

Rescue from False Teaching

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] And if you'd open the Bibles at page 987, this is the second of three sermons from 2 Peter. And let's pray.

God our Father, speak to us from your word, we pray this morning. Write it in our hearts and in our minds that we may believe it, that we may grow in godliness for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, I think Sir Robert Heltman is to blame. The only nightmares I've ever had in my life were his fault. You see, he looked so innocent.

He looked so enticing when he was holding out the lollies and the candy for the kids. But then, of course, they got trapped in his child catcher's van.

You see, underneath his benign guise was the evil child catcher of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. And when I was seven or eight, having seen that film, each night I'd check the wardrobe under the bed and I would wake up with Robert Heltman trapping me in his child catcher's van.

[1 : 07] Exactly the same role, though with more, he had more fear, I think, than the White Witch of Narnia with her Turkish delight that seduced Edmund. Peter in 2 Peter is writing to Christians, urging them to grow in godliness.

Remember that God's gospel goal is godliness. That's what God is on about. And we saw last week, and as we've just been reminded from that song, that God has given us, Jesus has given us, everything we need for life and godliness through the gospel, through his power and promises.

The power for godliness we saw last week comes from the scriptures, from the prophetic word and the promises of God of the return of Jesus and the promise of heaven. And that's something that Peter argued in chapter 1 has been confirmed by Jesus' first coming, and therefore we can be doubly sure is a certain promise for the future.

Peter is writing to Christians, therefore, urging them to grow in godliness. But he's writing to Christians who are living in a lolly shop. Well, the world is like a lolly shop. It's full of temptations to distract us from the promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Enticements bombard every sense that we have day by day. What is offered looks so sweet, so tempting, so salivating, but so deceitful, so false and so evil, so entrapping and so enslaving, and ultimately so destructive.

[2 : 47] That's the context in which we live. It's the context in which Christians of any age live. We live in a world that is like a lolly shop, that tempts us and allures us, but ultimately fails to deliver.

The existence of false teachers and false prophets was something that Christians ought to have expected. Indeed, we ought to expect the same. In the Old Testament, as the reading from Jeremiah gave one illustration, there were prophets in the Old Testament that spoke untruths, that spoke falsehood and misled people.

And Jesus predicted the same would happen for the church. And of course, Peter is expressing that reality as he writes this letter. The beginning of chapter 2, false prophets is the context of what he's saying here.

They are deceptive, heretical, and ultimately destructive. False prophets also arose among the people, that is, in Old Testament times, in contrast to the true prophets through whom the Old Testament was written, just as there will be false teachers among you, Peter says in verse 1, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions.

Notice how insidious this is. He's not talking about people out in the secular world who are proclaiming things that are untrue. These are false prophets who will rise up from among you, from within the church, and they will secretly bring deception.

[4 : 15] That is, they're not going to walk up to a pulpit and say, right, today I'm going to teach you untruth. Today I'm going to deceive you. They're never going to say that. It'll be secret. It'll be

misleading and beguiling.

And it'll be from within the church, which makes it all the more subtle and all the more dangerous as well. The danger, the greatest danger, often lies or comes from within.

And yet, of course, many will follow. Peter goes on to say in verse 2, even so many will follow their licentious ways.

And he goes on, because of these teachers, the way of truth will be maligned, or literally even blasphemed. Why is it that many people follow untruth?

Why isn't it that more people will flock to what is true and right? Well, every error that is preached is a friend to some sin.

[5 : 19] And sin is attractive. Sin is pleasurable, even if its pleasure is fleeting. Sin is appealing and alluring. If it wasn't, we would never sin.

But it's attractive. It has a grip on us so often. And so every error, whatever the error that is preached is, opens the door on some sin or other.

Every error creates a gateway for being free to sin with impunity. That is, without punishment. And that's exactly the error that the false teachers were preaching here in 2 Peter.

We'll see that even more clearly next week. The denial of Jesus' return means the denial of God's judgment at the end of history. And therefore, when judgment is denied, behavior is open slather. Do what we like. We're not going to be judged. And therefore, the gate is open to sin with impunity, literally. You see, always wrong teaching parallels ungodly living.

[6 : 27] They go hand in hand. Heresy and immorality are bedfellows. The same, different sides of the same coin. So in verse 3, Peter goes on to say about the false teachers that in their greed, they will exploit you with deceptive words.

Their greed may be for power, fame, prestige, money, or other things, control. And therefore, because of their inherent greed, they preach what is wrong and they exploit those who listen to their wrong teaching.

And so they become false shepherds who fleece the sheep rather than true shepherds who feed the sheep. But there's a great irony in this passage today.

That irony is born out in verse 3 as well. Peter finishes verse 3 by saying, their condemnation, pronounced against them long ago, that is in the Old Testament and it's speaking about false teachers and prophets, has not been idle.

Their destruction is not asleep. The very people who preach there will be no condemnation, no judgment, no destruction, themselves are under condemnation and destruction.

[7 : 44] Notice how Peter writes it in that verse. It's very evocative. Their condemnation has not been idle. Their destruction has not been asleep. He personifies condemnation and destruction. Because in the end, of course, it's Jesus who personifies that when he returns to bring judgment and rescue on the final day.

Jesus has not been idle. He's not been asleep. Yes, it may be that false teachers for centuries and centuries have been preaching falsehoods and beguiling people, but that is no reason to think there is no condemnation, that God's inactive, that God's turned a blind eye, or God's condoning what they say.

Not at all. Indeed, there's an element in which verse 3 is almost a bit like pantomime. You know in pantomime when you've got the villain on the stage and the villain is about to get caught, but the villain doesn't see it and everybody's meant to be shouting out, look above you or look behind you or whatever it is.

Peter's saying in effect, these false teachers think they are absolutely safe, but behind them or above them hanging over them is the condemnation and destruction that is surely coming to which they are blind.

I don't think I can overstate the seriousness of this passage today. The denial of final judgment, which is in effect what this false teaching is about, is both fatal and prevalent as a heresy.

[9 : 11] It began in the Garden of Eden. The serpent saying to Adam and Eve, you won't surely die. The very first doctrine that is refuted in the scriptures is the judgment of God against sin.

And it keeps cropping up all through the Bible and all through history. In the Old Testament, the false prophets as in Jeremiah for one illustration only who preach peace when there is no peace are denying the judgment of God.

The contemporaries of Jesus who in effect denied the judgment of God and thought that they were righteous in God's sight in their own strength. The theme recurs in other New Testament letters not just in 2 Peter and all through church history.

And it pervades modern church life today in 2007 as well like persistent weeds in the garden that you just can't get rid of. Not that I ever try. In my garden that is.

You see, so much of the church in the modern world is promoting immoral lifestyles. That is, a denial of the judgment of God. So much of the modern church in different places is promoting that all faiths are equal.

[10:19] There are lots of roads to heaven. That is a denial of the judgment of God. There are those who reject parts of the Old Testament where God is at war against enemies or putting enemies to death.

There are people in the church who hate those passages. They're difficult passages, I admit. But if we reject them as many do, we are denying the judgment of God against sin. And the church today is so blasé and so tolerant about people of all these various views of the denial of judgment and yet Peter by contrast is so strident and so vehement in the language he uses in this chapter.

Some of the strongest language that we find in the New Testament. You see, it's not a light matter this denial of God's judgment. It is a lethal and deadly heresy. The reason why it's so insidious is because sin is so alluring.

So attracting. Godlessness is quite appealing as a way of life. And so Peter seeks to expose their deception and to keep urging them to look for the coming of Jesus in judgment and in salvation at the end of history.

That's what he was appealing to at the end of last week's passage in chapter 1 and in the verses now that follow verses 4 to 8 he gives a sequence of Old Testament illustrations to demonstrate the point of God's future judgment being certain.

[11:42] He cites examples to show two things. One is that God will judge the ungodly and secondly that God will save the godly from the midst of the ungodly.

In their doing he provides an added incentive of course to be godly. It's a long sentence from verse 4 to 10. It's one sentence in the ancient Greek.

It's not easy to quite grasp and it has a sequence of for if and then an example. The idea being for if has actually happened as is the case as is recorded in the Old Testament if this and if this and if this and if this and if this then verse 9 is actually the key of this paragraph.

But let's see what the ifs are. Verse 4 is an odd verse. It's hard quite initially to grasp what it's referring to. If God did not spare the angels when they sinned but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment.

Probably referring to an incident in Genesis 6 where the sons of God or term meaning angels had relations with human beings or wanted that in order to make humanity divine.

[12:55] Probably that's what's being referred to there but it may be other things as well. And the theme there is that God will judge fallen angels. If he's going to judge fallen angels he'll certainly judge fallen human beings is the implication.

The next one is the next section of Genesis. Verse 5 If God did not spare the ancient world even though he saved Noah a herald of righteousness with seven others when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly again the example is God judges the ungodly world and at the same time saves the righteous man Noah and his family from the midst of the destruction.

The next episode is from later in the book of Genesis. Verse 6 If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction and made them an example of what is coming to the ungodly.

Well there is an incident from Genesis 18-19 Sodom and Gomorrah were archetypal cities of evil in all sorts of degrading practices and God punished them destroyed them to smithereens really in the book of Genesis.

Notice there that again it's the emphasis of God destroying the ungodly and judging them and notice how they are an example at the end of verse 6 for the ungodly of what's going to come in the future yet for others who are ungodly.

[14:19] And the same incident but the flip side the salvation side is verse 7 and 8 if God rescued Lot the nephew of Abraham he was a righteous man greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the lawless for that righteous man living among them day after day was tormented in his righteous soul by their lawless deeds that he saw and heard you can read that in the book of Genesis it's the

reason why he was saved in that Abraham had interceded for the righteous of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot was spared so we find here again an example of God rescuing the ungodly from the godly from the midst of the ungodly and at the same time punishing the ungodly cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of the judgment yet to come.

Peter could have gone on for pages he could have gone all the way through the Old Testament with example after example of God's judgment on the ungodly and his rescue of the godly he limits himself to just three examples all from the first book from the book of Genesis the point is verse 9 if God had done all of that in the Old Testament as he did then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment especially those who indulge their flesh in depraved lust and who despise authority Peter is saying these are examples which we can trust and rely upon and give confidence to our expectation of the return of Jesus to bring judgment finally on the ungodly and to rescue the godly from trial in the midst of the life of the ungodly Peter is saying then don't be fooled by false teaching don't be fooled by those who deny judgment don't be duped by them don't be conned by the rejections of the Lord's return the judgment of the ungodly at the end of history when Jesus returns is a reality a promise we can hold on to firmly the rescue of the godly when Jesus returns is also a reality to which which is a promise we are to hold on to for the end of history but not only this these examples from the Old Testament point us in the direction of what about now how do we live now by holding on to the promise of God's rescue when Jesus returns and we hold on to that promise by living godly lives now remember that's how this whole thing began back in chapter 1 verse 3 and 4

Jesus' divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness thus he's given us through these things his precious and very great promises so that through them the promises you may escape from the corruption that's in the world because of lust and may become participants of the divine nature the examples Peter's just given here in chapter 2 show that out the promise is rescue of the godly from the midst of the ungodly God's done it in the past he'll do it again we can trust the promise so in holding fast to the promise we live godly lives as we await and look forward to the return of Jesus to judge the ungodly and to rescue the godly well having reaffirmed all of that and having reaffirmed judgment against the ungodly Peter now really demolishes the pretenses of the false teachers he makes it very clear there is no room for such deception and he exposes them for what they are at the same time urging his readers to keep on growing in godliness now verses 10 and 11 are slightly odd verses it's hard quite initially to grasp what it's referring to

Peter says the end of verse 10 bold and willful they are not afraid to slander the glorious ones whereas angels though greater in might and power do not bring against them a slanderous judgment from the lord now we don't need to worry too much about the detail because the actual thrust of the point is straightforward Peter is saying that the false teachers are actually showing breathtaking arrogance in defying the authority of god it's actually picked up at the end of the paragraph before in verse 10 especially those who despise authority Peter is saying not even angels do what these false teachers are doing in despising god's authority and god's law and denying god's judgment in effect they're trying to sit over god which is a highly contemptuous thing to do as a result they are contemptuous of god's word they're fools who are rushing in where angels fear to tread and how like so much of our modern liberal theology that actually is in addition he goes on in verse 12 to say that they are completely lacking in spiritual discernment and knowledge these people however are like irrational animals mere creatures of instinct that is just pursuing their sinful desires without any spiritual apprehension at all but as a result if they behave like animals their destiny will be like animals born to be caught and killed they slander what they do not understand and when those creatures are destroyed they also will be destroyed suffering the penalty for doing wrong and again how much like liberal theology today that is that is so much full of ignorance and as a result in ignorance is slandering

God himself the next description portrays their hedonism in verse 13 they counted a pleasure to revel in the daytime that is not even under the secrecy of night but wantonly and boastfully shamelessly reveling in licentiousness and promiscuity and so on in the daytime their blots and blemishes reveling in their dissipation while they feast with you it is completely this worldly it is eating and drinking today because who cares about tomorrow that is there's no long term perception of the return of Jesus to judge and to save today is what matter and again how much like our society that is even sometimes with what the church promotes in some places they can't get

enough of it they can't live for enough pleasure that's what our world is all about it's our society we're so wealthy as a society and yet our wealth and what it brings us is so dissatisfying and so though we're the richest people really in a sense to ever live in the western world in world history we've got more than anyone else has ever had there are higher levels of dissatisfaction always you see the wrong paths promise far more than they deliver and yet in our blindness and sinfulness we pursue them headlong back in the book of numbers in the old testament there's a very strange episode where a prophet from another country called

[21 : 44] Balaam is paid money wants to get money is paid money to speak curses against the people of God God prevents this from happening and in the end this prophet Balaam is so ridiculed that a donkey speaks greater truth than this Balaam prophet now the details of that passage you can read for yourselves in numbers 22 to 24 but Balaam was highly shamed as one who was greedy for money urging people into sexual licentiousness but was in the end humiliated and silenced by a donkey who spoke who recognised angels and the word of God which Balaam didn't Peter draws a parallel between these false teachers and Balaam in effect not just to shock but absolutely to ridicule and humiliate these false teachers he's saying they are no better than actually a donkey that's how stupid they are for the false errors that they propagate so he says in verse 15 they've left the straight road and have gone astray following the road of

Balaam son of Bosor who loved the wages of doing wrong but was rebuked for his own transgression a speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness Peter is saying these false teachers are just the same even a donkey is wiser than they is in effect what he's saying here in this parallel well our world's promises seem so attractive our world promises everything that you could ever want every TV advert every internet scam every false preachers flattery and so on promises promises promises see a luxury car ad on TV I think it was Mercedes a few years ago in effect promises that buy this car and you can drive from your house to your city office where there will be a parking spot right in front of your office you'll drive there without any other cars on the road and it'll be like riding a stallion and what's more when you get out of the car in front of your office an attractive woman will actually pay you attention it's a lie it doesn't happen

Cocoa Pops Cocoa Pops tells you all the vitamins that you can get in Cocoa Pops how healthy Cocoa Pops must be what it doesn't tell you are all the ladles of sugar that are in there it's deception it promises but it doesn't deliver and so Peter says of these false teachers they are waterless springs at the beginning of verse 17 they are mists driven by a storm for them the deepest darkness has been reserved a waterless spring is the worst form of deception it's Birkenwell's theology it promises life but it actually gives you death that's what these false teachers are like they look on the surface as if they're promising you life water but they're waterless springs they lead you to death verse 18 they speak bombastic nonsense it sounds good it sounds a bit authoritative sounds perhaps a bit plausible but actually bombastic nonsense is just full of hot air full of sugar that it never tells you about that leads you to death it's empty boastful and deceitful

Turkish delight that enslaves you with the white witch rather than gives you life and godliness but the trouble is people get deceived and enticed verse 18 they speak bombastic nonsense and with licentious desires of the flesh they entice people who've just escaped from those who live in error it plays or prays on those who are new Christians whose theology and faith is not particularly well rooted or grounded you see it's easy to be led into sin that's the point someone said to me once god told me to leave my wife never will god say a word like that ever but how easy it is to somehow pervert and distort things so that your errors are leading you to a path of sin god told me that it's right for homosexuals to live together for example because love is what it's about and if they love each other then that should be right again a perversion of the truth and it's so easy to lead into sin god wants me to be rich his bible is full of blessings of prosperity so i'm going to pursue wealth with all that i've got what a distortion of the gospel what an evil deception that is pandering to human greed you see if judgment is denied then there is freedom to be immoral but it's not a freedom at all it's a diabolical deception that is it comes from the devil and leads to death not life peter says in verse 19 they promise them freedom but they themselves are slaves of corruption you see it doesn't give you freedom from sin at all freedom from sin does not come from denying judgment it comes from the redemption that christ brings and his return which leads us to heaven freedom is by redemption and cleansing of sin something these people would have forgotten if you remember back to chapter 1 verse 9 freedom comes by god's rescue from judgment not denial of judgment

chapter 2 verse 9 and for those who somehow have come out of the world resisted the lollies in the shop have come to embrace the knowledge of the gospel but have been sucked and drawn back into the world by the false teaching then they would be better off if they never heard the gospel in the first place god holds us accountable for what we know and if they've heard and embraced the gospel and then rejected it and gone back to their sinful ways of life then they are held more accountable and it's worse for them than if they'd never heard the gospel to start with so peter says in verse 20 if after they've escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our lord entangled in them and overpowered the last state has become worse for them than the first it had been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them he finishes with two proverbs in effect to illustrate what it's like to have come out of the world embraced the gospel but then been sucked and drawn back by false teaching into it and into its ways of immorality and sin like a dog turning back to its own vomit it's like a sow that is washed only to wallow in the mud that is they've come out of the vomit and the mud but they've quickly gone back into it and Peter perhaps is remembering

Jesus' sermon on the mount when Jesus says in Matthew 7 do not do not give what is holy to dogs don't throw your pearls before swine or they'll trample them under foot and turn and maul you what a pathetic image of those who reject the gospel by being seduced by false teaching into a denial of judgment and into the promotion of sin and immorality last week we saw that Peter was adamant that he would keep on reminding his readers of the truths of the gospel and its goal of godliness he says I will not cease from doing this and after I've gone I want to have set it up so that you'll keep recalling what I've said we need to keep remembering to keep refreshing our memory to keep recalling and bringing back to mind the truths of the gospel's goal of godliness and the return of Jesus to judge and to bring the final declaration of salvation we need to keep remembering that because the temptations of the lolly shop world in which we live are so strong we can't just read it once and think now I'm safe

[30 : 06] I can live in a lolly shop we won't we can't survive we have to keep holding before us the promises of the gospel so we have to keep remembering them and recalling them to mind and as I've thought and worked on this sermon during the week I've recommitted myself in a sense to keep on reminding you time and time again of the gospel's goal of godliness so that we resist the temptations of the lolly shop world in which we live and we keep growing in godliness and love and the things that we read about last week in chapter one the promises of our world are great and vast but in the end they go bang bang a sort of chitty chitty bang bang candy that doesn't last and leads to enslavement by an evil child catcher the Turkish delight of our world that leads us under the grip of the white witch of Narnia freedom offered but it's slavery delivered pleasure and sin that is advertised and promoted but satisfaction is never reached it talks about them in a verse that I skipped over by accident in this in verse 14 they have eyes full of adultery insatiable for sin it's a highly ironic statement insatiable for sin because they want more and more sin but sin itself is insatiable it never delivers it never sates it never satisfies the promises of our world are like that but the life giving promises of

Jesus do deliver and as we read back in chapter 1 verse 3 and 4 Jesus divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness and thus he's given us through these things his precious and very great promises of life and godliness so that through them you may escape from the corruption that's in the world because of lust and may become participants of the divine nature the promises of eternal life not waterless springs therefore our responsibility as we saw last week is to make every effort to grow in godliness to make every effort to confirm our election and salvation to be attentive to god's word as a lamp shining in a dark place for the day will dawn and the morning star will then rise in our hearts when the lord Jesus returns in glory amen and women zijn dan

Thank you.