

Recognizing Waterless Springs

2 Peter 2

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September 10 and 11, 2011 Jayne and I were passing through New York City. If that date isn't familiar to you, it was the 10th anniversary of the World Trade Center attack. The city was on high alert. We sat at an outdoor café eating supper as we watched police with bomb sniffing dogs walk up and down the street inspecting every parked van they came across.

Terrorists have the attention of the world. The world has changed because of their conviction. They are dangerous for at least three reasons:

1. They are driven by something religious and something deep in their heart.
2. Secondly, what makes them so dangerous is that they are hidden. They are among us and we don't know them until it is too late.
3. Finally, they are willing to sacrifice everything for their cause, and therefore, no threat against them has any power. They have no fear of giving up their lives.

And so our only hope is to discover them before it is too late.

This is especially true in America because we have been so open-minded, and open bordered. And so we are in a state of constant vigilance in the United States.

This is also true in today's church. For many years now a liberalism has been sneaking into our churches.

- It shows itself in doctrinal shallowness.
- They are more concerned with style than substance
- They are more concerned with acceptance than accuracy
- They are more concerned with popularity than with the power of the Word
- They are more concerned with newer ways and their badge of honor is that they have no concern for the truth and faith of the past.

So, when the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?

In this chapter, Peter warns against false prophets. He is concerned because he knows that sooner or later they will appear. There is no avoiding the difficulty. It would be nice if we could always screen out these people so they couldn't get a foothold in our churches, but it is probably impossible. Why?

Because we cannot read others' hearts, they will bring in their false ideas secretly.

False teachers do not come into a congregation advertising their wares. No, they seem to be in agreement with the doctrines of the church, yet little-by-little begin to share their views until they have a following.

Peter points out their presence in the Old Testament and warns his readers they will be coming soon. By the time we get to the book of Jude, they have arrived.

Chapter 2 is closely tied to chapter 1 and is very carefully worded. In chapter 1 Peter has explained that we have true teachers, the apostles, and that the Old Testament was written by true prophets. Peter will now warn us that just as there were also false prophets then, so there will be false prophets soon. There is a structure around chapters 1 and 2, beginning in verse 16 of chapter 1 when Peter explains that the apostles did not follow cleverly invented stories, and then ends up by contrasting the false teachers “made up” stories in chapter 2 verse 3.

Let’s work through our text together now.

In verses one through three, we see a quick contrast between the sleeping, gullible church and the ever alert God. False prophets have arisen in the past and there will soon be false teachers among the church. They will come in secretly, cleverly, and bring heretical teaching. Even teaching that denies the deity and resurrection of Jesus. This will bring swift judgment upon them yet, many in the church will follow them. How can this be?

Paul writing to Timothy warned that in these latter times people will be lovers of themselves and will accumulate for themselves teachers who teach them what they want to hear. And so as Peter writes in verse two, the truth is blasphemed.

In one sense or another, these men are accusing God of dozing off. Dick Lucas equates this to Elijah taunting the prophets of Baal when he speaks of God, “Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” Yet Peter makes it clear that God watches to bring judgment and salvation. Their condemnation is not idle and their destruction is not asleep. Peter then goes on to remind his readers of God’s past judgment on the ungodly in verses 4 through 9.

Verse 4 begins with the word “for” with verse 9 being the corresponding “then”. The structure of verses 4 through 9 is simple: Peter writes one long conditional sentence with four “if” clauses. These four clauses help remind his readers of events in the Old Testament that Peter is using to draw his conclusions in the “then” clause in verse 9.

We see three biblical examples of God’s judgment:

- Fallen angels is the first example. The angel’s judgment was swift although delayed. They are only being held in the present for judgment in the future.
- The flooded world is the second example. In the story that follows of the fallen angels in Genesis, mankind’s rebellion also provoked God’s anger, and he was “grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain”. Noah found favor because he stood out in contrast to these ungodly people.
- And finally we see the judgment upon the filthy cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah were a common pairing that represented sin and rebellion throughout the Old Testament. The particular sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was some form of sexual sin, but Ezekiel adds that they were also arrogant and unconcerned about that sin.

Just as with the flood though, there is grace and mercy and Peter places Lot alongside Noah as a righteous man. The fact that Peter calls Lot righteous may seem a little disturbing to us. Yet Peter insists that Lot was distressed by the conduct of the wicked and his soul was tormented by the lawless deeds that took place around him.

We reach verse nine and see the “then” to the “for” of verse four. God is in control. This is the application of verses four through eight. The Old Testament shows again and again how God has intervened to judge sinners and save the righteous. Peter invites his readers to place themselves in the category of godly. Through the trials that they are enduring, they can be assured that their sacrifices in living by God’s Word in an ungodly environment will be rewarded. God knows how to rescue the godly. While it may be that the readers, and us have to endure trials, there is safety in following God with faithfulness. The temptation is to think that because the unrighteous seem to run the world, God has ceased to rule.

This situation is very common in our world today. Everywhere we look, we find people advocating ideas that the Bible clearly condemns, yet claiming that they are the true way to find God. These religious teachers are often successful, attracting large crowds, making a good living for themselves, and gathering lots of publicity.

How is it that God stands silent as these false teachers in our day twist his truth and lead his people astray?

Peter’s answer is simple: God is not standing silent. There is a great day of judgment to come when the righteous will receive their eternal reward and the unrighteous will suffer eternal condemnation. God is also in control of the unrighteous. The men and women who run the world and the false teachers who try to control the church will find this out the hard way. And so we must not lose heart.

So how do we recognize these false teachers? Peter gives us a good list starting in verse 10:

- we’ve already seen that they will bring heresies and deny the master in verse 1
- in verse 3 we see they are greedy
- In verse 10 we can recognize them because they indulge in the lust of passion, they are bold and willful, and they blaspheme
- in verse 14 they have eyes full of adultery, and entice unsteady souls
- verse 15 reemphasizes their greed
- in verse 18 they are boasters

So what will God do with these false teachers? Although these people’s teaching may have been impressive in verse 12, Peter calls them blasphemers about matters of which they do not understand. They do not understand the truths of Scripture and act simply as natural animals. Once again Peter explains the certainty of their future judgment, “they will be destroyed as the wage for their wrongdoing”. These false teachers follow the corrupt desires of their sinful nature. Peter reveals this in verses 13 through 16.

While we have just seen how these teachers despise authority, Peter now shows us how they follow their corrupt desires.

- They revel in the daytime. This is another term for hedonism. There is self-indulgence, in fact, overindulgence and vice. God’s people are to be spotless and blameless, but these people are blots and blemishes.

- Their eyes are full of adultery; their sin is insatiable. They are out of control, for they never stop sinning.
- They have followed the way of Balaam. Balaam the prophet from the Old Testament who prophesied for money, would have been familiar to Peter's readers. The Old Testament repeatedly holds him up as a warning. Balaam loved the wages of his wickedness.

He was willing to take money in order to entice God to curse the Israelites. The heart of the story and of his dilemma was that he knew what God wanted him to do, and yet in order to profit he was willing to do the opposite.

Balaam's point of decision came when an angel blocked his path with a message from God. But Balaam was so self-absorbed that he could not see the angel. So God had the donkey speak. And Balaam was able to hear the message.

The bottom line regarding these false teachers is verse 1, "they are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm." In other words they have nothing of value to say much as wells without water were a tragic disappointment to travelers in that day. And much like mists driven by the storm there is no power in the water.

First 19 explains even further that they promised freedom that they cannot deliver. Peter understood true freedom as being a slave to Christ in verse one of chapter 1 and in Peter's first letter in chapter 2 where he wrote, "live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil."

And so we see as Peter concludes this chapter that the darkness is reserved for them that are destined for judgment. The false teachers have become entangled in the defilement of the world and have turned back from the truths that they should have known, as a dog returns to his vomit.

This is been a chapter of strong language, vomit and mud. Peter represents sin as vile and horrific. In fact the judgment of these false teachers is so bad that, "the last state has become worse for them than the first." Peter does not explain how they are worse off. Perhaps their sin is more serious, their hearts more hardened, their minds more cynical, yet they have been condemned and wait for their judgment.

So what are we supposed to do?

Know the Scriptures.

Be hopeful today. In the midst of all we have just read look at verse 9, "...the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials..."

No true Christian can be naive about this. It is too important. I hope you will feel yourself lifted up to a new level in the battle that must be fought. If we don't rise to fight the battle the truth of the gospel will continue to be lost. And so we must contend so that the truth exposes the counterfeit.