

The Close Escape

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[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 your name and profit to our hearts. 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 turn 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 will 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.

[3 : 29] 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.

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.

[4 : 56] Now, we know, perhaps as no generation has ever known, how creative lying can be, how enormously sophisticated it can be, 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 plodding 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 lies, 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.

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.

[6 : 34] 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.

I am... 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 why...

give them good reason why they didn't come to church last week and they certainly aren't going to come again next week. 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 : 47] 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 Creed 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, uncontestable ownership of them.

And they have denied that. That's what the destructive heresies have done. They have denied that he is Lord. They have denied his absolute ownership.

[9 : 15] 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 bought us and we belong to him. And that you can't find your identity apart from him.

[10 : 57] 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 our 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?

[12 : 13] They follow shameful ways and the second thing that happens is that they bring the way of truth into disrepute.

And the way of truth is 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. 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 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. 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 sometimes 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 they do it with stories they have made up well

[15 : 02] I don't know how many of you are very literary people but I you know 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 2nd

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 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 these lies how do you how do you maintain any sense of what truth is and

Peter says that it's it's man 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 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 it's how it's how it works because because we are a vulnerable community and and this this is so much more convenient a way of doing it and and it's so much more attractive to people and 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 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 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

[21 : 19] God tolerate it 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 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 perhaps

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 and so the church is that community which wants God to act in judgment and 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 he is a God who if you take the highest realm of being the angels of God when they sinned they were accused and they are held in judgment they are in hell until they face God's final judgment

God hasn't forgotten and when the whole world in the words of Exodus you know they they denied the truth so explicitly that 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 and when the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah got all mixed up between their spirituality and their sexuality so that they considered their sexuality was 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 a 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 sexuality is a great gift but if it is not subject to our spirituality which is our relationship to God then the fire that's all 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 we're holding out our hands 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 and 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

[27 : 59] 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 now I don't want to leave you there because 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 into participating in the sacrament of his grace and mercy in this holy communion Amen