saw based

on what he believed about Jesus. He recorded what he believed about Jesus, because of what he saw!

But isn't there a little skeptic inside of all of us that wants to believe that men wrote the Bible and not God? Because then we're not beholden to it. Because then we can filter everything in our lives through the strainer of "What do I want?" instead of "What does God say?" Certainly Satan presses on our skepticism. "Peter wants you to believe his message is legit, so of course he claims his message is from God. But Mormonism, Islam, and many other religions claim the same thing! Why believe Christianity is any different?"

I think there are two main reasons to trust that the message of the Bible is reliable and certain. One is what Peter mentions in our sermon text: Prophecy. The inspired writers of the Bible made somewhere around 1,500 prophecies, and every single one of them finds fulfillment, often hundreds or thousands of years later. And not just obvious Nostradamus predictions like, "There will be wars and natural disasters." We're talking unfathomable, intricately-detailed prophecies about everything from the rise and fall of earthly kings and kingdoms, to spiritual prophecies about the details of the life of the Messiah-- like how Jesus would be born of a Virgin; be born in a nothing town like Bethlehem, then move to Egypt for a while, and finally grow up in a tiny backwater town like Nazareth.

Or how King David perfectly describes the events of Jesus' crucifixion in Psalm 22, hundreds of years before Jesus was born; hundreds of years before crucifixions existed, hundreds of years before anyone knew what a "Roman" was.

Repeatedly, God's messengers prophesy things in Scripture that no one could possibly know or predict—unless God breathed into them the very words of prophecies he knew would be fulfilled from before time began. Like Peter said, "***We 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.***"

The other main reason to trust that the message of the Bible is reliable and certain is the message itself. Every other religion has the same basic message: "If you follow this prescribed list of do's and don'ts, then you can earn the favor of the higher power you want the approval of." There are no world religions whose basic tenet isn't a contractual obligation to earn acceptance through your actions.

Except Christianity! Every other religion says, "This is what you have to do to get right with God." Christianity is the only one that says, "This is what God has done to make you right with him!" If you were a teacher, and you got a tip that all your students, except one, copied off each other's test, wouldn't the one that goes in the complete opposite direction of all the others make it obvious?

And we see that unique message on Christianity on display at the Transfiguration! God sends his glorious Son, who is willingly humbled and pays the price for the sins of the world with his life, death, and the punishment of Hell—which we'll see him carry out on another mountain on the other end of Lent—to bring people to God!

The message of Christianity is true—because God himself is the author, and God himself is the Savior! And the implications are huge—for you! Because you were on trial. And all the evidence was pointing to a slam-dunk guilty verdict. Until an eyewitness took the stand. An eyewitness who saw the Son of God in all his glory, then saw him once again in humble humanity; who saw the Son of God suffer and die, and then three days later raised back to life again. And that eyewitness testimony, backed up by the very words of God, mean that you are not guilty. Forgiven. Set free, forever!

We can be certain of that glorious light shining into our darkness, because we have eyewitness testimony! And as we continue to be eyewitnesses of God's glory as he comes to us in his powerful Word; in the Word and waters of Baptism; in the body and blood and bread and wine of the Lord's Supper; we look ahead with complete certainty to the day when we will get to see him in all of his glory—not just for a glimpse, but for eternity. We look ahead with complete certainty to the day when we'll see that Jesus' glory at the Transfiguration was just

a precursor to the perfect glory that will also radiate forth from us.  
Have Transfiguration Certainty, dear friends in Christ, every day 'til  
eternity.