

Spiritual Survival: False Teachers

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[0 : 0 0] Chapter 2 But there are also false prophets amongst the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.

There will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on them. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

In their greed, these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment, 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, 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, And if he rescued Lot, a righteous man who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men, for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.

If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials, to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

[1 : 3 8] This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings.

Yet even angels, although they are stronger, more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. But these men blaspheme in matters that they do not understand.

They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed. And like beasts, they too will perish.

Thank you, Maria, for reading.

Thank you, Nick, for leading so well this morning. As we come to God's word, I'd just like to pray, and again just ask for his help as we look to understand it.

[2 : 4 6] Our Father, we thank you for the words of Scripture, which are your clear light to us as we seek to follow you.

Lord, we thank you as well for the Holy Spirit who takes the word of God and makes it real to us, convicting us of sin and showing us righteousness.

So I ask, Father, that your spirit would be at work among us this morning. In Jesus' name, amen. This morning we're starting into chapter 2 of 2 Peter.

Chapter 2 of 2 Peter. And as we've already read, and as we'll see next week, Alex is going to be preaching from the second half of the chapter. It's a difficult chapter.

As you can see, it fits right into the middle of the book. Second Peter is just three chapters long. And chapter 2 is this difficult chapter right in the middle that deals with the whole topic of false teachers.

[3 : 53] We might not get a direct sense of it, but I feel that in a way chapter 1 has been building up to chapter 2. In a way, chapter 1 has laid groundwork for what we now see in chapter 2.

Because in chapter 1, Peter has been reminding us of what it means to follow Jesus. To follow Jesus. To be called by Jesus.

And to live a life of faith and obedience. That, I believe, is essentially what chapter 1 is about. So Peter shows them then how to follow Jesus, how to grow in faith and love and all the things we read from verses 5 to 11 that we are to express through faith, all the characteristics.

And then Peter goes on to show the trustworthiness, his trustworthiness, that we can trust him by telling his readers of his first-hand experience on the mountain of seeing Jesus glorified.

And then Peter points them at the end of chapter 1 to the more sure word of scripture, which is to be their ongoing, continuing light to guide them in their lives.

[5 : 03] And as I said, in a sense, chapter 1 has been preparing us for what we now read in chapter 2. So Peter, in a sense, I think he's laid a good path, hasn't he?

He's laid the good path for us to follow so that we may reach eternal life. Let's just read some verses from chapter 1 again, just to remind us. Verse 10 and 11.

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So Peter has told us about the good path, but now in chapter 2, he's telling us about another path. And this is the false path, the crooked path, the path of destruction.

And in a sense, if the good path, the path that we take to eternal life, is lit by the light of scripture, then this false path is lit by the light of false teaching.

[6 : 10] It's sad, isn't it, that not everyone who calls themselves a teacher is a teacher of truth. That is clear from the label in verse 1. They're called false teachers, those who teach lies.

Now, we may be shocked because that's very strong language, isn't it? False teachers. You may be shocked to think that there are Christian teachers, people within the church who teach lies.

But Peter says, Peter says in verse 1, don't be surprised. You shouldn't be surprised at this. For as long as there have been true prophets of God, there have also been false prophets of God, side by side with the true prophets of God in the Old Testament, or false prophets.

There are many, many examples. And as long as there has been the genuine article, there has been the counterfeit. But there were also false prophets, verse 1, among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.

Do not be surprised. This morning, I'm going to just try and focus in on a few things to help us understand characteristics of these false teachers.

[7 : 28] Four things from the first two verses. I just have one slide. They're up there so you know where I'm going. Keep me straight as well. And then we're going to look at the rest of the verses that we've read down to roughly to about verse 10, and just take them together and see what we are to learn.

Once we see the characteristics, just to understand these two paths. So I'm just going to go through four things. It's not going to be very long. You'll be glad to know it will balance out my overshot last week of going over 30 minutes.

So you can take the average of the two weeks and then probably under 30 minutes for both, hopefully. So the first thing we see from verse 1 is, they are among you. They are among you.

We can think of false teachers, can't we, as being outside of the church. We can think of many examples. We can think of paganism. We can think of atheism. We can think of secularism.

We can think of all those other religions and all the other outside religions as being false or not teaching the truth of Jesus Christ. But the emphasis here is on the false teachers that are among you.

[8 : 37] They are part of the Christian church. They call themselves Christians. They use that title. Jesus had warned, hadn't he previously?

Jesus had told us in Matthew 7, 15, he said these words, Watch out, be on the lookout for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Imagine a wolf going around with a sheepskin. And that's what it's like, deceptive. You see, we are the sheep of Jesus' flock, and he is the chief shepherd.

But among us, among the church, are false teachers, ferocious wolves in sheep's clothing. There is no language mincing there. There is no making that easier to hear.

And we need to be aware, yes, of false teaching from outside the church, but I believe more so, we need to see the threats from within the Christian community. So number one, they are among you.

[9 : 42] Number two, they have a different message, don't they? The second part of verse one, they will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves.

You see, the message, the message that they bring is a different message. And this is really the central part to what makes them false teachers, isn't it? The message is different.

They're bringing a different message, but it says they're doing it secretly, aren't they? They're secretly doing it. They're not open about what those differences are. They're not being clear what those differences are.

Now, they teach openly, of course. They're speaking openly. They're wanting to attract the crowd and the followers. They don't teach in secret because, well, they're greedy and they want many followers.

So they're going to teach openly, but they do not openly tell people that what they say is a destructive heresy. That's a big word, heresy.

[10 : 45] It's one we don't maybe mention very much now, and it's one I think we have to tread carefully because it's a very serious accusation within the church. So what is heresy?

Well, I think it's any teaching or belief that denies basic Christian teaching. It denies the foundation of the gospel.

In this church, and I hope this reassures or helps, and please come and chat afterwards if it's not clear or you have questions, but in this church we sometimes have different teachers or preachers come and speak from the front or minister within the church, and there are different things that we encourage people to attend in other churches or activities or books.

We'd recommend all of that. So we've had people here speaking on a Sunday morning who come from a different church denomination. We've had people here that believe different things about baptism and would even baptize infants.

We've had people here who, speaking here, who believe and would practice sign gifts, such as speaking in tongues. Now, I believe these are differences within the family of God, but all these people, I believe, are part of God's universal church.

[12 : 08] They hold to the true teachings of Jesus, of the gospel message. The one church, they're part of that, all those who are saved and rescued by Jesus. So these differences, I believe, that we have in the church community between gospel believers are not heresies.

Heresies deny the plain message of Jesus Christ. A heretic, a heresy, might deny that Jesus is God. You can't get more fundamental than that in Christian understanding.

They might deny that God is a trinity, that God is three persons in one. Heretics will deny that the judgment is coming. They deny the commands of our Lord to live a godly and upright life.

You know, heresy is that we deny that we are saved only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. A heretic will, that's one of the things a heretic might deny. These things, these things are heresies.

To deny the Lord as God, to deny God in three persons, to deny how we are saved by faith through grace in Christ alone.

[13 : 24] And we would never knowingly allow people who hold to heresy to speak or to teach within this church. Their message is different, isn't it?

What we've read and it's sprinkled throughout these verses. It is one of shameful ways in verse 2. Their message is one of greed.

You see that in verse 3? Verse 3 says that they speak with stories they have made up. Verse 10. Start of verse 10.

They follow corrupt desires and they despise authority. Now we don't have time to go into it in detail, but if you look back at chapter 1, there's a contrast there, isn't it? From the gospel way and the gospel message.

The gospel message in chapter 1 doesn't speak of shameful ways. It speaks of godly ways. Instead of greed, we're encouraged to develop brotherly kindness, to love and care for one another as brothers, not to be greedy.

[14 : 31] Peter in verse 16 in chapter 1 says that, you know, I'm coming to you with true stories instead of these made up stories. In chapter 1, we escape.

We escape from evil desires while these false teachers are full of corrupt desires. Verse 19 in chapter 1. We follow the authority of scripture instead of the false teachers in chapter 2, verse 10, who despise authority.

Do you see the kind of contrasts? Because I think chapter 2 is hard to just stand on its own. We have to look back at chapter 1, the groundwork, the path that's been laid for us under the light of scripture of how we should live.

And then we see the false teachers so clearly, don't we? Because it's a contrast. It's a contrast. They are complete opposites. Number 3. Number 3.

These false teachers have many followers. Verse 2. Just the first part of it. Many will follow their shameful ways. This saddens me to read these words.

[15 : 41] Instead of instead of these false teachers being on the fringe, instead of these false teachers being the minority, these false teachers seem to attract many followers.

Their message promises quick gain. Quick gains. Quick gains. Quick gains. Greed. And many are led astray. Whole churches and congregations, denominations, will follow after these men and women.

They plant, they plant in the hearts of people false teachings about Jesus. And the result is that many, verse 2, will follow their shameful ways.

Do you know that Christianity is still the world's largest religion by followers? The largest religion by followers. So if you look at the statistics, one in every three people in the world carry the label Christian.

One in every three. That's 2.1 billion people carry the label Christian. In Ireland, we have an even higher ratio. Nine out of every ten people in Ireland have the label Christian.

[16 : 57] They say that they follow Jesus Christ. Think about that for a minute. One out of every three people in the world and nine out of every ten in Ireland. Now ask the question, are one in every three people in the world following the path of chapter 1?

Are they living the words of chapter 1? Now I'm not talking about struggling in your Christian life or struggling with sin, but is that their heart's desire? Are nine out of ten people in Ireland following the words of chapter 1?

No, they are not. For many of that 2.1 billion people in the world are following the shameful ways of false teachers.

And that's sad. That is sad. Teaching that says things like, you know, you just need to live as you like. Try your best. Do good as far as you can.

In the end, Jesus will forgive you. No talk about faith or grace or what it cost the Father to send the Son to die for our sin.

[18 : 04] Just a false message. There's teaching that says that, well, Jesus just died to give you a victorious life now. You just need to claim His promise for health and wealth.

And they say your best life is now and don't understand what it is we are called to and a reward in heaven. A false message of hope now. You know, when you put it like that, you can see the appeal of false teaching.

It always has been, back in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, it always has been, always will be just very, very popular. Many will follow. It's always going to be more popular than saying, take up your cross and follow me.

It's always going to be more popular than saying, instead of storing up things on earth, Jesus says, but store up for yourself treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal.

That's always going to be a harder message. It's always going to be a harder message. Number four, false teachers, they bring the way of Jesus into disrepute.

[19 : 15] Do you see that at the end of verse two? Start of verse two. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. Into disrepute.

If you're not a follower of Jesus this morning, then I am sorry and saddened for this mess. as you look on at churches and as you look on at denominations and even as you see individual Christians as they're featured on the news sometimes, you're turned off.

For Christians appear to be nothing more than hypocritical liars feasting on the weak and the vulnerable. Given what we've read, given what we know and given what we see in the news and media, you would be right to believe that about Christians based on what you see.

For the false teachers and those that follow them bring the way of truth into disrepute. They bring it into disrepute. Because of false teachers, people, others, outsiders, those that know they aren't Christians, they laugh at and they mock God.

They laugh at him and they mock him. They ridicule us, they ridicule people that are looking to follow Jesus. What? You're a Christian? You really take that seriously? The news and the media are always going to highlight the false teachers, the charlatans, those that make a mockery of the gospel of Jesus.

[20 : 48] So the way of Jesus is going to be mocked, it's going to be maligned, it's going to be brought into disrepute. But if you're not a follower of Jesus, do not give up because of this.

Do not give up. Scottish pastor Colin Smith put it like this, commenting on these verses. He says, one of the strangest reasons for not following Christ goes like this, and maybe you've heard this from people.

You know, I've seen people in church that are hypocrites. I'm not going to follow that. So you will not follow Christ because some people who claim to do so are hypocrites.

The existence of the counterfeit is never a good reason for rejecting the genuine. genuine. Let me say that again. The existence of a counterfeit is never a good reason for rejecting the genuine.

And Peter essentially tells us, of course there are counterfeit Christians. Of course there are teachers who do the church more harm than good. What else would you expect in a fallen world?

[21 : 53] He says, grow up. Don't be naive. Don't miss what's real. Simply because you've seen the counterfeit. And there's a challenge there isn't there? For us if we're put off by the hypocrisy, if we're put off by what we see from other Christians, yes there is the counterfeit, but don't be put off from the genuine because of that.

There are four things I think that come out in the first couple of verses. Let's just recap them. False teachers are among us. They're not just from outside, but they are among us as Christians.

They come with a different message. They speak heresy. They're going to have many followers, and they bring, as a result, the way of Jesus into disrepute.

Verses 3 to 10, the latter part of verse 3 to 10, there's a lot in there, and are difficult verses. We're just going to go through a brief overview.

If you have any questions, because I realize there is a lot in there, please do come and ask. I'm very happy to explore it a bit more and to understand it a bit more. But as we read from verse 3, the second half of it, it says, their condemnation has been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

[23 : 15] And Peter takes that little bit at the end of verse 3 and begins to unpack it through the rest of chapter 2. So after characterizing what false teachers are like, Peter is moving to their destiny.

He's moving to what their destiny is. In chapter 1, remember those verses that we looked at in verse 10 and 11, and to me it's the pinnacle of chapter 1 in a sense. It's the pinnacle of the gospel message.

It's Peter saying, live in faith and keep growing in your faith and add these characteristics of godliness and self-control and brotherly kindness and all these wonderful things and you're going to get there.

You will get there. Jesus is going to call you and he's elected you and you're going to get there. Just stay on the path. That's our destiny. The destiny of those that are called on the path of the gospel is eternal life and a reward in heaven.

Now in chapter 2, Peter turns to what lies at the end of the path for the false teachers. It's a different path, remember, and it has a different destination. And he says in verse 3, it's condemnation and destruction.

[24 : 25] You know, we're saddened, I think, when we read through the characteristics of the false teachers and see the destruction that they wage on people's lives and on the gospel. And we're saddened to think that people are led astray and people are exploited by a message of greed.

And we ask, where is God? Why is God allowing this to happen? Couldn't he even protect his own message? But Peter tells us that God is just.

He is not sitting by while false teachers are running amok. In chapter 1, God shows us his love in electing and rescuing his people and bringing them to their eternal reward.

Now in chapter 2, I believe God is showing us his great justice in dealing with false teachers who ruin the faith of many.

Verse 4 to 8, very dense, there's a lot in there, but it gives us three examples from the past, from the Old Testament, showing how God is able to sift out and to judge the ungodly.

[25 : 43] And the first example is how he dealt with rebellious angels. And I think we always get a little bit excited when we're talking about the heavenly realms because it's something that's unseen, it's supernatural. Now we don't know everything there is to know about the heavenly realms and angels.

God has given us what he has given us and we know certain things. So it's hard to know when this rebellion took place exactly or what was all involved. But what we do know from these verses is that in the past, that the angels, the heavenly beings created by God, rebelled in sin against their creator.

And many of those angels are being held, it says, in hell awaiting their final judgment. God did God did not spare his own angels when it came to judgment.

When it came to judgment, God did not spare his own angels. The second example is how he dealt with the ancient world. I was just looking actually yesterday, there's, it'll be interesting to see how they do it, but in 2014, there's a Russell Crowe film that's coming out called Noah.

Noah. It'll be very exciting, especially for our youngest, because that's his name, but it'll be interesting to see how they deal with it, because in the early days of human history, God flooded the whole earth, and only eight people survived.

[27 : 10] God did not spare the ancient world. Judgment came swiftly, but it says God knew how to rescue Noah.

You see that? God knew how to rescue Noah. God gave instructions, didn't he, to Noah to build a boat, an ark, to ensure that when judgment came that they would be protected.

So even in the midst of a flood, even in the midst of worldwide destruction, God knew. God knew how to rescue Noah. The third example, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, they were cities that were literally thriving and full of sin and rebellion and all the chains were off, all the restrictions were off.

These were people that lived with no reference to God. Everyone doing what was right in their own eyes. People turned away from God and they involved themselves in whatever sin they desired.

God knew how to destroy those cities and at the same time he knew how to rescue Lot. Remember God sent his angels to instruct Lot and his family to flee and they had to work really hard to get Lot to flee.

[28 : 23] He didn't want to flee. He didn't understand what was happening. But there were very specific, very clear instructions. Keep going. Don't look back. Go to the hills. Bit of negotiation. No, we'll go to this town instead.

Okay, but don't look back. Keep going. God knew how to save them in the midst of destruction. And these verses, these are all the past judgments showing that God takes sin and rebellion seriously.

We think that God doesn't at times, don't we? We don't see his judgments being meted out like this all the time. But they show as well, don't they, that God knows how to keep his people safe in the midst of judgment.

God showed his people the path to safety, the path to eternal life. And then we come to verse nine.

And verses four to eight are giving examples from the past and they're almost the lesser example. Peter here is arguing from the less these things in the past to the more.

[29 : 27] Verse nine. And this is what he says. If this is so, these three examples, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment while continuing their punishment.

False teachers look like they're working in the world with impunity. It looks like they're doing as they wish without any fear. But the Lord tells us, doesn't he, in verse three, and he unpacks it in those other verses, that their condemnation is hanging over them.

It says it's going to be swift. What does that mean? Because it's not. They carry on destructive teachings and people are led astray and we think of swift as immediate, but it's not immediate, is it?

Why is that? Well, I believe it is delayed now so that they would turn even now and repent. Let's look, just turn over the page, chapter three and verse nine.

And this is Peter writing in response to the scoffers, the people that say, where is God's coming? Where is his judgment? Everything's going on as it always has. God isn't coming back. He doesn't care.

[30 : 50] Why the delay? And Peter says in verse nine, the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you.

Read these words. Not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. You see that?

Everyone? Everyone? Including those in chapter two that have done so much damage? Yes, everyone. The Lord in his will of desire, desires that all people would repent and come to him.

His swift judgment in terms of the immediacy of it is being held off. It's being held off. But when it comes, it will be swift. When judgment finally comes, it's going to be like the flood.

When judgment finally comes, it's going to be like that hailstone storm that fell from heaven and destroyed those cities. Judgment is swift when it comes, but God in his mercy, he's holding it back.

[31 : 53] He's holding it back until that day. And that's not slowness. That's not slowness. That's God's love. That's God's patience. God knows even with people who teach false things.

So these verses in chapter 2, even though they're hard and about the false teachers, I think they help us to know what the path, the gospel of Jesus Christ is like. That that path is the safe path to be on.

You see, it says God knows how to rescue us. Stay on this path. Stay on this path. God knows. God knows how to rescue you. Keep on that path.

But these verses also serve as a warning, don't they? They serve as a warning. And especially to those of us who teach God's word. And there are many within the life of the church that teach and encourage and pass on God's word.

More so, Johnny as our pastor and as our main teacher and others who are up here and preaching from the front. He serve as a warning.

[33 : 06] And the words of James puts it quite simply. He says, not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Now, I don't think that's intended to put people off from pursuing the ability to teach and the gifting and to explore that. It's not to put you off, but it's just a word of warning.

Keep on this path if you're going to teach. Keep on this path. You see, words of teaching, what we say can lead people towards righteousness and it can lead people towards eternal life or they can lead people towards rebellion and it can lead people towards destruction.

There are two paths. There are two paths to follow. we need to recognize the characteristics that's why we have chapter two, isn't it? We need to recognize the characteristics of false teachers so that we can make sure that we're on the right path.

What's interesting about the paths as they meander, one of them is maybe a little bit narrower, another one is broader, but they're going to intersect at a point in future history, aren't they?

[34 : 23] Those two paths are going to come to the judgment seat of Jesus. And as we reach that point and we're before Jesus and he is on his judgment seat to just judge, we'll await a verdict.

We'll await a verdict. We've come on our paths to this point. And for some, for some, there will be the simple words like those of Matthew 25 verse 23 and Jesus says, well done, well done, good and faithful servant.

Come, come and share in your master's happiness. Simple words, a word of welcome. Oh, what a joy it will be to receive a reward that day, the things that we've stored up in heaven, the treasures, and to see Jesus, our reward, to enjoy him, to see his face, to know that everything that's wrong has been undone and everything has been made right.

Oh, to see your reward, to hear those words, well done, from the creator of the universe, well done, well done, good and faithful servant.

But for others, for others there will be no welcome. Instead, the conversation at the judgment seat will be more like that of Matthew chapter 7.

[35 : 56] And Jesus speaking and warning and letting us know, he says, not everyone that says to me on that day, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Many, many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, didn't we, didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we say things in your name?

Didn't we speak things in your name? And in your name, didn't we drive out demons? Didn't we do that in your name? And in your name, did we not perform many miracles?

Then Jesus will say, then Jesus will tell them plainly, I never knew you. I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. Well done, away from me. Well done, away from me. There can be no greater contrast between the way and the path of the gospel and the way of the false teachers.

[37 : 03] So let us take up our cross and continue to follow Jesus to safety. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.