

All right. Let's open our Bibles to 2 Peter 2:1 as we continue this morning with our studies through Peter's final letter that he wrote (two or three years after his first one) from death row, as he was awaiting execution, and God showed him that this was imminent, around the corner.

The background of 2 Peter is certainly much like the first (1 Peter). It was the wholesale kind of brutal slaughter of God's people by Nero. And if the first letter focused on that - the external pressure of persecution, this letter focuses on the internal - the pressures of not being ready for the Lord's coming or ungodliness, and, here in chapter 2, false teachers.

We spent four weeks in chapter 1. Peter talked to us about knowing God, that that's the most important pursuit we can have. We should know His Person and His power and His promises. In verses 5 through 9, Peter then said we should grow in the Lord, that getting saved was just the beginning, that we wanted to participate with God and "add" to our faith these many things. And we talked about - are we growing or slowing in our walks with the Lord? In verses 10 through 15, Peter encouraged us to remember to live with death in mind - like we were camping out, and to leave a legacy behind that would outlive us; certainly pertinent information from a guy who was giving his life for the faith. And then last week, from verses 16 through 21, Peter finished chapter 1 talking about how we could know that the gospel is true. How could we even die for our faith like Peter was having to do? And so he gave us the subjective truth - his experiences with God, what he had heard and what he had seen; and then the objective truth - the declaration of God's Word. And he said, "My eyewitness testimony is good, but God's Word is best." So that was chapter 1.

In outlining 2 Peter, I think here's the way you remember it: chapter 1 talks about "the true," chapter 2 talks about "the false," and chapter 3 talks about "the end" - the Lord's coming again to rule and to reign.

Well this morning we turn from the truth, and for the next several weeks, we're going to consider the false. It is a difficult chapter, vitally important. I'm always tempted, when I run into verses I don't like, to hurry through them. Maybe you're

like that as well. Unpleasant verses. And we'll get to the pleasant ones. But I just figure if Peter is dying for his faith, and he wants to warn us, then these twenty-two verses that scream to us, "Look out! Be careful!" ought to be taken slowly. So we're going to just look at three verses this morning.

But on the heels of Peter declaring Jesus had fulfilled the prophetic word of God and that true prophecy was always the product of God's work in men's lives (it wasn't open to private interpretation, it wasn't produced by the will of man), Peter now turns to the ever-present false teachers that have been found in every generation, speaking their own will, promoting their own way, and, with great eloquence and great passion, he warns us about the dangers of these teachers. Doesn't mince words. Uses much the same language as Jude did. He calls them deceivers from hell. It was no laughing matter to Peter. It was no insignificant problem, and it isn't to us today. It isn't a petty issue. Peter doesn't name names. He just goes after the clear characteristic descriptions of these false teachers.

To this day, one of the most lucrative rackets in the world is counterfeiting: from counterfeiting money to expensive paintings to collectible watches to rare manuscripts. Some counterfeiters are so good they can fool the experts. Well if you get caught by a counterfeiter in the world, you might lose your shirt. But if the false teacher fakes you out, you lose eternity. So to Peter, this was an important issue. We need to watch out for the fake - the fake jewelry, the fake purses, the fake medicine sold as real, and a fake gospel that sounds like the real gospel but cannot even be compared to it.

So this morning just three verses as God makes us aware of these false teachers - gives us some of their motivations. And then next week, Lord be willing, from verse 4 down to verse 9, we'll look at their fate.

One thing about company advertisements is that they want to be accurately depicted. I think if someone was promoting you, you would want to be accurately represented. And there have been some epic fails over the years when companies went abroad without knowing the customs or languages of the places they hoped to market. I think one of the ones that stands out years ago was Gerber baby food went to Africa. But because of the extensive illiteracy rate in portions of Africa, whenever people put pictures on cans or bottles, it was to accurately describe what was inside. And they had that little cute baby on there. Well it didn't sell. People were terrified. It was an epic fail. In 2002, the company Umbro, which makes a

lot of soccer products and all (it's a UK sports manufacturer), came out with a new sneaker called Zyklon. And when it went into distribution, there were lots of complaints from organizations and individuals, and they had to shut it down because Zyklon was the name of the gas that the Nazis used in the concentration camps. Bad idea. No one thought about it. Didn't really look into it. But obviously it didn't work. And it doesn't even just go by custom. Sometimes even those symbols that we are so used to - there's a story from a place named Bay Stevedores in the African port of Richards Bay where that internationally-recognized symbol for fragile - a broken wine glass - they just presumed it meant that the box was filled with broken glass. And so rather than storing it in their warehouse, they threw all these boxes over into the sea. So, those are innocent mistakes.

But trust me, the false teachers are not innocent in their mistakes. They claim to represent God. They don't know Him. They send the wrong message. They give out their own information. They do so with an interest in worldly gain. They're driven by the devil. The consequences of their deception are eternal. And throughout the Bible, wherever you turn, God warns us of the counterfeiters of the faith. Paul said to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:13-14), "They are false apostles. They are deceitful workers. They transform themselves into angels of light." He's the great imitator, Satan. It started with Eve in the Garden, where he said to Eve (Genesis 3), "Has God really said.....? Well that's not true. Let me tell you what is true." And he took God's Word and replaced it with his own. The church has folks in it - the tares, as Jesus calls them - the sons of the wicked one hanging around the church, and yet they're not believers at all. Paul said to the Galatians (and others), "There is a false gospel that offers to men a false righteousness, and one day the false teachers will come and offer a false Christ to the world" (Galatians 1:6-9, Romans 9:30-10:4, 2 Thessalonians 2). So it's a real deal. It's an eternal battle, and it is a difficult thing.

Some people are uncomfortable talking about doctrine. In fact, the picture that Peter paints is not a pretty one, but I think it underscores the need to be skilled in doctrinal truth. You ought to have an answer for why you believe what you believe. You ought to be able to stand on those things and the warning against compromising the essentials of your faith. And like I said, we'd like to avoid debating doctrine. Some people say, "Well just love is essential, as long as people are sincere. That's really all that matters." But I would argue that if a blind man was walking towards a cliff, you'd better stop him. And all of his sincerity, in thinking he's going in the right direction, is going to get him killed. It's like the doctor who diagnoses a

potentially fatal illness, and you don't tell the patient. You just say, "Go home, take two aspirin, get a good night's sleep," and be sincere. Not very helpful. So, this is the warning sign from God to the church. You might have seen signs as you're driving down the road - "Beware of falling objects" or "Oncoming traffic" or "Beware"I was walking with my wife the other day, and there was a sign on a fence in this backyard, and it said, "Beware of Dog." We walked by, this little Chihuahua came out, just yapping at us. I went, "Yeah, beware of that dog." But then I saw - driving Thursday night, maybe it was Friday - there was a sign in a car that said, "Beware of student driver," and I took that to heart. (Laughing) That was very.....backed way away. Yep.

Well, this is God's warning sign - Beware of the false teacher. And so I want to give you six principles this morning, quickly to get started with, so you can outline them, and we'll try to add to them in chapter 2 as we go.

But let's start with this point in verse 1 - False teachers are always around. They're always around. Verse 1, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you." So, Satan's appearance in the Garden with Adam and Eve started the whole thing, and since then, the false teachers and the false prophets have been actively seeking to turn people's hearts away from God and back to the ways of the world. Way back in Deuteronomy 13, as Moses rehearsed all that God had done for the people who were now ready to go into the Land of Promise, he devoted an entire chapter (all of Deuteronomy 13) to saying to them, "When you get into the Land, be careful of the people that are in it and what they teach. Be careful of the false prophets and the teachers." Elijah and many others, especially in the Old Testament, had to contend with the prophets of Baal. They were a little bit more obvious to deal with because there was a completely false, foreign kind of religious system. The harder people to deal with are those who have a Bible in their hands, and they say they're speaking for God, and they use familiar language that you're drawn to, and yet their desire is to draw you away from the Lord. Ezekiel, as we read this morning (Ezekiel 13:1-9), was sent by the Lord to the Jewish people at a time when, in their captivity in Babylon for their disobedience, mind you, they were telling the people, "Oh, everything's going to be fine, there's no need to repent, God's with us. We'll go home pretty soon." And because of that, no one was repenting, no one was realizing that they were there by God's judgment. You might read Ezekiel 13, the rest of the chapter that we went through this morning. The Lord, through Jeremiah, had warned the nation for fifty years about those false prophet liars, and He even said

to them there in chapter 23 these words, "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed! I have dreamed!' How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal. The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the LORD. "Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" (verses 25-29). The true prophet of God in the Old Testament was always outnumbered by the false prophet, and more often than not, as you read through the Bible, was hated by the very people he is sent to reach. The false prophet is embraced. He is loved because he offers a way of life that requires no change in your life. It is all about the flesh and self. There's no need for repentance. Holiness isn't an issue. It ignores faith. It looks like it works for a while. It sure draws a lot of people into arenas sometimes. But men like Jeremiah are imprisoned, and they're killed; Ezekiel is taken, and others. So Jesus warned of the false teachers in the New Testament. He said in Matthew 7:15-16, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits." So false prophets wear camouflage. They can't be easily identified. "What big eyes you have, grandma!" That won't work. Nor what is immediately said by them, for much will sound good on the surface. You have to take a good hard look and know well God's Word. If all of their lives were easy to spot, they wouldn't be nearly as successful as they are.

Well, I want you to notice in verse 1 that in the Old Testament, the primary voice for God was the prophet. God spoke to nations and to the world and to other nations and His nation through the prophets. There was a mouthpiece. In the New Testament, the gift of prophecy is given to the church, and the main method through which God speaks to the people in the world by His Word is the church or the New Testament teacher, if you will. So notice the differentiation, here in verse 1, between the false prophet of the Old Testament and the false teacher of the New. The arena, the television, the radio airwaves, the internet blog sites became the chosen avenues for sharing false teaching. And the biggest trick in Satan's bag has always been bad information - false doctrine, falsehoods presented as truth - that people live and die only to discover they were wrong. Deception is the name of his game. He just wants to deceive. And Peter begins by saying, "There have always been....they will always be among you. They're always here."

Jesus said, in Matthew 24:5&11, "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. Many prophets will rise up and deceive many as well."

Second of all - False teachers are interested in distorting the truth. Not only are they always with us, but they are interested in distorting the truth. Let's read the next part of verse 1 where it says this, "Who will secretly bring in destructive heresies." So, they are always around, and, second of all, they distort the truth. Destructive heresies. By the way, the word "heresy," biblically, means to make a choice. It speaks of a preferential choice that you make. I decide what is right. I decide what is wrong. That's heresy. In fact, Barclay wrote, "A heretic is a man who believes what he wishes to believe instead of accepting the truth of God that he must believe to be saved." Most natural men - without God - are very much adverse to absolute truth. They would rather have some kind of generic spirituality. What I mean by that is they'll pick and choose what they want to believe. I was raised Catholic, and my father was a very Catholic man. But even he would say, of his Catholicism, when I'd challenge him, "Oh, I don't believe that." I'd say, "Well, dad, that's what Catholics believe." "Well, yeah, but I don't believe that." He almost believed Catholicism like a salad bar. "I'll have a little of that, none of that, no more guilt, and I don't need some of that," and he would pick and choose what he wanted to believe. That's heresy, by definition. The goal of the false teacher is to force you to decide to which party you'll belong. A literal interpretation of the Bible or you're going to pick and choose which view is for you. But understand - you pick the wrong choice, it'll destroy you eternally. The false teacher today, like the Old Testament false prophet counterpart, operates in the same manner. They bring words to people claiming to have come from God, but they will lead not to life but to judgment. They don't align at all with what God wants to say, and they're delivered in a secretive manner. Right? We read that here. They "will secretly bring in destructive heresies." They'll get you to make choices that will destroy you slowly - false, destructive, deceptive. It's heresy. But you're called upon to make a choice. And they'll do it, not outwardly but under cover, a slow mixing and then a replacing of the truth of God with lies and errors. They'll use common words - salvation and faith and sin and believing. It's just that they don't have the same definitions for those words as you do; which is why essential doctrine has to be so exacting and why you have to, for the important issues, take a stand. If you're going to get in a plane and fly to Hawaii, and you're just two degrees off, you're never going to see the islands from here. You're going to miss them entirely.

Well Peter will say in verse 3, in a minute, that the motivating factor for the false teacher is "covetousness" and that he'll use "deceptive words." The word "deceptive" is the Greek word for plastic, and it literally means that you can bend and shape and twist and mold the words that you speak to any shape or form that you want. I read somewhere one time a sentence that stuck with me that said, "A false teacher may use your vocabulary, but he doesn't use your dictionary." So he'll talk like you talk, but he won't mean what you mean. And there is an ever-growing list today of sects and groups under the Christian banner that make them hard to recognize. So all of them have in common they'll use the Bible to deceive and not enlighten God's people, and they'll spend much of their time defending their positions rather than preaching the good news of Jesus because this is their product. Satan is a liar. So are his ministers. If you go back to that first encounter between Eve and the devil, and you watch these things go very quickly, he questions God's Word, he denies God's Word, and then he replaces God's Word. "Has God said?" "You shall not die." "You shall be like God yourself." It doesn't take long, but it's destructive, and it's secretive, and it'll destroy. But it demands that you make a choice. So they distort the truth. They're always with us. They distort the truth.

Thirdly - They deny the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice what we read, verse 1, "Even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction." False teachers can sometimes be best known and identified by what they deny. Do they deny sin? False teacher. Do they deny that there's a hell? False teacher. Do they deny that you need to be born again? That's a false teacher according to the Bible. Do they deny that salvation is by grace alone? False teacher. Do they deny that Jesus is God come in the flesh? Unsaved deceivers. In fact Peter, like I said, doesn't beat around the bush. In verse 22, he compares these teachers to pigs rather than to sheep. Those are some pretty harsh words. But Peter's dying. He's going to let it out before he goes. This is it. Notice that we read that they "deny the Lord who bought them." He bought them in the sense that Jesus, when He died, died for the sins of all men. He purchased the whole field to get the treasure that was within. But the false teacher devalues Jesus. He denies His Person, His purpose, His position. God'll have the last word, certainly. Swift destruction is coming. This is not going to last. But Peter says to the church, "You be careful. Don't you get caught up in this." I would advise you, if you are used to arguing non-essentials with the cultist who knocks on your door or who sits at the mall behind a desk, that you might just want to cut to the chase and say, "Tell me about Jesus. Who is Jesus to you?" And you never have to change the subject

because that's where you'll find that they deny themselves and deny their faith. To deny Jesus means you deny His claims, you deny that He's God, you deny that He was born of a virgin, you deny His sinless life, you deny our salvation is through His substitutionary death, you deny that He took our punishment, you deny the resurrection. You deny Jesus, you deny it all! The whole gospel is set aside. So, they deny the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourthly - They broaden the way to heaven. Verse 2, "And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed." Jude, when he wrote (and he writes using much the same language as Peter) in verse 3, said that the consequences were so great that you couldn't take them lightly, that you had to stand up "for the faith" is what he said. But notice in verse 2 that "many will follow their destructive ways." The ways of the false teacher always appeal to the flesh. Right? They want you to follow your feelings, and you listen and you say, "Oh, that's right. That's what I want." Jesus, when He spoke in the Sermon on the Mount, said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it" (Matthew 7:13). The door is open for all kinds of feelings and ideas. But when you get to Christianity, it's Jesus, and it's a difficult way, and it leads to life, and there are few who find it. Notice the word in verse 2 "many will follow their destructive ways." The false teacher is popular because he makes the way easy. You probably can draw to your mind some very successful large ministries that don't teach the Bible at all, but they'll make you feel good. They want this life to be a joy. They're not planning for the next. They just want you to have an easy life now. Be happy. Right? And that's all that they're interested in. Just get a happy feeling. There's this broad appeal to the flesh. But notice, again, Peter says it's "destructive." Can you imagine sitting in these huge gatherings that are not teaching the Bible, leading countless souls to hell, but they're feeling good as they're going? It's frightening. And because these false teachers claim to know God, people are stumbled by them. "Because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed." The hard thing to the Christian is these guys out there living one way, talking another, and then they apply you and say, "Well, you're all in the same boat." And you go, "Well, I'm not like that! It's not me. That's not how I believe. That's not what I believe." The Christian message is refused before it is heard because of the behavior of some who claim to know the Lord. Paul said to Titus (1:16), "They profess to know God, but in their works they deny Him, and they're abominable." It's a tough word. It means, "They're just disgraceful!" And yet it hurts us.

Supposed believers do the greatest harm to the church. So, these folks - "many will follow their destructive ways." The false teachers broaden the way to heaven.

Verse 3 - They cover their true motives. Notice what it says, "By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." The word "covetous" is the word in Greek for greed. And Peter is telling us that the false teachers are interested in only one thing - not your well-being, not your spiritual eternal condition. They will use all of those things for only one purpose - they want to get wealthy. They want to get gain. They want to get their hands in your pocket. They will tailor a religious message to bring them greater profit. They are driven by greed. Amen to that. "Give, and God will give to you." Well that's in the Bible (Luke 6:38) but not as the motivation for giving. It is completely beaten out of context. "Support our ministry. Sew your seed of faith with us. Write me a letter, and I'll send you a miracle wallet. Make a pledge of faith. Join us for another telethon week. We're in need during the holidays. If you could just tuck in your love gift, large or small." How about you just disappear? It hasn't changed. Even in the days of Micah. This is what Micah writes (Micah 3:11). Micah, now. 700 B.C. "Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, 'Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us.' " That's 700 B.C. "It's worked so far. Why change now?" They are driven by a motive of gain, and they come with, we read, "deceptive words." That's that word for plastic. They'll talk and tell you whatever you want to hear if it'll just allure you to feel good about yourself and to just follow their ways - as long as they can make a profit. In the process, the truth of God is turned, as 2 Timothy 4:4 will say, into fables. If you watch some of these folks who are at it, you know who they are. I don't know if you get computerized letters. I used to be on every televangelist's mailing list. I tried to get on them. I wanted to see what they were saying. I kept, for years, their letters. They were just atrocious, and then I finally said, "Oh, forget it." "Brother, as I was praying this morning at 3:30, the Lord put you on my heart specifically, and so I'm writing to you with great hesitancy to ask for your help at this hour of need." And I say, "You're an idiot." And the poor woman on social security said, "I've got to send him some money because he's praying for me. My name came up in his prayers." You want swift judgment, don't you? And I read that "their judgment has not been idle," and that their judgment, verse 1, is "swift," and I say to myself - not swift enough. Not swift enough. They cover their true motives.

Number six, verse 1 and verse 3 - They are headed for judgment. Notice at the end of verse 1, "Who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction." And verse 3 says, "Their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." Destructive heresies will bring swift destruction to those who lead others in their destructive ways. In other words, they're going to get it in the end. Right? To deny Jesus as Savior and Lord is to condemn your own soul. To tell others of your ways, when the Lord has not spoken, puts you in a tremendous place of judgment. But compared to eternity, their days are short, and their future is horrifying. The word "exploit," verse 3, is the Greek word for emporium. It is a word that speaks about that place where people go to buy and sell and trade. Peter says this of the false teachers, "You are their marketplace. They look to you for gain. They're going to use you." Certainly "the laborer is worthy of his hire" (1 Timothy 5:18). We have pastors that work here full-time. We pay them, hopefully, well enough to support their families, but none of them are here for the money. And if they were, they'd leave soon enough. It's just not a place to get wealthy. That's not a motivation for ministry - except for the false teachers. That's the place that they go to make market of you, and these guys have grander ideas. They want to use religion as a tool to exploit the weak.

May I suggest to you that you give where you attend. It doesn't have to be here. I really don't care. God provides all of our needs at the church. We will never ask you for money. He's a big God. He can pay for His own bills. If He doesn't, I'm quittin', and I'll go find a God who can do that. Because that's the God we know, isn't it? But you should give where you're going to church, and I'll tell you why. You can watch what happens with the money. You can see where the outreach is going, the ministries that are supported. And if you're just sending checks to people you don't know, and ten years later they fall apart, "Oh, I wish I hadn't been involved with that..." We had two or three ministries this last year go belly up; huge international ministries that did a lot of good for a lot of years that are now absolutely falling apart. It is better that you give in places that you can be involved with and understand. And if you're giving it elsewhere, know the ministries you are giving to, and stay involved with them. Find out what they're doing. Ask questions. Write letters. Don't just give because the appeal was heart-wrenching. We have folks - we don't have them anymore, they know us well enough now - but people would say, "Well, we'll come play for free. We just want to take an offering." And we always say, "Yeah, no. Our people aren't a marketplace. Here's what we'll pay you to come and do whatever it is we're asking of you, and if you

don't like that, well then don't come. But you're not going to come and hustle our people with heart-wrenching stories." And some people are pretty good at raising money, aren't they? Big tears....I'll get sucked into that. I don't want any part of that. Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 16:2, "The first day of every week, lay aside at home what you plan on giving so that when you get to the church to give, you won't be giving out of compulsion or because someone's working the crowd. You'll have decided between you and the Lord what you're going to give." That's the right way to go, certainly. "For a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." Peter says, "You might think they're getting away with it, but they're not." I'd hate to be in their shoes on judgment day.

So here's Peter from a prison cell in Rome, dying, and he wants to warn the church about the false teachers that are roaming the land, looking for a few bucks. They declare that God is broke, that He needs your help, that He can't do it without you. It's all a bunch of lies, by the way. So many are taken in by it, and they're turned from the grace of God and the joy of God and the peace of Jesus, and they're marketed by these false teachers that are headed for destruction. And they buy into their destructive heresies. They make a choice to follow them. And like sheep led to the slaughter, they are used and abused, and Peter just yells, "Look out!" They're always around. They'll distort the truth. They'll deny the Lord Jesus Christ. They'll broaden the way of heaven. They'll cover their own motivations. They're headed for sure destruction.

I don't know if you've ever taken an apple with a hole in it, and you suspect there's a worm in it, and you cut it open to see. In reality, other apples look perfect, and then you break into them, and you find a worm inside, but there was no hole. And you go, "Hey, how's the deal?" Most worms get into apples because they're inside jobs. Eggs are laid by worms in the blossom of the flower so when the apple comes out, the worm's already inside. Right? And you don't eat it, you spit it out. Well do that with false teaching. Spit it out. You may not have seen it coming - looked good on the outside. Spit it out.

Next week, we will see how God hates deception and the end of these charlatans that God wants us to be keenly cognizant of. So read ahead if you will - verses 4 through 9. I'm sorry it's going to take a little while. We've got to get through this.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson

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