

Warning: Be on Guard

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[0 : 00] The first reading today is from Ezekiel 13, verse 1-9, and can be found on page 836.

The word of the Lord came to me, son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying, saying to those who prophesy out of their own imagination, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says. Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing. Your prophets, Israel, are like jackals among runes.

You have not gone up to the breaches in the wall to repair it for the people of Israel so that it will stand firm in the battle on the day of the Lord.

Their visions are false and their divinations are lying. Even though the Lord has not sent them, they say, the Lord declares and expect him to fulfill their words.

[1 : 23] Have you not seen false visions and uttered lying divinations when you say, the Lord declares, though I have not spoken?

Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says. Because of your false words and lying visions, I am against you, declares the Sovereign Lord.

My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will not belong to the counsel of my people or be listed in the records of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel.

Then you will know that I am Sovereign Lord. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I am reading today from the second letter of Peter, chapter 2, verses 1-22, which can be found in the Black Pew Bible on page 1226.

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 : 53] Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of the truth into disrepute. 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. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness, to be held in 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 depraved conduct of the lawless, for that righteous man, living among them day by 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 the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

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.

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.

[4 : 46] 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.

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, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning.

They seduce the unstable. They are experts in greed, and a curse brood. They have left the straight way, and wandered off to follow the way of Balm, son of Beres, who loved the wages of the wickedness.

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.

[5 : 53] These people are springs without water, mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them, for their mouth, 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.

They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity. For people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.

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.

It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

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.

[7 : 04] This is the word of the Lord. Well, we heard from our second reading as we continue in 2 Peter. It ended with, A sow that is washed returns to wallowing in the mud, and a dog returns to its vomit.

Well, welcome to Holy Trinity. Aren't you glad you came this morning? It's a pretty full-on passage, today's passage, isn't it? But that's because it's an urgent warning to Peter's readers, and us, therefore, to guard against false teachers.

We see lots of warnings in life, don't we? Like this one, caution, this machine has no brain, use your own. Or this one to burglars, this house is guarded with a shotgun three days a week, guess which days.

But this is Peter's warning to us today, chapter 2, to be on guard. And he uses such strong language that we might get the warning, that we might take it seriously.

In fact, remember the summary verses at the end of the letter? He says, Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard. Well, Peter begins to forewarn us this week in chapter 2, and we'll continue next week just at the beginning of chapter 3.

[8 : 26] And the way he warns us is firstly telling us to expect false teachers, at point 1, verse 1. He says, But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.

We heard about that first line in our first reading, didn't we? There were false prophets amongst the people of Israel. We heard about it from Ezekiel chapter 13. And just as there were back then, so there will be today.

In fact, they've already come amongst Peter's readers, as we've seen. Now, of course, they don't go around with name badges that say, false teacher, look out. Rather, they will secretly, verse 1, second sentence, they will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord Jesus who seemingly bought them by his blood.

Like denying that Jesus will return as we've seen last week and we'll see again next week. Or like the teaching that was doing the rounds when I first began ministry almost 20 years ago.

It was a teaching which said that Jesus didn't really take God's wrath for our sin because that would be divine child abuse is the language they used, which is very emotive language, isn't it?

[9 : 44] And we don't want to subscribe to that, but they've totally twisted the scriptures. For starters, Jesus willingly went to the cross, didn't he? Not my will, but yours be done. And secondly, God is Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

And so God was actually effectively taking the judgment on himself through his son. It was false teaching just to get rid of the atonement, basically.

Or more recently, the hot topics have been a denial of the Bible's teaching on men and women in terms of roles and gender and marriage. And now these are no longer secret, but they started off being introduced secretly.

And now verse two, many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. And so false teaching about marriage today seems loving. And there are many people

and many churches that have followed that teaching.

But the best known chapter on love read at weddings around the world, 1 Corinthians 13. You know, love is patient, love is kind, that famous passage. Verse six says, love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

[10:53] Yeah. Love actually rejoices with the truth. What truth? Well, the truth that Jesus gave us, that from the beginning of creation, God created male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.

Now, I know this hits home for some at our church who have loved ones who are in same-sex relationships. And I think these people in our church are amazing because they rightly and deeply love their relatives while at the same time disagreeing with their lifestyles.

Now, that's very hard to do when you love them, and yet they do that. And so we need to pray for those people in our church like that. We need to pray for those in our church who are same-sex attracted but refuse to act on it because they want to honour and follow Jesus.

I think they're an amazing example of real love because real love loves people and rejoices in the truth, even when it's hard.

But many others have abandoned it and brought the truth of the gospel into disrepute. And we're seeing it today. You may have heard last month that there was officially a split in the Anglican Communion, the worldwide Anglican Communion.

[12:11] A number of Anglican provinces around the world have officially split with the Archbishop of Canterbury and joined to become the global Anglican Communion. Because after almost 20 years, 20 years of trying to get the Archbishop of Canterbury to uphold biblical marriage, the new Archbishop of Canterbury is the very one who initiated same-sex blessing services in London.

And you can't be united when one follows Jesus and the other doesn't. It just doesn't work. But as a result, it's brought the gospel into disrepute.

I mean, it's this split and this kind of one believing one thing, one believing another thing. It does nothing to commend the gospel to our world, does it? I mean, how good would it be if we were all actually united in the truth?

If with one heart and one mouth we proclaim the truth of Jesus together, what a witness that would be to our world. But when some follow and some don't, it brings the truth into disrepute.

False teachers teach falsely. Why? Well, Peter says in verse 3, because they're greedy. In their greed, these false teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories.

[13:29] Whether they're greedy for popularity or in many cases today, greedy for acceptance by our society. But in Peter's day, it's particularly for money.

Last week, I listened to a sermon by Joel Osteen, which he gave at the beginning of November. You can look it up on YouTube. And the title was From Trouble to Double. And he said, if you suffer a setback in life, if you had trouble, then you've just been qualified to receive double from God in life.

And he used one verse from Zechariah, often uses the Old Testament out of context. Remember, return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope. Even now, I announce that you will be restored twice, double as much to you.

Now, in the context, it's talking about twice as much on the last day. But Joel Osteen said, that co-worker who hurt you just qualified you to receive double in this life. And so when you suffer, I don't know if you can read his text at the bottom there, it says, so when you suffer, try in your approach.

Lord, I thank you that double is coming. Thank you that I'll come out better than I was before, stronger, healthier, promoted at work, increased in wealth.

[14:44] It's about this life, but it's false teaching, isn't it? Yes, we can have in this life meaning and peace and joy, but not double prosperity.

I mean, look at Jesus, whom we follow. He suffered more trouble than anyone. And did God give him double? No, God gave him the cross. It was only after he was raised from the dead and exalted, you know, started his, you know, had a new resurrection body, only then was he exalted. And if we follow Jesus, it'll be the same for us. Yet, why does Joel Osteen preach like this now? Well, here's his home in Texas. Why do you think he preaches like this now?

There will be false teachers in our day, just as there were in Peter's day, just as there were in Ezekiel's day. They will introduce destructive heresies, verse one, and for bad reasons, like verse

three, greed for money or popularity or acceptance by our society.

And so the warning, firstly, is to expect them. But secondly, don't follow them because their judgment is certain. Point to the rest of verse three.

[15 : 58] It says, their condemnation has long been hanging over them and their destruction has not been sleeping. It's not sleeping, it's just waiting. Waiting for the day when Jesus returns.

And Peter is certain of this future judgment for them because of God's past track record. And then he gives these examples, verse four and following. So you see how verse four starts with the word for or because, so he's giving a reason why he knows this.

What's this reason? Well, in the past, God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment. And 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, Peter, some people think that Peter is being overly generous to Lot at this point, calling him a righteous man.

But there's a bit of a translation issue. Verse eight says, For that righteous man lived among them day after day, tormented his righteous soul. In other words, he's righteous because he believed in God, yes, but it's like he tormented his own soul by his choices.

You've done that in your own life or have seen others do that? You know, they've made bad choices and they've kind of tormented themselves, or this is what's going on here for Lot by choosing to live there. He was tormenting himself, but he's counted righteous because he still believed God's word.

[17 : 34] But Peter's point is in verse nine. If these three examples are so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

And this is especially true for those false teachers who follow corrupt desires of the flesh and despise authority. You see his conclusion?

God knows how to hold the ungodly accountable and especially those false teachers. God knows how to hold them for punishment on the day of judgment and on the flip side, he knows how to rescue the godly too.

And so, if this is true, which it is, then why on earth would we follow them? We will be rescued, they will be judged. And so, Peter says, don't follow them.

It's not worth it. Unless we think they're not deserving of judgment, then look at their character and teaching. Point three, the rest of verse 10. He begins with their character, bold and arrogant.

[18 : 41] They are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings. 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.

Here we see their arrogance and unthinkingness. Arrogance because they despise authority as though they know better. Like our society who despises God's truth, thinking that we are now so enlightened and so we know everything.

Or a JW I once heard about. Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in the Trinity as far as I understand. And when someone from our church was speaking with them via email, showing them some verses about how the Father and the Son are one, this JW emailed back and this is what he wrote.

That is not what I want God to be like and God wouldn't let himself be something I don't like. Is that not the height of arrogance?

That God must conform to what I like? As though he answers to us? What's more, these false teachers also arrogantly take the place of God when it comes to judging others.

[19 : 52] Like the celestial beings in the rest of verse 10. which we think are probably fallen angels we don't really know. Yet even good angels don't heap abuse.

They simply communicate God's message of judgment. I mean, that's what angel means, messenger. He is their arrogance though. And it comes with unthinkingness.

Verse 12. They're not only blaspheming matters they do not understand, they are like unreasoning, unthinking animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed and like animals they too will perish.

You see, humble people often think before they speak, don't they? Because they know they don't know everything. But arrogant people speak without thinking as though they do know everything. And so these teachers blaspheme in matters they don't understand. They're arrogant. And so Peter says they're actually like animals who don't think unreasoning.

[20 : 51] They don't think before they speak. They just act on instinct. You see, they are arrogant and unthinking. And this is why they'll be judged. But not only are they arrogantly unthinking, they also have sinful indulgence.

Verse 13. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in the broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. Their eyes are full of adultery. They never stop sinning. They seduce the unstable. They are experts in greed and accursed brood. Talk about sinful indulgence. Whether it's drinking too much at the feasts or committing adultery or being greedy for money, their unthinking arrogance is only outdone by their sinful indulgence. But again, it's all pretty full-on language, isn't it? Peter would not go down well in our politically correct society, would he? But again, he speaks like this so we see false teachers for who they are. It's how he warns us to be on our guard against them so that we're not carried away by them because their teaching while empty can be enticing.

[22 : 05] Verse 17. These people are springs without water, empty, and mist driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them 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, particularly those young in the faith.

They promise them freedom but it's an empty promise because they themselves are slaves of depravity for people are slaves to whatever has mastered them. You see, they are empty. They have empty words and empty promises but their teaching can also be enticing, particularly for those young in the faith. I mean, accepting the world's view of marriage is enticing because it does sound loving and it makes life a whole lot easier to live in the world, doesn't it? Or accepting a false teaching of Austen that God wants to bring us from trouble to double prosperity in this life. I mean, that sounds appealing. Who doesn't want double their bank balance? Anyone? No hands. It is appealing. In fact, I know a young Christian man who used to come to this service but would listen to Austen online which is why I thought of him.

[23 : 29] And when I asked this young man why he listens to Joel online, it's because he wanted a prosperous life. It's enticing, isn't it? But their teaching and character only reveals their true colours which is the last few verses.

And verse 20 talks about if they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

It would have been better for them not to have become so-called Christians or known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

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 warns that if these false teachers were genuine Christians and fell away then they would be worse off than they would have been before they became Christians. Christians but verse 22 suggests that they were never really genuine Christians to start with. They may have looked like Christians or looked like they escaped the corruption of the world by knowing Jesus but by going back to their old ways it proves that they were never genuine Christians to start with.

[24 : 47] Just as it's in a dog's nature to return to its vomit and sniff and now that we have a dog I can confirm that proverb is true it's disgusting or just as it's in a pig's nature to go back and wallow in the mud so it's in a fake Christian's nature to go back to their non-Christian ways because God will keep those who are genuinely his.

But for us here who do have a genuine knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus this chapter is a warning and since we're being forewarned then we're to be on guard. Point three. How? Well firstly as we've seen being alert to the possibility of false teachers which we expect them not that we're to go on a witch hunt for them or attack them on social media we're just to be alert and that means secondly testing the teaching of every teacher in case they are false.

How? Well by checking what teachers say including me and Ricky and everyone else up here with what God says in the Bible. It's why we ask you to have your Bibles open and even put the verses on the screen even for those online so that you can all see it for yourselves and check.

It's why I try as much as possible to work through the passage so that you can see it for yourselves and you can check and if you think we've got something wrong then please talk to us because we want to get God's word right both for our sakes and for yours don't we?

[26 : 24] Of course to be able to check means that we need to know our Bibles too and so thirdly we can guard by growing in biblical truth and godly behavior.

Remember again the summary verses they're like two sides of the one coin. You know be on your guard and on the flip side grow by the grace and in knowledge. And so we're to grow in biblical truth.

Back before the digital days I once heard that the treasury department used to study the true notes so that they could spot a counterfeit note when it came along.

Or in the same way we're to study the scriptures and know the truth of God's word so that we can spot a counterfeit truth, a lie when it comes along.

And so do keep reading your Bibles. If you get stuck on something send me an email or drop me a note I'd love talking about the Bible and getting to know God better through his word.

[27 : 24] Do keep going to Bible study if you're part of one. Do keep coming to church. Keep growing in biblical truth and keep growing in godly behavior too because the more we grow in godly behavior the less likely we'll be enticed to ungodly behavior.

For example the more we practice being content the less we'll be enticed by greed. The more we practice being humble the less likely we'll be enticed to be arrogant. The more we practice at restraining our sinful desires like lust and lying and overindulging then the less likely we'll be enticed by those sinful desires.

You see growing in godliness helps us to guard against false teaching that appeals to our sinful desires. And so we're to be on guard by being alert to the possibility of false teachers checking the teaching of every teacher and growing in both biblical truth and godly character or behavior.

I saw this other warning once danger do not touch not only will this kill you it will hurt the whole time you are dying. I'm not sure that warning could be any clearer about the danger.

Well today's chapter I'm not sure Peter will be any clearer about the danger. So since you've been forewarned then be on your guard against false teachers that we might always continue in the truth of Jesus.

[28 : 54] Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father we thank you that your word not only gives us encouragements and promises but it also gives us warnings.

And so we pray in light of the warning to us today help us to be on our guard against false teaching by being alert to the possibility by checking the teaching of every teacher and by growing in both biblical truth and godly behavior.

Help us in these things we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.