

2 PETER

REMEMBERING THE PROMISES

2 Peter 2:4-22 **False Promises** **Kevin Maloney**

We are continuing our study through 2 Peter.

And this section of the text that we're working through is very difficult, it's very sobering, it's very dark. Because it is pronouncing judgment on those that would harm those the church that God loves from the inside - those that Peter calls the false teachers. And you'll hear the tone of anger and judgment here, and we can wonder what this says about God.

I remember when our first daughter was born, holding her in the hospital room, feeling like this was the strongest experience of love and concern for someone I've ever had. There was affection for this baby girl I just met, as well as a huge feeling of needing to care for her and protect her. So it was a whole new type of love I was feeling.

What came later in a number of circumstances was a whole new feeling of anger: anger at those who would want to harm my children. Whether they wanted to harm them physically or through lies and false ideologies or emotionally, or harm their souls with lies about Christ - love compelled me to anger against those who would harm them.

And often when we talk about God we think we have to choose - is God the angry God of the Old Testament or the loving God of the New Testament? (You'll see in our New Testament passage today that God in the New Testament displays anger, too, and God in the Old Testament is often described as relentlessly loving and compassionate and merciful. So the Old Testament God vs. New Testament God distinction isn't really there when you actually read scripture. It's all the same God.)

But also, we don't have to choose because righteous anger flows from love. When those that you love are threatened or harmed, you rightly feel anger.

G. K. Chesterton wrote that *"The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him."* And in our text today God will

pronounce harsh judgments on false teachers, because He loves the people they're harming.

Now you might expect that the harshest language in the Bible is reserved for the bad people out there who don't go to church, don't believe in Jesus, and don't embrace our values. And to be sure, all sin is serious and everyone is said to have to give an account to God for how they live. But the strongest negative language, especially in the New Testament, isn't aimed at people "out there."

It is aimed at religious leaders who would use their position to lie, exploit, and harm. Jesus's harshest words were for religious leaders, not for the Romans.

The corruption of the best thing is the worst thing. It's bad when people who don't claim to know the Lord sin, but it is even worse when those who claim to know the Lord, or claim to be leaders in the Christian community, sin. It's bad when they use the best thing - Jesus - to do the worst thing - harm others.

So for those that Peter has already introduced as false teachers, those who deny the Lord with their lifestyles, those who lead people astray with their sensuality, and those who exploit the church, Peter lays out how God feels about what they're doing.

In this passage we'll see a few things:

- (1) Warnings to the false teachers
- (2) How bad false teachers can get among us.
- (3) How false teachers operate
- (4) The core of their deception - the central false promise they make
- (5) Mingled throughout this passage, hope for God's people even in their midst.

And we need all of this for a few reasons. One, it is God's word, so the fact that He inspired it means it's useful to us. But it is a warning of how bad we could get if we let sin grow in us, it's especially a warning for those of us who would preach, or teach, or lead, or counsel, or influence, even casually give advice and counsel to friends.

It also helps guide us - a teacher is anyone who leads us. So we should all ask who influences us so we can be alert and not fall under their sway. And we should be equipped so that when we hear that central lie that false teachers have told throughout time, we are ready for it.

And it will give us hope that, even though the church is always experiencing pressure from the inside and outside, God is faithful to his people.

<Pray>

So Peter starts with the

I. Warnings to false teachers.

2 Peter 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked 8 (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

So Peter lays out three examples of God's judgment as warnings to those false teachers who would lead the church astray:

The first one is the angels (verse 4) - God judges angels. And the point here is that if God did not spare them when they sinned, and they are more glorious than we are, people won't be spared. We'll all stand before God's judgment, and nobody will be able to charm their way out of that.

One of the ways false teachers lead people astray is through charm, and strength, and charisma. They can talk their way out of most things, and may be so used to using people and getting away with it that they think they'll somehow, in the end, even get away with

how they led their lives. But God isn't impressed or fooled by the charm and eloquence - he wasn't impressed by angels! If he didn't spare angels, he won't spare a false teacher.

The second one is the world that was judged in Noah's day (verse 5). And the point here is that God spared 8 people while the rest of the world was judged. So even if everybody seems to have become corrupt and strayed from the truth, being part of that majority won't spare them from God's judgment. So even if everybody votes for what's wrong or celebrates what's wrong and all of society outside and inside the church accepts what's wrong, that doesn't change it. God saved 8 people out of a heavily populated ancient world - majority doesn't determine truth, and doesn't protect us in the end.

And the third example of God's judgment on the wicked is Sodom and Gomorrah.

He goes into a little more detail here. Abraham's nephew, Lot, lived among the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and he was tormented by what he saw and heard (verses 7-8). At least at the time he was righteous, and he saw the people around him nearly all being corrupt. He saw that his city had completely given itself over to sensuality and it was a huge sorrow to him.

His community had fallen apart, they had accepted all kinds of sin. In Genesis 19, Lot takes some angels into his house, but the bold and perverted men of the city demand that he send them out so they could sleep with them, and even when those men were blinded by the angels, they still groped for the door to get in and satisfy their perverted lusts. They had become much as our society has become - arrogantly celebrating sexual perversion. And it was that accompanied by a boldness and pride and disregard for the poor:

Ezekiel 16:49-50 "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it."

And as Lot lived among them he was constantly tormented by seeing them live in ways that were such an affront to God's design, and in such arrogance and defiance, no regret or brokenness, no shame, and it was a constant source of anguish to him.

And the feeling was mutual. The men of the city didn't like Lot, because he seemed so judgmental of their ways, they said, **"This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge" (Genesis 19:9).**

But God rescued Lot from Sodom. And the point here is in verses 9 and 10 again:

2 Peter 2:9-10 "then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority."

God knows how to sort people out - in the end he will rescue the righteous and judge the wicked. People who live in defiling passions and despising authority will be judged in the end, and eventually God looks at his people that He has made righteous and says, "they've suffered enough," and in a single act rescues and judges. His act of anger and vengeance is an act of love and rescue for the righteous.

Augustine said that Christians always live with the "persecutions of the world on one side, and the consolations of God on the other side."¹ And so here was Lot, persecuted and frustrated and appalled, but eventually consoled and rescued. Peter wants us to know that rescue is coming.

So this passage gives that warning to false teachers. And next, it lays out how bad it can get. The next set of verses don't have any action items, no "to do's," just:

II. an assessment of how bad false teachers can get among us.

2 Peter 2:10 Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, 11 whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. 12 But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, 13 suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you.

There's a lot here, including referring to some stories in a text we don't have preserved for us in the Bible. But the big message here is that good angels are humble enough not

¹ Augustine of Hippo, City of God.

to rebuke fallen angels. Jude gets into more detail here and talks about how Michael the archangel and Satan had some dispute over the body of Moses, and Michael wouldn't rebuke Satan but instead said, "The Lord rebuke you."

But the point here is that false teachers can get to where they are so full of themselves that they have no restraint at all on who they will insult and speak against. Among us, people can get so bad that they will mock sacred truths, sacred scripture, and carry themselves in a haughty way.

And in our day, we are tearing things down - tearing down old institutions, old truths, old doctrines. We don't honor our mother and father, so we get rid of everything they've passed down to us. So we've torn down the definition of marriage, the covenant of marriage (as we've made it a new throw-away institution), the authority of scripture - as it is mocked by purported Christians on twitter. We don't respect anything ancient and tested, we tear down what our parents built, and we believe that if it isn't new it isn't true.

And as this mindset spreads within the church, as we become increasingly arrogant and bold and willful, it is destroying us just like verse 12 says it will.

And we become increasingly bold about it, boasting about our sin on social media.

At least in Sodom they did their evil at night, verse 13 says we can get so bold and willful that we revel in broad daylight.

And then in verse 13 says "they are blots and blemishes who revel in these deceptions *while they feast with you.*"

They are arrogantly tearing down what Christians hold sacred, then coming to church on Sundays. And showing up for the picnic. And not feeling the contradiction at all.

Now, for maybe a moment of relief before we keep going. You might be thinking, "this is me. I'm the blot and blemish." And, if the shoe fits - if you are arrogantly living in sensuality, contradicting the Christian faith with your life or doctrine, and feeling great about Christian fellowship while you are boldly living contrary to the Christian faith, yes, this is you. And I'd urge you to repent and run to Christ.

But if you are here feeling that you lived contrary to what you believe this week, and you are coming convicted and broken and confessing and struggling, then this isn't talking

about you. Lot, who was described as righteous, was a very sinful man. And the righteous ones of God, those who have been redeemed, do often continue to fall short of living out what we believe. Paul says, “who is worthy of these things?”

But there’s a difference between someone who says, “This is good and true and I failed again, but I am confessing and forsaking sin and struggling, and I’m here today because I know I still need Jesus and his cross,” and the person who says, “I am whoever I want to be, and if my life contradicts the Bible, my life is right - and nobody’s gonna tell me what to do.”

There is so much mercy and grace at the cross of Jesus for guilty sinners like us who run there again and again. For all who would repent.

But for those who won’t repent, verse 12, they’ll be destroyed in their destruction.

There’s a big difference between those who sin and confess, and those who are bold and willful, stone cold in their sin, no trembling, no tears.

We are a room full of strugglers, with the only righteous one in this room being Jesus who promised to be here when we gather.

And there are some in this room who remain bold and willful, reveling in deceptions, and they’ll stand and sing the songs with everyone else. Peter says that’s a reality, and in his last months on earth he was kind enough to write to warn us about it.

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2 Peter 2:14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!

He says they aren’t satisfied with sin. They prey on those whose feet aren’t firmly planted in the gospel yet. They know how to manipulate for their own gain.

2 Peter 2:15 Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, 16 but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

We don’t have time to look at the story of Balaam and his donkey - that could be some good Sunday afternoon reading for you. But essentially, Balaam was a prophet who said

a lot of true things, but his heart wasn't right with God and in the end he betrayed Israel. But there was a time when Balaam was willfully sinning against God, riding his donkey to essentially prophesy false things for money and prestige. He was willfully opposing God in this way, riding his donkey to go on a bad mission, so God allowed the donkey to speak to keep him from sinning. The donkey, which is known for its stubbornness, was more submitted to God than Balaam the "prophet."

And God, to shame Balaam, allows the donkey to teach him. And Peter says, to restrain his madness. Balaam got so crazy that a talking donkey was less crazy than him.

2 Peter 2:17 These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.

These are waterless springs. They look good from the outside, but have nothing within. And just like people are drawn to a well or a fountain, people are drawn to these false teachers, but only end up thirsty.

Now he gets into a little bit of:

III. How False Teachers Operate

18 For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.

They speak loud boasts of folly, or swelling words of vanity. They use big, complex words and speech so that people admire them for knowing so much. Big words can make you sound smart, and you can even feel obligated to use them.

There's a woman on twitter, a seminary student, who decided to punk some of her guy friends in seminary by making up the names of non-existent Dutch Reformed theologians and asking those guys if they've read any of their work.

So she asked one guy, "have you ever read the Dutch reformed theologian Janus de Veenhouwer?" And one guy responded, "Yeah, not as much as I should though."

She asked another guy, "What are your thoughts on Dutch Reformer Hans van Coevordengroot's refusal to fully condemn Arminius?" And a guy responded, "Disappointing, but not surprising, to be honest."

Big words can impress.

And false teachers will use them, and also entice with sensual passions of the flesh. People want to do what they want. So false teachers give them a way to do what they want and make it feel Christian.

And here's the core of their deception - the central lie - one we should be listening for:

2 Peter 2:19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption.

The central promise is freedom.

And this is the lie that is doing the most damage here at Grace Road among us.

It's the lie that the most important thing for me is to find out who I am, to create myself into who I want to be, and to do so I have to cast off the voices of everybody around me who might challenge that. I'd be the best me if nobody on the outside were telling me what to do.

In our culture, we believe that I can be who I want to be. And if I feel a certain way, that determines who I am. This comes from philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre, who essentially said mankind creates his own meaning and value because there is no inherent meaning or purpose in mankind. Therefore, we are self-determining, self-actualizing, and self-moralizing.

It's how you live when you don't believe you have a maker - you make yourself.

And in our therapeutic age, we tell ourselves that if I feel a certain way, this is who I am. And my number one task is to be free.

And of course, Jesus said **"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36)**. So isn't this what Jesus wants? For us to be free to be our truest self?

Isn't that where we'll find joy?

But we have to let Jesus define his own terms.

Someone asked Jesus what the greatest commandment is.

Matthew 22:37-39 “And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Here’s true freedom - love God according to his word with no hindrances, go all in loving and obeying Him. And pour yourself out in love for those around you.

No talk of finding your true self and casting off restraint. Just talk of giving yourself fully to God and neighbor.

And we’re right to feel like this kind of Christianity clashes with the entire way of thinking today. It clashes with new morality. It clashes with new definitions of marriage and gender. It clashes with the entire quest to create and express new identities for ourselves.

And the central lie of false teachers in our age and in our church is “you do you.” Don’t let anyone tell you who you are or what to do. Be free.

But Peter calls it for what it is:

2 Peter 2:19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

It might look like freedom, but following the desires of the self is only enslaving.

And he gives this final warning:

2 Peter 2:20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 What the true proverb says has happened to them: “The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.”²

² Proverbs 26:11 - "Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly."

He says “don’t go back. You left that life and those lies for a reason. At one time you knew they were empty. You learned who Jesus is, your life seemed to be changing and escaping those old defilements, and now to go back, you’re worse than you started.

Because if you’ve experienced, even from the outside, the goodness of Jesus, and chose to go back to those old ways instead, what hope is there for you if you’ve spit out the cure?

Let’s not be deceived by the lies that there’s anything better than Jesus, or any life better than the life of loving God and neighbor.

And the big application is the same for everyone: run to Jesus and his cross.

If you’re here and you don’t know the Lord, aren’t a Christian, the good news of Christianity is that you can be rescued. If you sense that you’ve sinned and need forgiveness, Jesus will forgive. He came and lived among us and went to the cross where he died as our substitute, and three days later he rose and conquered death.

So if you will believe in Him, and turn from whatever you were trusting to make you ok and turn to Him alone, He will receive you. Just believe in him by faith, call out to Him, he doesn’t lose any who come to him.

If you’ve been walking with the Lord and you’re tempted - you hear the lie that there’s more freedom elsewhere, you know the Christian life is hard, you’ve had some bad run-ins with Christians, and you’re wondering if casting it all off and living for yourself, regardless of who you harm in the process, might be best - don’t believe the lie, run to Jesus.

And if you are in this false teacher category - using big words to lead astray, enticing people to live as they want instead of Jesus wants, all the warnings in this passage are for you. One day soon you will see your judge, and you won’t be able to talk your way out then. Your heart be be laid bare before him, and the one your spurned and derided and mocked will be enthroned before you in power, and you will have to give an account, when none can really be given. But it doesn’t have to be that way. If you’ll put down

those arms and run to Jesus, He will receive and forgive you too. But you gotta stop living by lies.

And if you are boldly sinning, thinking now I'm really free, and still feeling totally fine coming to church, eating with believers, praying the prayers, repent and find mercy in Christ.

Let's pray.

Father, we confess that lies become enticing. They're enticing because often we want to pursue our sin, and we want to believe that somehow it's ok. So we call that freedom, or excuse it as grace. But we know what we're doing. Forgive us.

Jesus, we thank you that by going to the cross you showed your willingness to forgive us - for all of our blasphemy, our unbelief, our rejection of you. You made that way so that we could be forgiven. So we turn from the filthy rags of our own self-righteousness and turn to your righteousness as our only hope today.

Spirit - keep teaching us so we don't believe lies. Help us to believe your way is best. Help us to know true freedom, and to discern its forgeries. And help us to live in it, giving ourselves to our Lord and our neighbor.

Assurance of Pardon:

Hebrews 7:25 "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

As a profession of what we believe, let's stand and read the Apostles' Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;**

he descended to the dead.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church, [universal]

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.