

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES – A LIGHT FOR DARK PLACES II PETER 1:12-21

INTRODUCTION:

Before the Tyndale House Publishers released their translation last year they commissioned a national survey. They called the survey “Bible Reading in America” and it was conducted by the Barna Research Group. The findings of that survey were very interesting. They found that 91% of American adults own one or more Bibles; only one in five reads the Bible at least once a week; 45% rarely or never read their Bibles. Moreover, while 86% claim to know the basic principles of the Bible, somewhat, or “Very well, a large percentage perform poorly on a basic quiz of Bible knowledge. This will not surprise anyone who teaches an adult Sunday School Class. This finding stands in sharp contrast to the testimony of useful lives in the past. Martin Niemoller, the German pastor who was imprisoned by Hitler leaves behind a different testimony. Not only after he began his years as a prisoner under Hitler, his cell door opened one day and intruded a Nazi officer. With a surprising attempt at politeness, he said to Niemoller; “Have you any wishes or complaints?”

“Yes,” said Pastor Niemoller “I do. When I was brought here I was stripped by your men of practically every thing – my wedding ring, my wrist watch, my suspenders, all my books and papers; I have, accordingly, many wishes but one wish above all – that you give back to me my Bible, and that right away!

The officer hesitated, but only for a moment. Calling a guard, he said, “Get this man’s Bible from my office.” Ten minutes later it was there.

Now listen to this from Pastor Niemoller: “What did this book mean to me during the long and weary years of solitary confinement, and for the last four years at Dachau? The Word of God was simply everything to me – comfort and strength, guidance and hope, Master of my days and companion of my nights, the bread which kept me from starvation, and the water of life that refreshed my soul.”

Such a testimony should not surprise us. Peter indicated that the scriptures are to be to us “as to a light shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

What a lamp is to a travel at night the Word of God is to us as we travel through this dark world. The words of Peter concerning the Holy Scriptures in our text are particularly meaningful and helpful. They are indeed a lamp for the dark places of life. Given the nature of the world in which we live, all of us will go through some dark places before we finish the journey. We may not be imprisoned in a concentration camp, but we will go through the dark places. The Word of God as found in the Holy Scriptures is our lamp for the dark places.

Let’s explore together what Peter has to say about the Holy Scriptures in our text.

I. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ARE A LAMP FOR THE DARK PLACES BECAUSE OF THEIR ORIGIN.

In these words Peter gives us insight into the very nature of the scriptures themselves. It is true that his focus is upon “prophecy,” but what he says about the prophetic sections of scripture is true of all of the scripture. He says, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

1. The scriptures are not of human origin.

The first statement of Peter in this passage has often been misinterpreted. The older King James version lent itself to that. That version reads “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation.” The words of Peter have been made to mean, based on that translation, that none of us are to come up with our own private interpretation of the scriptures while this is surely an appropriate word of caution, it is not the emphasis of these words of Peter. The New International version has done a better job of catching the force of what Peter says.

The “interpretation” that Peter is concerned about is the prophet’s interpretation. What he means for us to understand is that what we have in the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament are not simply the personal ideas of the prophet. The things that the prophet wrote did not originate with the prophet. They were not the result of the prophet’s impressions or his interpretation.

Peter emphasizes this again with the words, “for prophecy never had its origin in the will of man.” The men that God used to give us the prophetic scriptures did not set out on their own to be prophets. They became prophets only when a sovereign God laid His hand upon them and

placed His Word in their hearts and in their mouths. So, we need to understand that the Holy Scriptures, though they are obviously written in human words, did not originate with man.

2. They are of divine origin.

One of the great statements of all of scripture concerning the inspiration of scripture is found in this text. “But men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” This statement brings together the two vital elements involved in the origination of scripture. “Men spoke” – these words remind us that the authors of scripture were indeed men. This is obvious as we read the Bible. Even though the human author of some of the books is not revealed in the writing, in others the human instrument is very prominent. But in every case the scriptures are written in words of “men.” In the Old Testament these men spoke and wrote Hebrew. In the New Testament they spoke and wrote Greek. So men have an obvious and prominent place in the origination of scripture but that is not the whole story.

“The Holy Spirit” is the other and divine element. The verb used in connection with the Holy Spirit and these men is an interesting verb. It is translated here “were carried.” The idea in the word is that of the wind being caught in a sail on a boat and moving the boat across the waters. The Spirit of God blew upon the life of these men and moved them along in the divinely chosen course. So much so that when they had completed the writings of their prophecies, or history, or poetry, or gospel, or letter, what they had written was exactly what God wanted written. They did not write these words by dictation, nor did they write them while in some trance. Yet, they were under the control and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they wrote.

You and I have a trustworthy lamp to give us light in the dark places because this lamp came from God Himself. It came through human personalities but it came under divine guidance and divine protection. The sovereign God who moved by the Holy Spirit upon these men made sure that we received just the light we would need for the dark places we would encounter.

II. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ARE A LIGHT FOR THE DARK PLACES BECAUSE OF THEIR PURPOSE.

While Peter does not fully explore in our text all of the divine intention for scripture, he does give us enough insight to encourage our use of the scriptures.

1. The Holy Scriptures preserves the things that we need to know.

This takes us back to the autobiographical section of these paragraphs. In the biographical section Peter shares with us that it was his full intention to make sure that we had every thing in the scriptures that we would need to know for the days ahead. He says, “So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them are firmly established in the truth you now have.” And then he says, “And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.” Last week I indicated that he may well have been referring to his influence on Mark as he wrote the gospel of Mark. One of the things that God had in mind when he wrote caused holy men in the past to write the scriptures and prompted others like Peter to add epistles to the scriptures, was providing us what we need to know.

We should have complete confidence in the sufficiency of the scriptures. The scriptures do not tell us everything we might like to know. They do not satisfy all of our curious questions. But they do provide for us all the light we will need for the living of life day by day in this dark

world. They reveal to us what we need to know about God and ourselves. They reveal to us what God's will is in particular and strange circumstances of life. God gave the scriptures so we would have all that we need to know for the living of life day by day.

2. The Holy Scriptures reveal the Savior.

One of the primary things that we need to know for the living of life in these dark days is the Savior. In this text Peter reminds us that he has a word to share about the Savior. "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him for 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 the mountain when we were with Him on the sacred mountain. We have the word of prophets made more certain." The thing that Peter is saying to those early Christians is that the prophetic sections of the Old Testament were illumined and made sure by the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. He specifically points to that moment in which Christ was transfigured before them on the mountain. Peter is indicating that that moment of transfiguration was a foretaste of what will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed in His power at His coming. He is encouraging them to look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Scriptures are full of Jesus.

Knowing who He is and what He has done makes so much difference when you come into the dark places. Knowing that He has promised and will come again makes so much difference when you feel the oppressive darkness around you. It gives light to the dark place.

3. The Holy Scriptures illumine our path.

The old version reads, “Which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place.” It was God’s intention to give us a lamp when He gave us the Holy Scriptures. The Psalmist recognized this when he declared, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” The scriptures were given for people like us who live in a world like this so we would not have to stumble around in the darkness. They were given to save us from the errors that befall the world around us. They were given to illumine the way for us.

It is easy to see that the purpose of the Holy Scriptures make them a lamp unto our feet always.

III. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ARE A LAMP UNTO OUR FEET AS WE PROPERLY USE THEM.

There is one word of admonition in this text to us – “And you will do well to pay attention to it.” There have been some Christians who have mistakenly believed that the Bible is a book of magic. They have felt safe because they own a copy of the Holy Scriptures and keep that copy in some prominent place. But the Holy Scriptures are like a lamp. A lamp is useful only when it is used as a lamp. If you and I are to benefit from the Holy Scriptures and are to find our way through the dark places of life, then we must use the Holy Scriptures as a lamp. We must give careful attention to them.

What does this involve? How do I give careful attention to the Holy Scriptures? There are several applications that we can make from this.

1. We pay attention to the Holy Scriptures as we build our lives upon the truth that is revealed in them.

Everyone builds their life on something. Everyone has a set of presuppositions on which they make decisions and build their lives. The Christian who is wise saturates his mind and builds his heart with the truth that is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. They take the truth concerning God and what is revealed concerning man and build upon that.

Would it be profitable for you to check the underpinnings of your life and to see if it is built upon the revealed truth of God as found in the Holy Scriptures?

2. We can take heed to the scriptures by basing our life decisions on the principals of scripture.

How do you decide what is right and wrong? On what bases do you make the decisions of your life? Where do you get your value system? You are going to find the scriptures most useful when you take the principals found in scripture and use them as the bench mark by which you measure everything. Your decisions are based on God's revealed will in Holy Scriptures.

Obviously, if we are going to be able to carry the scriptures with us as a lamp for our path, we must become very faithful and very practical in filling our lives with scripture.

We must read the scriptures daily.

We must study the scriptures diligently.

We must memorize the scripture by placing it in our minds and our hearts.

We must take advantage of every opportunity to go deeper in our understanding of the scriptures.

We must “Study to show ourselves approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the Word of Truth.” I want to give you strong encouragement today to give proper place in your life to the written Holy Scriptures.