

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Eyewitness Testimony: Abiding Truth

*Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. (2 Peter 1:12–18, KJV 1900)*

Whether the man is first century Apostle Peter or a little-known and soon forgotten minister of today, every faithful minister of the gospel lives with an abiding obligation to God. His role in preaching and pastoring is to constantly remind people of the "...present truth" of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The preacher who starts thinking about leaving a legacy to his name as he grows older and realizes that his time is short becomes an unworthy preacher by this very act. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Corinthians 4:5) This verse rejects all motives outside "...Jesus Christ the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

*...as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance.* I started speaking in the church when I was fourteen years of age. I was ordained before I reached age twenty. For many years after my ordination, church people often referred to me as "Little Joe." Now I'm seventy-two years old, long ago past the "Little Joe" stage. I have no expectation of dying in the next short while, but my age reminds me that I am entering the season of exit. I certainly do not have another seventy-two years before me in life or over fifty more years in ministry. Each time I enter the pulpit I want to speak words to the people that will remind them of their God and His amazing merciful grace that secures their eternity and may enrich their present lives if they stand faithfully beside Him in their lives.

As I confront this season in my life and ministry, my obligation is not to give those who hear me a "New revelation," but rather it is to ensure that they are "...established in the present truth." "Go and shew John **again** those things which ye do hear and see." (Matthew 11:4; emphasis added)

*Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.* The proof of a man's faithful ministry often appears after his departure, not while he lives in active ministry. Does he leave the

"Sheep" who were under his care prepared to carry on their faith apart from him or his presence among them? If he creates his personal legacy, they will remember him, but forget his preaching, and their hope of godly faith will implode. If he taught them well, and if they learned well, he may be absent, but the timeless truths that he taught them will guide them in their faith walk far beyond his lifespan.

*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* Peter here refers to what seems by this narrative to be the single most memorable highlight of his time with Jesus, the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter didn't fabricate an exaggerated myth of Jesus' life, ministry, and power. He tells us that he personally stood with two other disciples in that mountain and personally witnessed Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah about "...his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31b) Moses died some fifteen hundred years earlier; Elijah around eight hundred. Yet these two men appeared personally with Jesus. Peter, James, and John are witnesses of the event.

The critic who attempts to belittle the testimony of Scripture, and the fact that the men who accompanied Jesus during His ministry were so convinced of the truth that He taught them that they were willing to die for that faith, will tell you that many sincere martyrs have died for a lie that they believed. However, this critic overlooks the fact that the sincere martyr lived long after his hero and came to believe what others told him about the hero. They could easily die because they believed a lie. But these men lived with Jesus during His life on earth. They were eyewitnesses of His life, death, and resurrection. They had no third party to rely on for the information on which they based their faith. They believed what they taught so strongly that they were willing to die for its testimony, and, by secular history, all except John in fact did die for their faith. Will a man die for what he knows to be a

fabrication? Never. The information that we read in the Gospels is from the pen of men who lived with Jesus and were eyewitnesses of the important spiritual events in His life. They didn't report a fanciful "...cunningly devised fable." They reported what they saw and heard themselves, facts confirmed by multiple eyewitnesses. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8; notice that Paul first appeals to the fact that Jesus' death for our sins was "...according to the scriptures") His life, especially including His literal, bodily resurrection, was also witnessed by a multitude of eyewitnesses.

*For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* These three men saw Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, but they heard a fourth voice. Whose voice did they hear? Who spoke to them and told them in no uncertain words that Jesus was His Son, and that He was well pleased with Jesus?

The power of eyewitness testimony appears throughout the New Testament, including long after Jesus' resurrection and ascension back to His glory.

*For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Paul appeals to the power of eyewitness accounts of Jesus' resurrection to refute the error of those in the Corinthian Church who disbelieved the literal, bodily resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, forcing their errant belief that they also would not experience a literal bodily resurrection at the Second Coming. Interestingly, despite the fact that he was not numbered with the believers at the time of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, Paul even included himself as a personal eyewitness, "And last of all he was seen of me also...." What the eleven saw during their time with Jesus, Paul saw on the Damascus Road. The Jesus whom Paul saw that day was not a defeated Jesus whose body remained in its borrowed tomb. Paul saw the literal resurrected and glorified body of the Lord Jesus Christ no less than the eleven had seen Him during His time with them.

*And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.* Peter knew the Speaker of those words from the fourth voice. He knew that the Father was speaking

to them from heaven; speaking words that he and his two companions needed to hear and remember.

What we preach today is not a clever fairy tale or myth. God charges every preacher of the gospel to preach historical facts and truths that have been witnessed and verified by "...many witnesses." Notice Paul's documentation of the many witnesses to Jesus' resurrection.

Today, approximately two thousand years since those events, the strongest and most authentic voices for Christianity, for Biblical faith, are men who believe that they are reporting eyewitness testimony, recorded firsthand by those eyewitnesses. Simon Greenleaf was trained as an attorney. His journey began as an unbeliever. He decided to research and disprove the "Jesus story" based on the rules of legal evidence and sworn testimony in a court hearing. By the end of his research, Greenleaf was a strong believer who wrote that the evidence for Jesus and the testimony of Scripture was valid legal evidence. *The Case for the Empty Tomb*, Ross Clifford, contains documentation from eight leading legal personalities who all came to believe that the evidence for Jesus and His literal resurrection is altogether valid legal evidence that they believe based on the rules of evidence, but more so based on the "Rules of faith." *Who Moved the Stone?* by Frank Morison was written by a trained reporter who understood how to research data and arrive at factual information. He also started his research project as an unbeliever. He intended to write of his research to disprove the claims of Christianity. The first chapter of his book is entitled, "The Book that Refused to be Written." Morison intended to research the last seven days of Jesus' life and, by compiling the data and weighing it against "Scientific grounds," to disprove the claims of Scripture regarding Jesus' deity. Over ten years after thinking and planning this project did Morison complete his research and, to his great surprise, came to believe it, thus making his original book impossible to write.

More important than Morison or eight attorneys' testimony, Peter tells us that what he writes is firsthand and factual. The united testimony of Scripture defies every presumption of unbelievers. Across fifteen centuries and several different cultures, some forty men wrote sixty-six "Books" that make up our Bible. Despite determined efforts, no real contradiction has been revealed. Apart from incredible supernatural power, such integrated, non-contradictory writings would be impossible from the most intelligent of humans. Every time we pick up our Bible, we pick up a supernatural and proven testimony to the faith of Jesus Christ.

Important as eyewitness testimony may be, Peter is preparing us in these verses for a more compelling testimony than even his personal eyewitness—and true—testimony could ever be. How can anything be weightier than an eyewitness account? Stand by; we shall soon learn.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.  
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