

2 Peter 2 Sermon 16/06/19

Preamble:

This is the second sermon from our series from 2 Peter

- Last time we looked at the first chapter
- We talked about how our faith is a precious gift and should be looked after
- How we should take care to build on our faith with goodness, knowledge and love

We talked about Peter's blessing to us

- *"Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."* (2Peter 1:2)
- Knowing Jesus as Lord and knowing his word leads to grace and peace.
- And chapter 1 finishes with Peter's endorsement of the truth of scripture

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

But now Peter has a warning

- Prophecy and scripture are true
- But be careful, we can be led astray
- We carry on reading from 2 Peter 2 verse 1

Reading: 2 Peter 2: 1-22 *False Teachers and Their Destruction*

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶ if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— ⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. ¹⁰ This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings;¹¹ yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. ¹² But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish.

¹³ They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you. ¹⁴ With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! ¹⁵ They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. ¹⁶ But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

¹⁷ These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸ For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.” ²⁰ If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²² Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.”

Introduction

Not an easy reading

- This is where I wonder why I chose to study 2 Peter in the first place
- But sometimes it is good to look at the hard passages
- They are included in scripture for a reason
- This is a warning Peter felt his readers needed to hear.

Peter is saying,

- I told you how important the truth is.
- I’ve explained how you should base your life on it.
- But be careful, there are those who would deceive you
- And trick you into believing lies about God and Jesus.

In his first letter Peter talks about persecution from outside the church

- Where our faith is devalued mocked and undermined by a society that rejects God.
- His advice for these attacks is:
“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”
 (1 Peter 2:12)

However, here he is talking about those inside the church.

- As he says in verse 1, *"Just as there will be false teachers among you."*
- This is scary.
- But he reminds us that in the past, the Israelites were deceived by false prophets
- And warns it will be the same in the church
- People in the church, who look like Christians, and sound like Christians
- But are actually false and misleading others

This leaves us with questions

- How do we know who to trust?
- How do we recognise these false prophets?
- Peter does give us some clues to this
- But first he warns of the judgment that will befall such people

This morning I want to look at 3 things from this passage

1. The destiny of False teachers
2. The characteristics of false teachers
3. The empty promise of false teachers

1. The destiny of False teachers

These false teachers will face judgement and punishment for what they have done

- Peter is saying, no matter how they may seem to get away with it on earth
- No matter how they may seem to prosper eventually, justice will be done

This is important,

- We need to know justice will be done
- Otherwise we could become discouraged and wonder why we bother to do good
- But we know, one day our faithfulness will be rewarded
- And corruption and dishonesty dealt with

Peter gives us three examples of Judgement

1. The fall of Satan and his angels. (vs.4)

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment

The Bible tells us of the reality of Hell

- But it also tells us it is not intended for us
- Hell is for the devil and his demons
- It is a place of punishment and judgement.

The word translated hell here is refers to 'Tartarus'

- This is a classical Greek place of punishment and judgement
- It not used anywhere else in the bible.
- The more common term for hell is Gehenna.
- A valley outside Jerusalem used as a rubbish dump

It is pictured as a place of unquenchable fire

- Jesus warns his disciples
"If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where "the worms that eat them do not die and the fire is not quenched."
- (Mark 9:47-48)
- He concludes with the warning. *"Everyone will be salted with fire"* (vs.49)

Both these references would suggest hell as a place of waiting for final judgement

- Where our lives will be tested
- This idea is expressed also by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians
- A passage that seems very appropriate to false teaching
By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Cor. 3:10-15)

However, this is not the complete picture of hell found in the Bible

- In several places it is referred to as eternal
- Matthew records Jesus saying
"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire" (Matt 18:8)

Although it could be argued that it is the fire that is eternal not the punishment

- So, is hell an eternal punishment?
- I think revelation has an answer
- It talks of a final judgement. (Rev. 20:11-15)
Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

This seems to suggest hell is both a place of waiting for judgement

- A place without God and therefore empty of all that is good
- It is the place where the devil and his angels have been sent
- And also, those who did not accept Jesus in life.

But there is also a final judgement to come

- A final banishment of the devil and his demons
- And for those whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life.
- This means those who continue to reject Jesus and refuse to receive the gift of salvation.

2. The Flood

The second example of punishment is the flood (vs.5)

If he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;

Peter is arguing that the Flood demonstrates God is righteous

- And as such cannot tolerate evil
- Therefore, just as in the flood, God will destroy all evil.

But there is another point he is making here

- God is also loving and good
- And is capable of saving those who trust in him.
- This thought is echoed in the next example

3. Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 6)

"if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly"

This is a difficult example for us because Sodom has all sorts of connotations that would have been alien to Peter

- He is not talking about sexuality here

The Jewish understanding of Sodom and Gomorrah was different to ours

- The Torah taught they were primarily condemned for their corruption of justice
- Exploitation of the poor and vulnerable
- And abuse of immigrants

It is an example of a society that has rejected God on many levels

- And the consequence was the devaluation of human life.
- And the pursuit of personal 'fulfilment' became the aim of life.

Once again, the point Peter is making is the inevitability of judgement

- And the ability of God to save the righteous even from the midst of such depravity.

This brings me to my second point.

2. The Characteristics of False Teachers

Peter doesn't really explain what false teaching he is objecting to.

- It is difficult to know exactly what these people were saying or doing
- In some ways this makes the letter harder for us to understand
- But false teaching takes on many guises
- So, on the other hand the letter is more applicable to many different situations

The only clues we have are in verse 1 and 13

- *They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them*
- *And "Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight"*
- So, it seems they are teaching either what we might call Legalism or liberalism

Legalism is where people claim there are other criteria to salvation apart from faith in Jesus

- They are either saying, you cannot be saved unless you do this,
- Or you can't be saved if you do that
- The truth is that we are saved by faith in Jesus.
- There is nothing we can add to this.
- No amount of hard work, good living, or rule following can make us more saved
- Neither is there anything we can do that is beyond salvation
- There is no sin so bad, Jesus' sacrifice is not good enough to save us.

Liberalism goes the other way

- It says Jesus died for us, our salvation is secure
- It doesn't matter what we do
- We can sin with impunity; we are saved anyway so it doesn't matter
- But we are saved from sin
- If we continue in sin, then that too is a denial of salvation

It sounds obvious when put like that

- But both errors are surprisingly difficult to spot and eradicate.
- Like a virus as soon as one error is challenged it changes slightly and resurfaces.

Peter lists many aspects of their character and behaviour

- Depraved Conduct (vs.2)
- They will bring Christianity into disrepute. (vs.2)
- They will exploit others. (vs.3)
- Make up stories (vs.3)
- Seek to fulfil their own corrupt desires (vs.10)
- They despise authority (vs.10)
- They are bold and arrogant, even challenging celestial beings
- They blaspheme in matters they do not understand.
- They are self seeking, (vs 11 and 14)
- Adulterous (vs.14)
- They target the weak and unstable (vs.14)

And finally, (vs.15-16)

They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. ¹⁶ But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

Balaam is a wonderful story in the Old Testament

- It is found in the book of numbers - Chapters 21-24
- The Israelites are moving across the desert and overcoming any who oppose them
- The people of Moab are scared stiff because God is with them
- So, their king, Balak decides to hire a prophet to curse them
- And sends for Balaam

Balaam asks God, *But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed."* (Num. 21:12)

- But when Balaam says no, Balak offers him more money
- And eventually greed gets the better of him and Balaam sets off on his donkey
- But on the way his donkey starts acting up and refuses to go any further
- Balaam gets cross and hits the beast

But instead of moving the donkey starts to speak to him

- "Don't hit me" he says "I've carried you obediently for years"
- "All I've done now is try to save your life!"
- Then Balaam sees the angel of the Lord is in the road ahead ready to punish him for disobedience

After a few stern words a chastened Balaam is allowed to continue on his way

- However, when he tries to curse the Israelites only blessings come out of his mouth
- He tries three times but every time he blesses them
- Balak, as you can imagine, is less than impressed
- And wants his money back and to punish Balaam

After this the story becomes unclear.

- But other passages in the bible also hints at what happens
- It seems in order to 'earn' his fee Balaam suggests an alternative strategy.
- "If you can't beat them with force, then befriend them instead"
- So, they orchestrate a plan of their women seducing the Israelite men and inviting them to participate in their feasts where false gods are worshipped

The consequence is that the Israelites turn away from God and lose his blessing and protection

- Moses and others then have to lead the people in repentance
- Before the curse is lifted and they can resume following God

So, the story of Balaam is about people being seduced by the pleasures of the world

- And thus, failing to stay faithful to God

3. The Empty promise of the False Teachers

¹⁷ These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸ For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.” ²⁰ If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²² Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.”

Peter says these false prophets promise much but deliver little

- Like a spring that has no water.
- A mist driven by a storm
- Promise freedom but are themselves slaves

Really vivid descriptions

- Ultimately all they offer will be worthless and leave us dissatisfied and cynical.
- How many young Christians have given up their faith because of false promises that never come true?
- How many churches damaged by self-seeking leaders who promise them much but serve only themselves?
- It is no wonder Peter is so condemning

Salvation is by faith

- Not by anything else
- Freedom in Jesus can only be found by repentance
- We cannot continue or revert to our old way of life
- Or our old values and judgements

Victory is only gained by the cross

- Victorious living is not about the avoidance of all hardship
- But remaining faithful despite it.
- Grace and Peace are found by knowing Jesus
- And holding to the truth of scripture
- And the rewards of that will not fail us.

Conclusion

As we said at the beginning this is a hard passage

- But it is sandwiched between the blessing of grace and peace in our walk with Jesus
- And the promise of heaven for all who put their trust in Jesus
- And that is the theme of the third chapter that we will look at next time