

Face up to the Future

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[0 : 0 0] from Edinburgh and I grew up in a Christian home. That's very true, Martin. Where are you from? Linlithgow. Linlithgow. Okay. We go for precision at St Silas. Someone else from Linlithgow. Oh, that's exciting. Shout out. I grew up in Linlithgow and then moved to Edinburgh when I was 13. You happy with that? That's fine. Great. Good. That's correct.

Yes, it is. Yes. And I grew up in a Christian home, but it wasn't until I was about 12 or 13 when I was going to a church in Edinburgh called Gorgie Parish Church and a family of missionaries or a family who were missionaries in Thailand had moved back and they really took me under their wing and shared the Bible with me, witnessed to me by their hospitality and their complete care. And that's really what kicked me into the kingdom, as it were.

Great. I was just thinking, I was talking to someone this morning who knew you from SU holidays. So you're still involved with them? Is that right? That is correct. So tell us a bit about Scripture Union and what you do. Do you just do loads of SU holidays or is it you just do one or two now? So I can just do one or two now because I'm getting on. And when you get to this side of 25, it becomes very difficult to recover after you've done a camp. So I did an Easter camp a couple of weeks ago, a study camp for S4 to 6s where people studied, which was entertaining, I'm sure, for them. And in the summer, though, I team lead an event along with my friend Eleanor Dixon for P6s to S4s at Lendrick Muir, one week from the 4th to the 11th of August. And yeah, it's great fun. We're really excited.

We've outgrown where we usually are, which is up in the creek, up by Inverness or Abbeymore. And we're now going to lend it in your number full. Because of size. Because of size. Yeah. There must be, there's probably guys here who never led on an SU holiday. Why would leading on an SU holiday be a good thing to do? You've just said it's exhausting if you're over 25.

Yes. But give us a positive on why someone should consider spending their summer week with young people. Yep. I think it's incredibly encouraging to spend a week of your summer discipling, mentoring, and helping children and young people to get plugged into God's word and to see how truly satisfying living for and being a child of God is. It's the most exhausting week of my year, but it's also the best week of my year. And as you do it year in, year out, it's such a joy to see young people coming back year after year and just growing in their love for Jesus and gaining confidence to serve them in their families and in their schools. It's great.

[2 : 4 7] Great. Okay. Thanks for coming today. Tell us, so when you're not on an SU holiday, what are you doing with yourself now and where you're at church as well? So I go to Chalmers Church in Edinburgh, which is great. I like it.

Sure. There's a few people here who know you from there. That's right, isn't it? That is correct, Martin. Who've found their way across to the better half of the central belt, but actually have very fond memories of Chalmers.

I'm glad. Yeah, yeah. We've relocated recently near Waitrose, which is glorious. I really enjoy it. It's very nice. Okay, good. Yeah. But I'm not at Chalmers or on an SU holiday. I'm studying a Master's in Practical Theology at St. Andrews, but I do it distance, so I get to stay in Edinburgh. St. Andrews is nice, but it's not got a Waitrose.

Okay. Great, James. Thank you for being here. I'm going to pray. I'm going to pray for you. Okay. Heavenly Father, we thank you that James is a Christian. We thank you so much for that family who took him under their wing and brought him face-to-face with the Lord Jesus in the Scriptures faithfully. We thank you for the ways you're using him through SU, but in other ways in service. Thank you for your goodness to him over the last few years. Father, we pray for him this evening, that him coming to minister to us will be an encouragement to him as well as to us, and indeed your spirit will be at work as he preaches, bringing out in us what is pleasing to you. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Thanks, James. So in a moment we'll hear from James, but first, Tamara is going to bring our reading from 2 Peter chapter 1. So you can follow that in the pew Bibles, 2 Peter 1, and then James will come and preach.

[4 : 36] Our reading is from 2 Peter 1, verse 12 to 21, and it's in the Bibles in page 1222. So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me, and I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. 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. He received honour 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. 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. Above all, 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Hi. We prayed a lot, but let's pray again. That's always good. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for your word, and we ask once more for your Holy Spirit's help as we come to your scriptures now.

Would you give us hearts and minds that are ready and willing to be shaped by what you're saying? And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. It's super fun to be here. It's nice to be in Glasgow. It's very different from Edinburgh.

As we prepare to get stuck back into 2 Peter this evening, I thought it might be useful to remember a little bit about the context from which Peter, our author, is writing. 2 Peter is a letter that is chocked full of instructions, clear instructions to a church that is scattered and under pressure, pressure from outside and pressure from within. And what I have found most striking is that time and again, there are, I think, two questions which just jump out of the text, and they are, firstly, how will you live? That's the first question I think Peter is asking his readers.

[7 : 23] How will you live? And the second one is this. Who will you trust? How will you live? And who will you trust? And our author has stressed these questions, I think, because he cares for his readers. His instructions, they're not being issued from the safety of an ivory tower. We must remember that Peter isn't writing from the serene cloister. He's writing from the very front line himself. Everything in this letter is shaped by the fact that Peter has, for the sake of the gospel, been taunted. He's been arrested. He's been shouted down. He's been imprisoned. And he knows what it's like to have friends stoned for the gospel.

And he's come up against those who have been preaching an entirely different gospel. He's also someone who, as we all have, he's got things wrong from time to time, but he's been humble enough to be corrected. Peter is someone who's been powerfully transformed by the Lord he serves, whose gospel he preaches, whom he left everything for, and who has corrected and challenged him. So who better than Peter to remind this young, fledgling church in modern-day Turkey, Asia Minor then, to remember what matters most, which is growing in Christ, and to root them in the truth that the gospel is revelation, not myth, not myth. So trust it. Growing Christ, trust the gospel. That's very much the pattern, I think, of verses 12 through to 21, which we have in front of us tonight. Growing Christ, trust the gospel. And in the context of the whole letter, do these things in light of eternity. This, says Peter, is how to live while we wait for Christ's return. So our two headings this evening are, remember what matters most, growing in Christ.

And secondly, the gospel is revelation, not myth. So trust it. And they're in the inside, I think, of your service handout if you want to follow them. I recently saw the film *Hunt for the Wilder People*, which is pretty odd. I was introduced, I lead life explored at Chalmers, which is great fun, and our minister came along the first evening just to introduce, you know, see the folk there, introduce people, and he introduced me as, this is James, and he has an odd sense of humour. I don't really know how to take that, that's quite funny, isn't it? So perhaps I like *Hunt for the Wilder People* because I too have an odd sense of humour. It's pretty quirky, and for that reason, most enjoyable.

Two main characters are living in the New Zealand outback, rather them than me, and in the course of their time together, the older man gives some advice on how to survive to the younger guy he's with, and it's advice on the level of, if you remember absolutely nothing else, then you must remember this. If you get lost, keep your clothes on, find water, follow it upstream to the source, then take a look from the hilltop to see where you are, which sounds to me entirely sensible.

If you remember nothing else, remember that. Now, whilst Peter isn't simply reminding his readers what to do if they get lost, not just to keep their clothes on, we are certainly in the realm, I think, of advice that is on the same level of, if you remember nothing else, remember this.

[11:19] Look again with me at verses 14 and 15. Peter seems to be more than aware that his time is short.

The language in verse 13, as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know, verse 14, that I will soon put it aside as our Lord Jesus has made clear to me. Verse 15, he talks about his departure. Peter seems more than aware, doesn't he, that his time is short, and so he is eager.

I wonder if you noticed that same language from last week, make every effort. He is eager to ensure that his readers will keep growing in Christ long after he has gone. What instructions then will he leave to a young church that is under pressure from outside and from within? Well, verse 12 points us back to the advice that he is looking to get home. The qualities that you looked at last week, they were virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

Peter is saying, because you have been saved by Christ, that's verses three to four, grow in these qualities. And as Martin noted last week, it's not these qualities that save us by no means, but if we are saved, then we want to live lives that reflect the future that we have been promised. So live like this. Now, I don't want to unpack for us again this evening the outworkings of each of these qualities.

Rather, our question tonight is, why does Peter choose to remind his readers of these particular qualities? Why are these qualities what he's pointing his readers back to in verse 12? Especially since, as he says in verse 12, well, you know them already. Why, in the midst of persecution and false teaching and worldly lifestyles, does Peter want his readers to remember to be loving or steadfast or virtuous?

[13 : 37] Do we find that surprising? I find it surprising. Nothing new, nothing novel or fresh. Peter hasn't offered these suffering readers a unique dream or vision. He's not invited this fledgling, church that's struggling with false teaching to a deeper level of experience or a new feeling.

He's not encouraging them to feel something that rejects what is real, and he's not even asking them to bear in mind a social cause, although there would doubtless have been lots of social causes to bear in mind. Instead, he's pointing them back to what they already know. Remember Jesus, live like him, it's entirely ordinary. I think there are two or three reasons why Peter wants his readers to remember this advice over and above everything else. Because, well, live this way, says Peter, because the temptation to live otherwise is real and enticing. It looks good. It does look good. It looks good to live without the gospel. Isn't it easier? Isn't it better to ditch self-control, to bin godliness, to live differently, to live like the world? No, says Peter, it's not. And later in the letter, Peter compares such living really to something pallid and vacuous, about as appealing or nourishing or satisfying as a cold and squashed McDonald's chip. Why these qualities? Peter, why these? Well, when the church is under pressure to conform, I reckon that these are the kinds of qualities which are likely to be the first to go.

When the temperature is turned up and the price of following Jesus is costly, it's surely more likely than not that steadfastness than not that steadfastness and brotherly affection and love. These things will surely be quickly jettisoned. There's no time for that. It's dangerous to be like that. It's costly to be like that.

But Peter says, no, don't do that. Continue to live this way. Peter wants his readers to remember that this is the lifestyle that Christ has called and elected you for.

Therefore, know it and live it. This is the ordinary but remarkably miraculous business of everyday Christian living.

[16 : 15] Now, I've been really struck by that. I wonder, are we comfortable, am I comfortable with knowing that it is the ordinary business of seeking to grow in Christ-likeness, as Peter is exhorting his readers to, which, when we are fully committed to the Lord, turns out to be so special, so vital and important?

In a culture, and in a Christian culture even, which craves the special and the unique and the new, the deeper level of experience or gifting or intimacy or feeling, the popular speaker, the largest band, the new event, the big event, well, in that culture, the business of godliness or brotherly affection or being virtuous, well, that can seem utterly pedestrian, dull, banal.

Yet, Peter says, here's what does matter most. Here's what is entirely special.

Growing in Christ, becoming more steadfast, learning to love your brother better, growing in knowledge of God. Now, that's what's special, says Peter. That's how to live in light of eternity.

Crave these things, desire these qualities. That's what's special. And I wonder for us, are these the qualities which come to mind when you and I think of God's call on our lives?

[17 : 53] For students, for young people, for adults even, there can be so much said, can't there, that's profoundly unhelpful when we talk about what God's calling is.

What has God called you to? What does he want for you? What's he calling you to do? And we sometimes find ourselves, I find myself, waiting for a particular, I don't know, a particular guidance, direction, a sign, whatever.

Should I do this job? Should I do that job? Should I become a podiatrist? Should I be a green grocer? Should I date that person? You know, what should I do? What's God calling me to? It's a quagmire. It's confusing.

It's a total fog. Well, I think by pointing us back to these qualities as Peter does, what he is doing is sweeping aside all uncertainty, isn't he?

He's saying, well, this is what God is calling you to. This is what his call in your life is. Here's what you need to remember. God's calling on your life and on my life is to know and love Jesus and to live like this, that is, to look like him.

[18 : 58] That's God's calling on my life. That's his calling on your life. to live like Jesus, to know him. And Peter says, well, just do it.

Do it. And the good news is, verse 3, we're not left to do this on our own. He gives us his divine power, his spirit, to help us. And that is good news.

I wonder too, are these the qualities we are praying for those we are discipling, the young people perhaps you are at camp with at Easter or the students who are on your CU committees or those who are graduating even after the summer.

What about your children, the children in the church or our wider church family? What about the folk who come to roots or to your equivalent of Christianity Explored or Life Explored, whatever?

Do we desire for such as those growth in these areas? Is that what we're praying for them? Is that what I'm praying for the young people I meet with? Do we desire growth and building up in these areas?

[20 : 01] We need God's help with that, don't we? Particularly in a culture that says, well, do what you want. Just do you. We need God's help to live like this, to live in the way that Peter says matters most.

And so we're back to that first question aren't we? How will you live? How will I live? Are you and I remembering what matters most? If you remember nothing else, says Peter, remember this.

Grow in Christ. But why listen? And this brings us to our second heading. Why listen to what Peter has to say about the way that we live?

By what authority is he saying these things? Well, helpfully and conveniently, that's exactly what Peter moves on to answer next in verses 16 through to 21.

Look with me again at verse 16. I think that for, at the beginning of the verse, is very important. Peter is saying, I'm not going on about these things at the cost of my life for the sake of something which is made up or fantasy or myth.

[21 : 13] I'm doing it because the gospel is real and I know it's real, verse 17, because I've seen Jesus and I'm confident that he's God's son because that is exactly what I saw and it's what I heard on the mountain when he was transfigured in glory before me.

In short, Peter is saying, I was an eyewitness to Jesus and to his glory, so listen to me, his apostle. I'm very much persuaded that the value of eyewitness testimony is not worth any less now than it was at the time when Peter was writing.

Our courts, for example, operate very much on the basis of evidence being put forward to either support or counter a claim or version of events.

It's eyewitness testimony. We rely on that. Or a more everyday example, our social media platforms are, I reckon, largely full not just of GIFs and entertaining memes but also eyewitness accounts.

Look where I was. Read about who I met. Can you believe what I've just seen? Pictures, text, video footage. It's all eyewitness testimony.

[22 : 31] And we don't generally, not at least without good cause, doubt what we see on social media as being anything other than reliable eyewitness testimony. If I say that Simon has been to Cyprus, I say, sure.

And I like it because I've no reason to doubt the veracity of what Simon says. He strikes me as a very truthful man. Likewise, with a witness giving evidence in a court, we don't doubt the version of events that is offered unless we have good cause to do so.

It's the same, isn't it, with recorded history. I really enjoy when I'm down in London visiting the Imperial War Museum or the British Museum. That's one of my, or two of my favourite things to do, which I know is very sad.

But I love it. And I don't wander around these exhibitions, though, in these wonderful buildings with a sceptical attitude, doubting the veracity of what I'm looking at or what I'm reading.

I see these primary sources and I think, that's eyewitness testimony. I'll trust it. We still do, in 2018, we still do eyewitness testimony.

[23 : 39] We like it. We rely on it. We trust it. And really, it's entirely sensible that we do so. So we don't reject Peter's account out of hand simply because it is eyewitness testimony.

The right question to ask about this eyewitness testimony is, however, do we have reason to believe that Peter's eyewitness testimony concerning Jesus isn't reliable?

Well, the answer to that question is, no, it is reliable because, for starters, he's one of a number of eyewitness accounts about the life of Christ, including amongst secular historical accounts.

And these accounts all stack up. They affirm each other. They complement each other. But I think what is far more persuasive is that Peter, no more than you or I, is hardly going to be willing to lay down his life for a lie.

Surely, one only does that for the truth. Peter's support of the scriptures is twofold. The eyewitness testimony, things that he has seen.

[24 : 51] But not only are these accounts reliable eyewitness testimony, says Peter, but he says that we have something more sure than what the false teachers have at their disposal.

That is, verse 19, the prophetic word of the Old Testament. And it's worth paying attention to because it's not just the words of man, says Peter.

It's inspired by the Holy Spirit. That's what he's saying in verses 20 through to 21. So listen to it. Listen to it. It's this word, says Peter, that will sustain you until the Lord returns.

It's a light in a dark place and this world can be a very dark place indeed. So listen to it until the Lord returns. Here's another question for us.

Why is Peter looking to establish that what he teaches is not myth but real? Why is he harping on about that here? Because, and you'll see this next week in chapter 2, there is false teaching about chapter 2 verses 1 to 3 and such teaching is dangerous, says Peter, because it is based on a desire to exploit others and it denies Christ.

[26 : 11] And there is no room for both the false teaching and Peter's teaching. One, says Peter, will lead to instability and to destruction.

The other, to the rich provision of entrance into the kingdom of God. That's what he says in chapter 1 verse 11. What Peter is teaching here in the space of but a few verses is of extraordinary significance for us.

This is the ground of Christian truth. What is the real and final authority so far as Christian truth is concerned?

Well, says Peter, it's the apostolic testimony, the eyewitness accounts and the prophetic word of the scriptures. how much better is that story, that dialogue in a culture that celebrates skepticism or fear of absolutes or distrust of certainty?

If you ask me, and let's pretend that you have, what we have to offer in our Bibles is far better than that.

[27 : 35] It's a better story, a better dialogue, here we have authentic witness, concrete truth, complete certainty, reliable stories. Does that not sound more persuasive and convincing than skepticism and a fear of absolutes and a distrust of certainty?

I think it's true to say that it's entirely refreshing and much more satisfying. And so we land at our second question.

who will we trust or what will we trust? Are we letting scripture shape our view of scripture?

And I wonder how would the way that you and I live and witness be changed if we believed with Peter that our hope is based on real eyewitness testimony and spirit-inspired truth, that we have a better story.

Indeed, I think we have as Christians in some ways been so battered by a skeptical, non-believing, non-Christian worldview that we have perhaps lost confidence in what the Bible says it is.

[28 : 47] We may begin to feel shame. We've ever felt that if you've been asked a question about the Bible, that kind of creeping up here, I always feel it here, of sort of, you know, shame or embarrassment or cringe, don't ask anything more.

Or we begin to feel convinced that the Bible isn't the truth, but it's just our truth. And that other person has their truth about what scripture says. Peter wants you and I to be confident in the scriptures.

And so does Jesus. Peter's not saying anything new here. Jesus says himself that the scriptures, well, that they're all about him. That's why he relies on them during his ministry.

So, have confidence in the Bible. Don't be afraid of criticism or challenge from colleagues or friends, the academy or family. The Bible is robust.

It stands up to critical engagement. It stands up to the awkward questions. It really does. And let that give you the confidence to open it and to invite the questions that the Bible naturally inspires to open it with friends and skeptics.

[29 : 59] Why? Well, because it is eyewitness accounts and it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. I've been struck by the, I've been struck quite a few times this evening, haven't I?

I wonder if we see the folly of thinking otherwise. What are the consequences of viewing scripture in a way that is out of kilter with how Peter views scripture?

Well, I think if we do that, if we don't hold on to what Peter says here, then we will very quickly be led astray. You know, the very first challenge to God's authoritative word comes in the garden, doesn't it?

That skeptical voice of doubt that twists and blunts what God says. Did he really say? Is that what he meant? Is it true?

And that sort of challenge has played God's people ever since. In many ways, I guess. And so how refreshing to be reminded by Peter here that we can indeed take God at his word.

[31 : 19] We can trust what he says. We can take God at his word. So, if what Peter is telling us is based on eyewitness accounts and God's spirit-inspired word, how will you live?

Why are you holding on to or settling for a life that is less than what God would have for you? And who will we trust as we live in light of eternity?

Those are the searching questions that Peter, this fisherman, apostle, this rock of the church, this friend of Jesus and our brother in Christ has for us this evening.

And we must take care, mustn't we, that we are not carried away, that we don't lose our stability. That's what Peter warns against at the end of his letter.

Make sure you don't lose your stability. There is little more, I found, that is distressing than seeing friends or family, campers, those we minister to on campus.

[32 : 32] Whoever wandering down that gentle, wide and easy path away from the Lord because they have become unstable, they've lost confidence in God's word or simply don't see the point anymore in living in the way that Peter sets out and he points us back to in verse 12.

That's truly one of the most distressing or saddening things I've seen. And so we must heed and listen to what Peter says, mustn't we?

Be careful, be careful, church, not to lose your stability but instead grow. Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour and trust, trust his words more and more each day.

We're going to pray and then we're going to sing. Martin's nodded so it must be true. Let's pray together.

Father, we want to thank you afresh for the wonderful way that you have provided us with the scriptures.

[33 : 58] We thank you for these true eyewitness accounts. We thank you that they are inspired by your spirit. We thank you that you have redeemed us through Christ and that you want us to live his way.

we pray this evening very much for your help to do that, your help to live in a way that shows and demonstrates those qualities that Peter has pointed us back to.

We pray that we be people who pray those qualities into the lives of others who we know and love. And we ask again this evening that you would continue to grow our confidence in your word, that we would be unashamed and delighted in what you're saying through your scriptures.

And we ask this all in Jesus' name. Amen.