

Prayer

We are truly thankful, Lord Jesus, that we can have confidence in You, for without this, our worries and troubles could overwhelm us. We praise You because we can hand over all our concerns to You, for You protect us and have our best interests at heart. Lord Jesus; sustain this faith within us when we are distressed or troubled, and keep the bright fires of love and hope alive in our hearts. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly theme: Those who struggle with faith

There may have been times in your own life when you have struggled with something to do with your faith. You may have been shaken by an unexpected incident, or your prayers have not been answered, for example. Reflect on how the Lord has brought you through such times and pray for those who you know who may be experiencing such difficulties right now.

Meditation

When everything happens all around me too fast,
Lord Jesus, slow me down.

When everything all around is in chaotic disorder,
Lord Jesus, bring me calm repose.

When everything I come across is incomprehensible,
Lord Jesus, grant me understanding:

When everything I try to do seems to be dominated by others,
Lord Jesus, give me humility and perspective:

When everything appears to be out of control
Lord Jesus, help us place our hope in You

For You are the Master of all things, the great organiser,
And the ultimate timekeeper of all that happens.
We therefore put our trust in You.

Bible Study - 2 Peter 1:19-21

¹⁹ So the prophetic word has been confirmed to which we should give our fullest attention, as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ It is imperative that you all understand this. No prophecy of scripture is a matter of personal interpretation, ²¹ because prophecy does not have its origins in human will, but people spoke as from God and moved by the Holy Spirit.

Bible Study

This is a most powerful passage of Scripture, and it was written by Peter to follow on from His confident statement about the glory of God in Jesus Christ (1:16-18) and his authoritative description of the Gospel and the life of discipleship to which Christians are called (1:3-11 etc.). Peter was an eye-witness to the events of Jesus' life (1:18; please see my comments in the previous study about Peter and the authorship of this letter), and he recognised that what he had seen and heard was not simply a wonderful personal experience. It was the fulfilment of all that God had said in the past through the prophets about the Messiah who would come and bring salvation for all people as well as show the whole world the glory of God through His own life, death and resurrection. If the story of Jesus was merely the sum total of what the disciples could remember and have written down about Him, then it was perhaps a truly wonderful tale with impressive consequences. It was however, far more than this. What they bore witness to was the truth of God's plan for all the world and for all eternity, and this was confirmed by the prophets; as he said at the beginning of this passage 'the prophetic word has been confirmed.'

Peter was, of course, talking about the prophets of the Old Testament. Their exclusive work was to tell God's people His Word, but the Word they delivered was always far bigger than even they could understand themselves, and they knew it. From Elijah through to Malachi, they spoke God's truth to the people of Israel about what was happening to them, and this meant that their words had a meaning for the times in which they were set; but they also pointed forward, because God's plan and purpose was to show the world His love and His salvation through His people Israel. As Israel progressively failed in this task, the prophets insisted that their message was not compromised by this failure; it was eternally true. From Isaiah onwards, they all spoke with extraordinary courage about things that were far beyond their own experience and pointed towards the coming plans of God to bring His Messiah into the world to fulfil Israel's work, for the good of all and for ever. I have not given quotes to justify this analysis of the Old Testament prophets, because by reading them over many years I am convinced that this is the truth. Peter also believed this, and called on all the Lord's new people, the Church, to pay attention to the extraordinary vision and courage of the prophets; 'a lamp shining in a dark place.' (1:19). Their Old Testament testimony to God's will and work, added to the testimony the disciples bore of Jesus, completed the package of God's consistent, ultimate, complete and true Salvation for all.

No wonder Peter said 'it is imperative that you all understand this ...' (1:20) and went on to insist that prophecy was a matter of God's revelation and not human reflection or thought (1:21). Of course people were involved in the process of prophecy; for example Jeremiah spoke and performed brave prophetic tasks (Jer 13:1f. Jer 19) and his words and deeds were recorded by his secretary Baruch (Jer 36:4f.), but the record we have of the book of Jeremiah makes no sense whatsoever (not even chronologically!) unless it is analysed as record of prophetic words and deeds which pointed towards God's purposes of Salvation (see Jer 31:31-34). This is true, in different ways, for all the prophets. What they said and did makes no sense in human terms, because what they did was God's work, and they spoke God's words by the Holy Spirit (1:21)

Peter calls the New Testament Church of God, which now includes us, to pay far more attention to these prophets than we do. His call is Scripture's call, and God's call, and we need to hear it.

Space for notes

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Would you say that you have previously regarded the words of the prophets to be essential to our understanding of the life and work of Jesus Christ?
2. Discuss any prophetic themes that come to mind which help us interpret the life of Christ.
3. Read through the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel, and look carefully at how Matthew uses the words of the prophets to explain Jesus' birth. What prophetic passages of Scripture help us understand Jesus' death?

Discipleship

Each of us must respond to Peter's challenge according to our prior knowledge of the prophets of the Old Testament. We can be helped by reading a little about each prophet in a Bible Dictionary (Such as the 'New Bible Dictionary; I.V.P. '); you can even do a 'Google' search on prophet's names, and with a little discretion, find out some interesting background facts. In the end, however, there is no substitute for reading their words for yourself. Some of the prophetic books are very long, but if you have researched the background a little, what seems at first to be baffling will soon fall into place.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, help us understand your life and work with such clarity, we may have no fear of speaking to others about You or explaining the Gospel of Salvation. May we always treat Your Word with respect, and use it with dignity and care, all our lives. AMEN