

Text: 2 Peter 1:16–21

Theme: Only the true knowledge of Christ has the power to save and transform lives.

Arrangement:

- I. False knowledge is ineffective and unfruitful.
- II. The true knowledge of Jesus was revealed to His disciples by His glory.
- III. The true knowledge of Jesus is borne for us in His Word.
- IV. True knowledge of Jesus bears fruit in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

—2 Peter 1:3–16

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Epistemology. My Sunday School group has encountered this word as we've discussed the concepts involved in having a reason for and confidence in our faith. Epistemology is the study of knowledge. More specifically, epistemology seeks to answer questions regarding the nature and extent of human knowledge.

In other words, what does it mean to actually *know* something? We throw this word around with much self-confidence but don't often give it proper respect. We tend to be overconfident in our intellectual abilities, passing things off as absolute truth simply because we heard it from someone we like or think knows things. There is especially true when it comes to things that are simply beyond our ability to know. There are many things in this creation that we cannot learn through our senses or with our reason, yet we assert we have arrived at the truth of them, or we at least hold up our truth as not only valid but the most likely explanation. I think some of this arrogance comes from the fact that because we can't rightly know, then nobody can rightly prove us wrong.

Yet there is One who knows not only these things but all things. He knows, because He made it. And He gives knowledge of these mysteries to the ones who seek the truth from Him. At least, He gives us knowledge of the mysteries that we need for our life and salvation. He gives us this knowledge because His desire is for us to dwell with Him for all eternity, yet false knowledge leads to our own destruction not only in this life but also in the next.

Only the true knowledge of Christ has the power to save and transform lives.

(1) False knowledge is ineffective and unfruitful. (2) The true knowledge of Jesus was revealed to His disciples by His glory. (3) The true knowledge of Jesus is borne for us in His Word. (4) True knowledge of Jesus bears fruit for us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I. False knowledge is ineffective and unfruitful.

We see it in our own lives all the time. We even sometimes take guilty pleasure watching people who *think* they know fail in their doomed attempts to prove their knowledge. Sometimes, though, that false knowledge has destructive consequences. Mix the ingredients wrong and you get a toxin instead of a cure. Don't use the equipment correctly and people can get hurt.

Throughout the Gospel accounts, we see the destructive nature of false knowledge. People came to their own conclusions about Jesus. The extreme example is the pharisees, who convinced themselves that Jesus was a blasphemer and found themselves opposing the very God they claimed to serve and defend. Others include Herod, who thought Jesus was a threat to his throne; Pontious Pilate, who thought Jesus was an innocent man of no consequence who was getting a raw deal; and the crowds of people who dismissed Jesus as a lunatic or magician.

Yet there were even those who sought Jesus, but whose faith proved unfruitful when He was shown to not be the Messiah they desired. For example, the crowds who followed Jesus and ate bread to their full. Many became His disciples and had hope that Jesus had come to take away all society's ills and their own discomforts and sufferings. But when He told them that He did not come to give them fullness in this life but fullness in eternal life, they grumbled and complained and left Him.

Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked if they too were going to leave Him. Peter, in a profound moment of faith, responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the world of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:66–69).

II. The true knowledge of Jesus was revealed to His disciples by His glory.

Though the Twelve themselves largely struggled to truly understand Jesus, they did receive these profound moments of faith that helped them endure. I say received, because that is just Jesus tells them. Shortly before the events in our Gospel lesson today, Jesus asked the Twelve who they say Jesus is. Peter, again, confessed "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:13–17).

Peter Himself acknowledges that their knowledge of Jesus did not come from within, but from without. *"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."* They did not make up this knowledge of Jesus. They did not come to it on their own. They did not follow their hearts to the truth. Instead, the Father made it known to them, for they were eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty.

Peter writes, *"For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard*

this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.” Peter is talking about the very event in our Gospel Lesson today, the Transfiguration of our Lord upon the mountain. And this voice that was heard by Peter, James, and John was not from within themselves, but it came from within the cloud. Over and over in the Old Testament, and even in Revelation, God the Father’s presence is hidden in a cloud. Peter’s confession of Jesus was confirmed by God Himself in an external word.

Yet that was not the first time that Peter and the others heard that Word. It had been spoken prior by the Spirit through John the Baptist and was said, almost word for word, by the Father in Jesus’ Baptism. This Word which Peter spoke, which all the disciples spoke, was not a product of their own imagination or speculation, but they were eyewitnesses to it. But even more than the Baptism or the Transfiguration, they witnessed what both these events pointed to and testified of. They saw the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, proving Him to be our Savior and every word He spoke to be true.

They learned from Jesus the mysteries of God for our life and salvation and saw in Him the fulfillment of God’s prophetic Word. Even the promises that were yet to be fulfilled had already begun to be answered in Jesus, so that the disciples were confident that in Jesus their completion would come. The question of His return is not “if,” but “when.”

III. The true knowledge of Jesus is borne for us in His Word.

Not only do we still have that prophetic Word regarding Jesus, but we even have the Apostolic Word, that eyewitness testimony for us found in Scripture. Even though He died and rose again and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, reigning over creation, there are still many in the world who ignore His Word and claim knowledge for themselves, even contradicting His Word to do so. And this is not only those who do not seek Him. There are plenty who call themselves by the name of Christ, and yet they utter all kinds of myths and fantasies concerning Jesus. And many of them wander into saying they have knowledge of things that is simply beyond our ability to know, largely because they can’t be “proven wrong.”

But here’s the thing, as Peter says, it is not a question of “if” Jesus is coming back, but “when.” And when He comes, He will hold us accountable for what we have done. For we who cling to Jesus as our Savior, what we have said and done has been covered by the blood of the very One who comes as our Judge, purifying us. But lest anyone be deceived, those who cling to Christ also cling to His Word. For it is in His Word and through His Word that we receive Him and learn of His will and His way that we may cling to Him.

That is why Peter proclaims, *“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”* When we lean on Scripture, we are not leaning on the understanding of man, which so easily can go awry, but we lean upon the understanding of God Himself who made the heavens and the earth, *“knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. 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.”*

This means that we are not only going to Scripture as the source of knowledge but even to test all knowledge according to Scripture. It is only in this way that the power of our Lord Jesus Christ is made known to us and within us. For the Scriptures are the Word of God and the very means that the Spirit uses to create and sustain life within us, bearing the fruits of faith.

II. True knowledge of Jesus bears fruit for us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we receive this knowledge of Jesus, we receive the words He says about our condition. And knowing our Savior, we are freed to acknowledge our sin, confessing it before Him. Acknowledging our sin, we are freed to repent and ask for His divine aid, that we may partake of the divine nature as He cleanses us from our corruption and empowers us to lead godly lives. For the same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles to write the Scriptures works within those Words to remake us in the image of Jesus.

As our true knowledge of Jesus grows, our love for Him also will grow and produce in us a love for the things that He loves, and we long for the Day of His return when He will set all things right once and for all. And as we long for that day, our lives become oriented toward it by Spirit's working, and little by little our lives transformed, in outer ways, yes, but especially our inner life as we are borne and upheld in His righteousness, longing for the Day when we will finally and fully be made right.

For now, cling to His Word, the Scriptures, and you will not be ineffective or unfruitful, but you yourselves will become eyewitnesses and make known His power and coming both in your life now and in the life to come. Amen.