

The Close Escape

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Lord, you have given us this one hour to invest, and we ask that we may each invest it in a way which brings glory to the heart.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm speaking on 2 Peter 2, verses 1-9, and it's found in your pew Bible on page 220.

I would be glad if you turned to it as I'm going to read it to you. But I'm going to read it from the New International Version, and you have the Revised Standard Version.

And if you listen carefully, you'll find out what licentiousness means, and other words as well.

From the NIV, as you watch the RSV, But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.

[1 : 18] They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves.

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 long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

There's only one sentence left to read, but it's five verses long, so listen carefully to it. And it's all built on a whole series of ifs and one then.

So you watch as I read. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into 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 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 godly men from trials, to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Now you know that this is Peter's sort of last letter, and it's the latest news that comes in the good news of the New Testament.

[3 : 44] And so it gives you a picture of what the church was already beginning to be by the end of, towards the end of the first century, and it doesn't give you an inaccurate picture of what the church has become since then.

But Peter writes to encourage people to understand how this is to work. So, belonging to a church is very difficult, and Peter tells you why.

Though it is difficult, it is absolutely essential. Just take a moment to feel sorry for all those people in Vancouver who aren't in church this morning.

You'll have reason to, before you finish this text. The thing is, if you look in verse 1, you'll see that there were lying prophets and lying teachers.

Now, we know, perhaps as no generation has ever known, how creative lying can be. How enormously sophisticated it can be.

[5 : 09] How it can get you to your goals so much faster than anything else. How it can sell a product so much more quickly than anything else. Lying is terribly efficient, compared to the dull plotting of truth, as it seems.

And so, it's not surprising that into the sort of welcoming community of the church should come the lying prophets and the lying teachers.

And they're what have become enormously sophisticated lives.

Some that have been worked on and polished and developed for close to 2,000 years. They're amazing and very attractive.

And yet, how do they work? And Peter goes on to tell you how they work and how they are brought to be.

[6 : 15] They are done by introducing destructive heresies, we're told. The heresies are, they're just, on the first reading, they're just opinions that people have.

The church is a divided community, always. And what a lot of people come to church for on a Sunday, I mean, I'm not thinking of you, but I just lied.

What happens when, is that they hear these destructive opinions, and that people come to get some opinion that they find congenial, and will warrant, give them good reason why they didn't come to church last week, and they certainly aren't going to come again next week.

It's because these lies are so attractive, and so convenient, and so congenial, that they are quickly picked up.

But Peter doesn't make any secret of the fact that they are destructive. And the way you see that they are destructive, is by the impact they have on the community.

[7 : 46] And the impact that they have on the community, is that they deny the sovereign Lord. You see, what we've just done in saying the creep, is to say, God is Lord.

Jesus is Lord. The Holy Spirit is Lord. The Greek word here is despot. He is the absolute Lord. That's who He is. And by your participation in the creed, that's what you have said He is. But it goes on to say that not only do they deny the sovereignty of God, they also deny what He has done. That is, He has redeemed them. He has bought them back. He has absolute, uncontested ownership of them.

And they have denied that. That's what the destructive heresies have done. They've denied that He is Lord. They've denied His absolute ownership.

[9 : 11] And they have done it in such a way that they feel wonderfully emancipated by these destructive heresies. But rather than being wonderfully emancipated, what in fact it says, is that it brings on them swift destruction.

In other words, what's happened when they deny the despot who is God and His authority and His ownership of them, when they deny that He is Lord, and when they deny that their life is utterly dependent upon what God has done for them in Jesus Christ by redeeming them from sin, when they deny that, they pull the linchpin out of their lives and their lives immediately begin to fragment. They become unglued. The meaning of their life eludes them. The lie may be very congenial, but it's destroyed the whole basis of their life.

So that you get a picture of a world wandering around looking for something that will hold them together, but at the same time denying the reality that that involves.

That God is Lord and that He has Baha and we belong to Him. And that you can't find your identity apart, apart from Him.

[10 : 54] But then you see in verse 2 what it says is that many will follow them. because, you know, that's how we invest most of the time and most of the energies of our lives is by finding an attractive lie and following it till we find out that it destroys us or it breaks down.

It was such a great idea and it had such promise and it seemed so attractive and it seemed so good and we went after it because, you know, most of us are followers.

And so we follow that and what it says that we followed it for was two things happened as a result of following it. The two things are we followed, we began to practice an immoral way of life without shame.

that immorality moves in and we practice that without shame. You see how it says it in the text.

Many will follow, what do they follow? They follow shameful ways and the second thing that happens is that they bring the way of truth into disrepute.

[12 : 21] and the way of truth is a description of Christian discipleship, of being a follower of Jesus.

So you see, what happens is their thinking has broken down in that they have denied the truth and their behavior has broken down in that they now are happy to practice things which formerly they would have been ashamed to do.

So you see how this thing, how the false teachers work in the community. How the community breaks down.

And then you see how the church develops in verse 3. It says that in their greed these teachers will exploit exploit you with stories they have made up.

So that what the church becomes is a community of mutual exploitation. Preacher, we want you to listen to us.

[13 : 34] Congregation, I want you to listen to me. And I exploit you, you exploit me, we all exploit one another, we all do this by pretending, by, in a sense, following a lie, a practical, I mean, lies are beautiful things.

They rot badly if they're not taken care of, but they are beautiful in themselves some of the time. And you see, when that happens, we use them to exploit each other.

we say that we have a consumer society at the moment. We don't have a consumer society. We have a society of mutual exploitation.

That is, we permit ourselves to be exploited by lies because we want to be able to exploit other people by lies and that's the way our world works, the way it goes around.

Now that may be alright for the world in which we live, but it's not very healthy in the church. And somehow you've got to get past that, past the false teachers who in their greed, these teachers exploit people and how do they do it?

[14 : 53] They do it with stories they have made up. Well, I don't know how many of you are very literary people, but I, you know, and we've had Booker prizes and all sorts of prizes for stories that people have made up and some of you I'm sure are sufficiently omnivorous readers that you have gone through them all and I only hear about them.

but it would be interesting to read them and to see to what extent they are exploitative, to what extent they are taking a fundamental truth and trying to twist it into a sophisticated lie, and to what extent they're trying to reach from a world of sophisticated lies to take hold of a fundamental truth. It's hard to tell, you see, because this practice is so pervasive, even in the church, this mutual exploitation, which is done by the use of stories that have been made up.

Now, if you look back into what David was talking about last week, from 2 Peter, when in verse 16, it says that the church became the church not by following cleverly devised myths which were made known to you.

And the chapter concludes by saying you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.

[16 : 54] You're not free to do that, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man. That's not the source of the truth.

But men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God. So, you see, everybody loves stories and they're very dangerous things to use, because these false teachers and false prophets use them to exploit people.

Now, how do you, in the midst of a world which is, you know, carried here and there by these lies, how do you maintain any sense of what truth is?

and Peter says that it's it's men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

You see, what the church has consistently done, and for this, you know, I think we ought to be mindful, is to confront people with Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[18 : 09] keep that front and center, because there is horror in that, and there is terror in that, and there is profound reality in that, and it sums up in a wonderful way what God has to say to us, and it sums up in an amazing way what we have to say to God, and it's all there, so that at the center of the life of the church has to be Jesus Christ and him crucified, and he becomes the touchstone of truth when people tell stories, and he becomes the only defense we have against mutual exploitation by one another.

Well, it then goes on to say that these lying prophets and lying teachers, and I mean, the church is full of them, to name but a few, I dare not, but I, but it's how it works, because we are a vulnerable community, and this is so much more convenient a way of doing it, and it's so much more attractive to people.

And Peter concludes that their condemnation has been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping, but having said that, he suddenly realizes that they are, that they are, that that's not, that's not good enough to say that their condemnation has been hanging over them, and that their destruction has not been sleeping, because, you see, if you are a righteous soul, like Lot is described as being, or Noah is described as being, then you have hanging heavily on your heart

a deep concern as to why God tolerates it, why does God allow these lies to take off, why is the world filled with them, why doesn't the condemnation of God come down in judgment, and slam them to the ground, why do they get away with it, why, why are people so quick to follow after a lie, why are people so easily exploited, by lying prophets and lying teachers, why does this happen, why does

God follow him, has God forgotten who he is, well, that's one way of looking at it, the other way of looking at it is, I have been able to lie, and I have been able to cheat, and I have prospered enormously, and so God must have nothing whatever to do with it, because I've got away with it, I mean, to bear witness from my own life, that at those times when I have knowingly and willingly, and denying the shame that's involved, been prepared to completely ignore what I knew to be the will of God for me, you know, that I have gone to bed in terrible anxiety, wondering whether I would survive the night before the judgment of God came crashing down upon me, only to wake up in the morning, and the sun was shining, and the coffee was on, and life was ready to go ahead, and I said, yes,

God doesn't mind after all, because if he did, he'd have got me by now, so maybe I'm free to do whatever I want, whenever I like, so that you see these two, and so the church is that community which wants God to act and judge, God doesn't seem to be there to do it, and we're left to try and figure out what kind of God is this, and so Peter tells us in this last sentence what kind of a God he is.

[23 : 05] He is a God who if you take the highest realm of being the angels of God, God, when they sin, they were accused, and they are held in judgment, they are in hell until they face God's final judgment.

God hasn't forgotten. God's judgment is the word of Exodus, they denied the truth so explicitly that God had to bring a flood on the earth to destroy them, and to begin his creation all over again. God's judgment stands. It's not been forgotten. And when the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah got all mixed up between their spirituality and their sexuality, so that they considered their sexuality with what life was really all about, and their spirituality could be made subordinate to it, then God visited those cities with fire and reduced them to ashes because they made their spirituality subordinate to their sexuality.

You see, in our world, the same thing is happening. The truly emancipated man is the man who can indulge himself sexually in whatever way he likes, at whatever time he likes, for whatever reason he likes.

You see, sexuality is a great gift, but if it is not subject to our spirituality, which is our relationship to God, then the fire, fire, fire, that's all.

[25 : 25] There's no other way of dealing with it. And so, Peter concludes that this is the circumstance in which the church has to live out its life.

It is waiting. I mean, it's dependent upon hearing. men moved by the Holy Spirit speaking from God as their source.

It's dependent utterly on that. But in fact, it is constantly infiltrated by false prophets and false teachers that gain great followings and whose thinking is smashed and whose moral behavior lies in ruins.

And this happens because of the lie taking over from the gospel. This happens because Jesus Christ and him crucified doesn't remain central to the life of the church.

And we're not constantly brought to our knees before him. We're not constantly brought to the place for holding out our hands.

[26 : 55] We receive the body of blood of Christ broken for us and we receive the blood of Christ shed for us to cleanse us. Unless we're in that place, then the lie has taken over and the judgment of God, though it may be delayed, is absolutely certain.

And the great dignity and honor that God does to human beings is to give them the right to go to hell.

Belongs to you. God will honor it. And it is a dignity if you want.

If you're the center of your world, it's a dignity which is essential to you. But God's condemnation has not been forgotten.

God's judgment inevitably must come. and the option between hell and heaven remains in the lap of each one of us to deal with.

[28 : 21] Now, I don't want to leave you there, but I do want to leave you there. But I want to remind you of the grace and mercy of God.

And to invite you with perhaps a new awareness to enter in to participate in the sacrament of his grace and mercy in this holy communion.

Amen. Amen.