

2 Peter 1:16-21 (1984 NIV)
Spiritual Anchors for Faith Foundation

Introduction

Let me begin with this question: “How do you define a disciple of Christ?”

In simple terms, I would define a disciple of Christ this way—“One who learns and follows Christ and His teachings so that he/she can grow to become more and more like Christ the Master.”

To learn, follow, and grow in such a manner, some spiritual anchors are fundamentally important because these help us to have a strong foundation in our faith.

Such spiritual anchors were also crucial in the lives of Christians at the time when Peter wrote his 2nd letter to them (probably between A.D. 65 and 68). The Letter of 2 Peter was believed to be written towards the end of Peter’s life. Church tradition has it that Peter was martyred in Rome during the reign of Nero in the year A.D. 68. So, what Peter wrote in 2 Peter could be considered his last words to the church.

In this 2nd letter, Peter was alarmed that false teachers were beginning to infiltrate into the church. Many were deceived and strayed away. He called on Christians to grow and become strong in their faith so that they could detect and combat these false teachings. In particular, he stressed the sure return of Christ and the authenticity of God’s Word. And Peter did this by way of reminding the believers of some spiritual anchors stated in the form of some fundamental beliefs about Christ and God’s Word.

These spiritual anchors reminded by Peter are also for us today. Massive information is easily accessible to us through the social media we have these days, for better or worse. False teachings and fake news are before our eyes and in our ears in a matter of seconds. Thus, we need to be even more discerning than ever before in our time and age; we need to be discerning enough to distinguish between truth and error.

For us to be strong in our faith foundation, we need the spiritual anchors as reminded by Peter.

Spiritual Anchor #1: Believe that Jesus is the Son of God who will come again (vv. 16-18).

V. 16: 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.

V. 17: He 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.”

V. 18: We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

When Peter spoke of the coming of Jesus Christ in power, he asserted that he was absolutely certain because he and some others were “eyewitnesses of his majesty”. Here, Peter was alluding to Matt. 17:1-5; to his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration when he was with the Lord together with James and John. There, of course, he saw Moses and Elijah too.

Matt. 17:1-5 - “After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he 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. Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!’”

The transfiguration of Jesus before him had left an indelible impact on Peter. Some 30 years later, this picture of Christ’s glory and majesty was still fresh in Peter’s mind. Whenever he thought of Christ he thought of that day when he and James and John were eyewitnesses of this. As Peter talked about the coming of Christ, he was also reminded of the glory and majesty he saw on that mountain where Jesus was transfigured.

Now, why did Peter tell this powerful spiritual experience to his readers? Was he trying to boast of his superior spirituality over them? Was he trying to say something like, “If you are a true disciple of Jesus, you must have such experiences. If not, something is wrong with your spiritual life!”

Sounds familiar? Was Peter trying to belittle his readers by talking about his experience as an eyewitness of Christ’s glory and majesty when the Lord was transfigured?

Of course not! The reason why Peter recalled the transfiguration of Christ is to tell his readers that his experience of witnessing the glory and majesty of Christ on that mountain was true BUT not an end in itself. Rather, it was only meant to be a reassurance of that day when Christ would come with the same glory and majesty that He manifested himself on that mountain. And Peter, James and John were privileged to preview that so that they could testify as the three apostolic eyewitnesses to this coming of Christ, NOT for them to boast of it as their powerful and superior spiritual experience.

Just as this experience was not a fictitious story, Peter asserted that the coming of Christ was not a cleverly devised story to give people a false hope of better things to come.

In what ways is this coming of Christ our hope for better things to come?

- One, it is better because we shall receive the glorified body that is free from death and corruption (1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). We have many reasons to groan about our bodies. We can name several physical problems, weaknesses, pains and illnesses. The older we grow, the more evident is our physical decline.

What a disappointing reality it would be without the resurrection and the changing of our body into an incorruptible one. But Jesus will complete His work of redemption by giving us a living, glorified body at His glorious coming.

- Two, it is better because we shall be with the Lord. Jesus said, “I will come again and take you ... that where I am, there you will be also” (John 14:2-3). This is both permanent and personal fellowship with Jesus. Unlike here on earth, there are lots of things that can disturb our fellowship with Him—lots of noises, cares and problems that can easily take our attention off Him; lots of imperfections that can make our minds to wander away. But at His coming, it will be a perfect communion with Him always.

Now these gave hope to the believers in Peter’s time in the face of the difficulties they had then. But there were some false teachers who were telling the believers that the coming of Christ, and all the promises that were supposed to be associated with it, were all “fairy tales”, and cannot be believed in.

As Peter prepared to leave this life, he wanted the believers then (and us today) to be fully certain and convicted that Christ is coming in His glory and majesty to receive His people one day.

Why do we need to have full certainty and conviction of this coming of Christ?

- One, it helps to “set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2). When we decide that we want to be faithful to God, this goal must always be at the forefront of our minds. Then we seek to find eternal value in every situation. This ensures that when we find ourselves tempted to be unfaithful to God, we are reminded of who and what we are living for here on earth. Then we won’t be deceived into thinking that something else is more important, or will bring us more joy, than to serve God and do God’s will in each situation.

The coming of the Lord will remind us that whatever gains or losses we have here on earth are only for this life. So we learn to live life not with a tight fist, but with an open palm—an open palm to receive and to give as the Lord blesses and leads us.

- Two, it helps us to submit to the Lord's time—"... With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Some of the believers in Peter's time might find the false teachers believable because they had expected the Lord to come SOON. In Rev. 3:11, the Lord said that He would be coming SOON. But after all the waiting so far, where is He?

Maybe this is also the one thing troubling many hearts and minds today. "Lord, you have said you will be coming soon. But after some 2,000 years and with the world in such a mess today, where are you? How SOON is SOON?"

And so it is very easy for us to live our lives as if here and now is all that matters. Maybe this coming of Christ is all a big myth; something to give hopeless people some hope to hold onto, but not for real.

I believe that the Lord is coming soon. How soon I cannot say for sure. But I believe He is coming soon as He has promised in the sense that when He comes, it will be so sudden and quick that if you have not prepared for it way before hand, you will be caught flat-footed, without time at all to change in any way.

So, I prepare and grow in my faith by aligning the purpose and direction of my life in accordance to the Lord's will for me as I seek Him. I do it now so that when He comes suddenly and quickly today or any other day, I am already running the good race and fighting the good fight. I may not know His time, but I can use my time now to prepare myself to start well, stay strong, and finish faithfully when I meet Him in His time.

- Three, it helps us to ground our identity in our heavenly sonship and not in our earthly success—"... I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ..." (Phil. 3:8). On the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father said these words in the hearing of Peter, James and John—"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

The implication for us as people who are in Christ is this—in Christ alone is the approval of God to be found, and thus, it is only in Christ that we are declared righteous before God.

Where do we ground our identity and significance in? Once again, as Paul has said in Phil. 3:8—“... I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ...” Like Paul, we are to ground it in who we are in Jesus Christ (in Christ we are God’s children) and not in who we are here on earth—teacher, engineer, doctor, lawyer, pastor, cleaner, clerk, homemaker, etc. Whatever our stations in life may be here on earth, what matters is that we are children of God, loved and pleasing to Him because we are in Jesus Christ.

Now, at the Mount of Transfiguration, who did the disciples see together with Jesus? They saw Moses and Elijah. In the Old Testament, Moses was dead and buried; Elijah was taken up to heaven alive. On the Mount of Transfiguration, we see the Lord in His glory and majesty together with His two faithful ones—one was buried dead in the ground and the other taken up alive to heaven. It will be the same at the Rapture—the day when the Lord will come to take His people with Him, both the dead and the living (see 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

And Peter was there with James and John to get a grand preview of this great event of deliverance so that he could defend what the Scripture had prophesied as an apostolic eyewitness. He was telling the troubled and misled believers in his time that the coming of the Lord for His people would be sure and certain. They might have doubt about this. But Peter reassured them that they would be with Jesus when He comes, and they would see Moses and Elijah with Him too ... and all their loved ones who were in the faith, both the dead and the living.

I also want you to notice that while on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter was so enthralled by the glory and majesty of the Lord at His transfiguration that he pleaded in Matt. 17:4, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” You see, Peter refused to leave the mountain. He wanted to stay on the mountain to continue to enjoy that high mountain-top experience.

Are we like Peter today who wanted to stay on the mountain top always? Jesus does not just do wonderful things in our lives to keep us on top of the mountain. He wants us to return to the valley where hurting people are found. You see, His coming is not only for the Church to get ready, but for the Church to get others ready.

His coming is promised to us so that we can understand that we need to be in the valley telling others about Jesus. The Lord who is coming wants us to:

- Leave the holy mountain and bring hope to a hopeless valley.
- Leave our place of blessedness to minister in our world of brokenness.

Jesus doesn't want us to stay on the holy mountain of transfiguration. He wants us to go down the valley and tell hurting and hopeless people about the healing and hope that comes from Him. The Lord gave a foretaste to Peter and others of His coming in glory and majesty not merely to let them know that He's going to return, but to send them down to minister to those in need in the valley.

When Jesus comes again, those who are lost will be left behind. Those who are saved will be caught up with Him into glory. The only way the lost can be saved is for you and me to go down to the valley and then bring them up to the mountain.

For us to be strong in our faith foundation, we need a second spiritual anchor as reminded by Peter.

Spiritual Anchor #2: Believe that the Bible is God's Word that is true and trustworthy (vv. 19-21).

V. 19: 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.

V. 20: Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things.

V. 21: 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.

As Peter began to prepare for his martyrdom, he wanted even more so to remind the believers that when he's gone, they would still have something even more trustworthy than a human eyewitness like himself. They would still have the written Word of God with them. This written Word carries the same authority as the voice that came from the Father that declared Jesus to be His Son.

The written Word carries God's authority because ...

- One, it illuminates our understanding like a "lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (v. 19). The Bible lights up our spiritual darkness so that we can understand spiritual truths. God's Word is a lamp that shows us where to walk and where not to walk. It will reveal God's truths and expose human falsehood. It will give our lives meaning and purpose.
- Two, it originated with God because "no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (v. 21). Because Scripture is God originated, it can

be trusted. This is where Christians are to turn for truth and comfort in this present world so that they can be strong in their faith.

As opposed to the false teachings that were misleading the people in Peter's time, the Bible does not have its beginning with man but with God. You might say, "I thought men actually wrote the Bible." In saying that, you're only partially right at best. Men did write it, but notice again what Peter says in v. 21—"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit would carry the human writer along as he wrote. The Greek language paints the picture of a sailing boat being carried along by the wind. The boat (the human writer) follows the direction of the wind (the Holy Spirit), not the wind following the direction of the boat.

The Bible was written by some 40 writers, over a period of 1,600 years, in 66 books. And the great theme from one end of the Bible to the other is REDEMPTION—God's love for the human race; God redeeming man and bringing man back to Himself after man had rebelled against God.

Since centuries past, the Bible has been under much attack. Many people, even within the church today, have come to doubt whether the Bible is really authoritative and trustworthy. So, the Bible has long been ridiculed, burned, banned, discredited, and refuted.

E.g. there are people who find it very difficult to believe how a big fish could swallow up Jonah and yet he was still alive after three days. But Jesus deliberately took this story and told it as if it is as true as a circle is round or a triangle has three sides (Matt. 12:38-41).

What I am trying to say is that the Bible may be difficult for us to understand with our own human reasoning. But this does not mean the Bible is anti-reason. Rather, the Bible is often above reason. Thus, we have to take a step of faith; that when our reasoning cannot give us any satisfactory answer, it is faith that must carry us to the end. Yet such faith is not a blind leap into the dark, but a step into greater light. When we believe and obey in faith, God will honour our humility to learn and to be taught, and grant us greater certainty and conviction in where we are struggling. His Spirit will help us see and understand with eyes and mind of faith.

God is God. If we wrap God up in a little box and make Him as small as we are, of course He cannot do a lot of things mentioned in the Bible. But God is the Great Creator. He not only has created the whole universe, but also contains the whole universe. So, if you try to describe or explain God using a mere scientific framework of time and space, you will run into problems with what the Bible tells us about God and His work. The God of the Bible is the

Great Creator who is beyond time and space. And if you believe in that kind of God, then He can do anything as He wills.

Many years ago, I spent a few months doing some investigative Bible Studies with my best friend. He was eager to learn about the Christian faith. But being a highly intellectual person, he found it very hard to just accept things by faith. He wanted reasons and evidences. I recall that the theology of one God in three persons really blew his mind. He just could not come to terms with that.

After many sessions together, I suggested to him that we should take a break but remain in contact. I asked him to read through the Gospel of Mark on his own, and to call me if he would need any help to understand. I also told him that I would pray for him every day that the Spirit of God would convict him and gave him eyes of faith to see and mind of faith to understand. I also gave him the “Sinner’s Prayer” written on a card. I said to him, “When you come to a point where you are ready and willing to believe and receive Jesus into your life, say this prayer to Jesus with all the sincerity in your heart.”

He called me one night. He said, “John, you remember asking me to read the Gospel of Mark? I have done so faithfully and one evening I said to myself, ‘If Jesus is really like what the Bible is saying about Him, I want to believe in Him.’ So, I call to tell you that I have prayed that prayer that you have written on the card.”

I was delighted but I asked this just to be sure—“What about your difficulty with one God in three persons? Do you have an answer that has satisfied you?”

He replied, “No, I still cannot figure that out yet. But you know, somehow it doesn’t matter anymore.”

Today, he is heading his own Christian family—a devoted wife and two grown-up sons who are actively serving in church.

I have learnt from that experience that we really cannot argue people into heaven, but we surely can pray them into heaven.

An essential first step that we must take as we come before the Bible is actually a child-like step. Many people stumble over the Bible because they cannot take it as it is—i.e. the true and trustworthy Word of God. They consider it so incredibly simple that they reject it. Our human pride often prevents us from humbling ourselves and becoming small by coming with simple child-like faith. No wonder the Bible says in 1 Cor. 1:21—“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was

pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”

There’s a saying, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” This is so true. Think of your early days as a Christian—you were so excited about worshipping God in church, pray, do Bible studies, and share Christ with the lost. What about today? Are you still excited about these things? Or are you somehow getting tired of these and looking for some other things more refreshing and new?

The caution is this—we are not necessarily stronger in faith even if we are longer in faith. Complacency, indifference, disappointment, disobedience can be like weeds that are choking the vitality out of our faith life. What may be needed to renew our faith life may not be so much new spiritual knowledge and experiences, but a return to the foundational truths of the Word and obedience to it.

Peter, who once denied the Lord three times, had learnt his lesson well. That’s why in 2 Peter 1, he didn’t tell the Christians to ground their faith foundation by seeking powerful experiences, like seeing Christ in Transfiguration. Rather, Peter exhorted them to ground their faith foundation by seeking to hear and obey the Lord in His Word. When we hear and obey the Word, we can experience the Lord in a very intimate (not necessarily intellectual) way. We will begin to exercise and even stretch our faith. And when we exercise and stretch our faith, our spiritual muscles begin to grow. We begin to know, trust and obey even more and more the will of the Lord in His Word.

So, faith is like a muscle and needs to be exercised—the exercise of trust and obedience. One way to help us exercise trust and obedience in God’s Word is keeping faith in His ability yet submitting to His sovereignty.

As soon as we talk about the ability of God, we may face some serious questions. We rejoice in stories of God’s miraculous intervention in people’s lives to bring salvation, deliverance, and healing. We know that God is able to do these things. Our question is why, if he has the ability, doesn’t He always do it?

Faith factors in the ability of God, but it does more than that. It also submits to the sovereignty of God. If you factor in the ability of God without submitting to the sovereignty of God, you will soon find yourself in all kinds of confusion.

God has never promised a storm-free life. You remember the disciples who were in the boat with Jesus in Luke 8:22-25. They were all caught in a storm because they obeyed Jesus’ command! It will sometimes be like that. Christ never promises us fair weather all the time.

That is why biblical faith must submit to the sovereignty of God because no power in the world is going to make God do what He does not want to do! God does whatever He pleases, and so there is a place in His plan for storms as well as calm waters.

Conclusion

Perhaps, some of you today may need to be stretched beyond your limits and your comfort zone so that you can see your need to trust God like you have never done before. Perhaps, Christ is calling you to launch out into the deep. The storm may come, but if you are where Christ has called you to be, and you are doing what He has called you to do, you will find Him worthy to be trusted and obeyed as your Lord and Master.

Peter has reminded us of two spiritual anchors that will help give us a strong faith foundation:

1. Believe that the Lord Jesus will come again so that we can view all earthly gains and losses in right perspective.
2. Believe that the Bible is true and trustworthy so that we will not only be hearers of the Word but doers of the Word as well.

Let's seek the Lord to hammer these two spiritual anchors into our faith foundation by way of the spiritual discipline of trust and obedience. Amen!