

2 Peter 2:1-22

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[0 : 00] What do you think is the biggest danger to the church? The biggest threat that we face?! Is it the world out there that's increasingly opposed to us? A world that finds the claims! of Christianity offensive, bigoted and progressive. That's definitely a danger isn't it? But a very good case can be made that our biggest problem is not out there, but it's in here.

There's a problem that most of us don't think about very much at all, if we're even aware of it. But it's a massive problem. A problem that causes many in the church to lose their stability. What is this danger? In chapter 2, verse 1, Peter says this, there will be false teachers among them. And verse 2, many will follow their sensuality. This isn't just a problem for Peter's first readers, it's everyone. The entire New Testament rings with constant alarm about false teachers. Are you aware of this danger? Do you realise that the church is a dangerous place? Peter says there will be false teachers among you. It's a certainty.

And many will follow them. We need to be prepared and on our guard against this threat. Why are these false teachers so dangerous? Well, it's because of what Christians have escaped from. In chapter 1, verse 4, Peter says we've escaped from the corruption that's in the world because of sinful desire. Christians have escaped the dominating force of sinful desire in our lives.

That happens when we came to know Christ. But now, these Christians that Peter's writing to, false teachers are whispering in their ears, come back. You don't need to take sin so seriously.

Chill out. It doesn't really matter how you live. There's not going to be a day of judgment. You can still be like the world. You can fit in. Have fun. Be who you want to be. Follow your desires. May entice people in the church to go back to their old sinful ways. And many will follow their sinuality. Peter's big aim for us in this passage and in this whole letter is this. He says it right at the end of the letter in chapter 3, verse 17.

[2 : 27] You therefore, beloved, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. Peter says don't lose your stability. Don't fall away. Don't go back to your old life. We need to take care that these false teachers don't lead us astray with their lawless sinful ways. So here's what we're going to see. There will be false teachers.

They will entice you to sin. But their end is destruction. So don't listen to them. Now the passage this evening is quite heavy. There are serious and scary things in it.

But let's not shingle away from that. God's word is what we need to hear. Let's dig in. This morning we looked at the bit just before this passage where Peter said pay attention to the authentic word of God from the true prophets and the true apostles. That's what we saw at the end of chapter 1. And the reason that's so important is because there will be false teachers.

That's our first point. There will be false teachers. And Peter says there have always been false teachers. Look down again at chapter 2, verse 1. But false prophets also arose among the people just as there will be false teachers among you. In other words, in the past there were false prophets among God's people, not outside but inside the household of God. And we see that all over the Old Testament. False prophets contradicting what God said through his true prophets. This isn't a new thing. There have always been false teachers. But what about now? Peter carries on. Just as there will be false teachers among you. Not there might be, or watch out just in case. There will be false teachers among you. It's not just one particular era. All throughout the history of God's church there have always been false teachers and it's no different there. So we have to ask ourselves, do we feel the danger of false teachers among us? Do you think that there could be false teachers in your church? I'm not just talking about people who stand up front and preach God's word to us. It could be anyone in the church. False teachers spread their message in home groups and conversations after the service of the church. And just in the normal life of the church, there will be people who speak and live a false gospel. It's one of the reasons that this denomination is so careful about the

way that ministers get ordained. You're tested on your life and your doctrine, your teaching before you can be an elder in the church. But false teachers can be anyone, not just the visible, not just the visible, upfront teachers. I don't know about you, but I often don't have any real sense of danger and urgency around false teaching. You might think of it as out there on the internet or in less conservative churches than ours. Surely there aren't any false teachers in our church. Well that would be really naive to think. There will be false teachers among you. And in case you think Peter is overreacting based on his current circumstances, we need to see this is all over the New Testament. It's actually astounding when you start noticing it. False teachers come up in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Jude, Galatians, Colossians, 2 Corinthians, 1 John, 2 John. It's all over the place. There will be false teachers among you.

Jesus himself said, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. Beware. Verse 2 tells us what effect false teachers will have in churches.

[6 : 38] It says there, many will follow their sensuality. Many will follow them. This is not just something that happens occasionally. It's not that one or two people will be lost. Lots of people will follow them. People will leave the church because they want to live in sin and they know that the church won't tolerate it. Or they're living in sin and hiding it from the church.

Regardless, they followed the false teaching and lost their stability. Are we prepared for this danger? There will be false teachers among us. Now before we go on to our next point, just to say this isn't about having a suspicious attitude towards everyone in your church family. It's not about crashing down on anyone who doesn't know the gospel very well yet and gets things wrong. That's not what Peter's saying. And we'll see later on what these false teachers are really like. It's not the same thing as being immature in your faith. But before Peter gets into what they're like and what they're saying, he really wants us to know where they're headed. So this is our second point. They are going to hell. Listen to how many times he repeats this. Verse 1, they are bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

Verse 3, their condemnation from long ago is not idle and their destruction is not asleep. Verse 9, the Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment. Verse 12, they're born to be destroyed. Again, they will be destroyed in their destruction. Verse 17, for them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.

[8 : 31] Peter says over and over again their destiny is destruction. In other words, they are going to hell. He says it so many times because he wants to make sure we don't follow them there.

Verses 4 to 10 in particular, all about proving that they will be judged. And before we get into that, there are a few reasons why Peter is telling us this. Why should we care that false teachers will be judged and sent to hell? Well, firstly, Peter is countering this big lie that is in their false teaching. We'll find out later in the letter that they're saying Jesus is not really coming back to judge. There'll be no day of judgment. In chapter 3, verse 4, they scoff and say, where is the promise of his coming? If he's really coming to judge, where is he? So Peter really wants us to see that Jesus is coming back to judge and that these false teachers are done for. But secondly, it's a big warning for us. Peter says many of you will follow them. And you need to be warned because if you follow them in their central sin, you'll be judged too. There are two destinies. Peter says clearly in verse 9, either you'll be one of the godly who are rescued from the judgment, or you'll be one of the unrighteous, you face the terrifying judgment of God. We need to know their end so that we avoid it at all costs. So how do we know that they will face judgments? Well, verse 4 to 10, Peter has this really long sentence, which is an if-then sentence. If X happened in the past, then we know why it will happen in the future. That's the kind of reasoning.

Verse 4, if God did not spare angels when they sinned. Verse 5, if he did not spare the ancient world. Verse 6, if he turned Solomon and Gomorrah into ashes. Verse 7, if he rescued righteous lot. Verse 9, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishments until the day of judgment. We get four past events from scripture about angels, Noah, Sodom and Lot. And all of these four events prove that there will be a future judgment, but the righteous will be rescued from it. So firstly, angels. Verse 4, for if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgments. This is talking about the fall of angelic beings. There were angels who rebelled against God, the chief of them being Satan.

And Peter says, what happened to them? They were cast into hell. They are waiting in hell until the day of judgment. And Peter's point is, if God didn't spare them, why do you think he will spare the

ungodly? If he's thrown them into a gloomy dungeon until judgment, what makes us think it will be any different for those who rebel against him now? It's the same thing with Noah. Verse 5, if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. I think we're used to, the story of Noah and the flood is a nice kid's story. Oh, look at Noah and the animals in the ark. It's a nice bedtime story. Actually, the flood is one of the most awful, terrible events that ever happened. The whole population was wiped out and drowned except Noah and a few others.

God's awful judgment fell on sinful mankind until there were bodies floating in the water. It's not a nice bedtime story. It's supposed to teach us that if God did not spare the entire ancient world, and he's not going to spare the ungodly in the final judgment, it just won't happen.

[12:49] And yet that's not the only thing it teaches us, because he did preserve Noah, who was a herald of righteousness. And so this unchangeable God, he still knows, verse 9, how to rescue the godly from trials. When judgment falls, the righteous will be safe.

Thirdly, Sodom and Gomorrah. Verse 6, by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly. Do you remember that story of Sodom and Gomorrah? The city where the evil was so terrible, we can't even talk about it with kids in the room. And what did God do? The Lord rained down sulfur and fire out of heaven until the whole city was destroyed. No survivors. That is a picture of what is going to happen to the ungodly. It's not that God was an angry God in the Old Testament, and now he's a loving God in the New Testament. He's always been a God of love and of justice, and he will judge the wicked. We have to take this seriously.

Fourthly, Lot. Verse 7, and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked, for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and hurt.

Lot lived in Sodom, and it says there that Lot was greatly distressed by the sinful ways of the wicked. His soul was tormented day after day by what he saw and what he heard. The consistent breaking of God's commands had troubled him because he was a righteous man. And God rescued him when the judgment fell. The point that Peter wants us to get is right there in verse 9.

[14:49] The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials. He knows how to make sure we don't get swallowed up in the coming judgment. Do you see all these examples? The contrast is between the ungodly and the righteous. The angels who sinned. Noah, herald of righteousness. The world of the ungodly. Righteous Lot. The point is that these false teachers are like the Sodomites.

They're like the wicked at the flood. They're like the fallen angels. They're living in sin, unconcerned about the coming judgment. And the Holy Spirit says the ungodly will be judged, and the righteous will be saved. We have to be careful not to get the wrong idea here. It's not saying that we earn our rescue by how righteous we are. No, we are saved by Christ's righteousness alone. That is clear all over God's word. But it's also clear that those who are truly saved will become godly. It's inevitable. Because God's spirit is in you. Peter said in chapter 1, his divine power has given us all things for a godly life. So if we don't care about godliness, like these false teachers, if we're consistently living in sin, that's a sign we're not truly saved. We're headed for judgment. Now there's a difference between battling and struggling and wrestling with sin. That's what true believers do. And then the casual strolling through life, not concerned with sin. That's what the false teachers do. Which one are you?

Because one will face judgment. And one will face salvation. I remember when this hit me. I heard someone preach on Romans 8 which says, if you live according to the flesh, you will die. In other words, if you live in unrepentant sin, you will go to hell. And I've never heard anyone say it that directly, but that's what the Bible says. Be killing sin or it will be killing you. That is a famous quote. But how does that verse end? It says, but if by the spirit we put to death the deeds of the body, we will live. His divine power is at work in us for godliness. So we've seen two things. There will be false teachers and they are going to help. Don't follow them. What does this mean for us? Here's our final point. Don't be enticed. Don't be enticed. We're looking at verse 10 to the end of the chapter. And because of time, we'll speed through most of verses 10 to 17. Just focus on 18 to the end. But in verse 14, Peter warns us what these false teachers will do. He says, they entice unsteady souls. They entice you. And this word entice basically means to lure somebody by the use of bait. And they're targeting unsteady souls, wobbly Christians. This is the whole point of Peter's

letter. He wants to ensure that those he's writing to won't lose their steadiness and fall away from their faith. Flip over for a second to chapter 3 verse 17. This is how Peter ends the letter. It's the key summary verse of what he's trying to say. Chapter 3 verse 17.

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. It's the same word there. Stability. Steadiness. They entice unsteady souls. So we must take care that we don't lose our steadiness. How do they entice people? What is the bait that they use to get you into the trap? Well, have a look at verse 18. They entice by sensual passions of the flesh. In other words, the bait is sin. And that might be surprising to us. We often think of false teachers as purely an intellectual problem. People who teach dodgy doctrine, dodgy teachings which persuade you intellectually and you end up believing the wrong thing. But Peter is saying actually their main strategy is to seduce you with sin. It's not mainly intellectual, it's moral. So Peter describes them and their sin in detail because if we're going to avoid enticement, we need to know what to watch out for. So here's what they're like. Verse 10 says that there are two things that characterize them. They indulge in the lust of defying passion and they despise authority. So basically sexual sin and despising authority. Firstly, authority. Have a look at the end of verse 19. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones.

[20 : 02] Whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. What is this talking about? Well, essentially, they have no fear of the spiritual forces of evil. They're not aware that they should tremble at these dangerous beings. When it says there that they blaspheme the glorious ones, who is it talking about?

Well, it's most likely demons. This verse is really similar to a verse in Jude. Jude chapter, verse 8, says these people also reject authority and blaspheme the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, the Lord rebuke you. So the point is, these false teachers are not scared to make light of the devil and his demons. They have no fear of them. Even the archangel Michael didn't dare to say anything blasphemous against the devil and his demons. Instead, he said, the Lord rebuke you. But these false teachers have no healthy fear of spiritual evil. Now that might all seem a bit strange, but I think the point is, these false teachers are not worried at all that there's a real spiritual battle there. They think we can sin as much as we want and there's no fear of the spiritual forces of evil. I think this can be a problem with us too. Sometimes we're not that bothered about

Satan. But if we're not scared of the devil, we're fools. When Peter says they do not tremble as they blaspheme the demons, the implication is they should tremble. Peter has already said in his first letter, your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Or as Paul says in Ephesians 6, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. There's a real spiritual battle going on. And it's a fool who says, I'll be fine in my sin with no fear of the lion who wants to tear your hearts. Now we don't need to be terrified of Satan because Christ is in us and he is stronger. But we do need to take this battle seriously. So they despise authority and secondly, sexual sin. Verse 14, they have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They can't get enough. They're insatiable for sin and they want you to join the minutes. Peter's saying, watch out for ungodly people in the church, people living in sin. You will know false teachers by their disregard for sin. They're teaching with their lies as well as their words that godliness doesn't matter. And it's striking the strong language Peter uses to describe them. He wants us to shun them. Here's a list of the insults in this passage. They are irrational animals, blots and blemishes, accursed children, dogs that return to their own vomit, pigs that wallow in the dirt, ignorance, greedy, foolish, slaves of corruption. It goes on and on, a barrage of attacks. It's in no doubt the way that Peter feels about these false teachers. We're supposed to feel the same way. They do not belong among us. And the thing that's so surprising is he's talking about people in the church. Verse 13, they are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions while they feast with you. In other words, they're taking the Lord's supper. These are people who would have been considered part of the flock. But in fact they're wolves in sheep's clothing. And this is so dangerous, especially for newer Christians. It says in verse 18, they entice those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. This is new Christians who have just escaped from the life of sin. Through knowing Christ they've been washed from their sins. They've turned from their old lies. But they've barely escaped and here come the false teachers saying, Christians can have

fun too. God wants you to be happy, to follow your hearts. Why would he give you these desires if he didn't expect you to express them? There's no judgment day. Or maybe in our circles it might be. There's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. So don't worry about sin. He forgives you. Christians aren't under the law anymore. Don't worry about it. They will entice you to sin. But don't listen. Look at verse 19. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

This is a watchword for the false teachers. Freedom. They're always promising freedom. Freedom to do whatever you want, whenever you want. But actually all they're offering is slavery. Acting on all your desires just means that your desires control you. Freedom is having the control to choose not to indulge even when your sinful desires want to. In reality, these false teachers are overcome by sin totally enslaved. They can't stop. Look at verse 20.

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. Here's what Peter's saying. These people have heard the gospel. [25 : 56] They've repented from their old sinful ways and believed in Christ, but now they're going back again. They are again entangled in sin and overcome. They've gone back to slavery after having escaped from the corruption in the world. This is a warning to us. Don't follow them. Don't go back. Don't lose your stability. There's a scene in Lord of the Rings where the hobbits come to Shelob's leg. Shelob is a giant poisonous spider. Frodo the hobbit is stumbling about in the cave. He's completely lost and he feels something sticky on him. He flails around. He's trying to get it off him, but the more he flails, the more he gets stuck in his horrible sticky fluids. Eventually he can't move. He's completely stuck in a giant spider's well, totally at the mercy of Shelob. Long story short, he's rescued and he escapes.

Now wouldn't it be a terrible ending if Frodo thinks, I can handle the situation now. And he goes back to the spider's lair that he just escaped, only to get entangled again and caught in the well. That's the picture here. Don't go back to your sin. It will entangle you.

You will be overcome and the last state will be worse than the first. Let me ask you, is that you today? Have you been sliding backwards into your old sins? Have you become casual about sin? If you detect any of that, listen to these warnings. It's very serious. If you're enticed and overcome, it would have been better, says Peter, for you to never have known Jesus. Maybe you're allowing porn to become a passer in your life. Maybe it's fooling around with a girlfriend or boyfriend. Maybe it's indulging desires of same-sex attraction, whatever it is. If these sins are not bothering us anymore, if we're not fighting to put it to death, Peter says, many will follow their sensuality. Don't be one of those women. False teachers will lead you to hell. Don't be enticed. Peter finishes this section with two images. And they go show what it's like when we go back to our old sinful life. And they're disgusting images. Look at verse 22. What the true proverb says has happened to them. The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire. Have you ever seen a dog vomit something up, and then later on they come back and they sniff it and sometimes even eat what they've vomited? That's what it's like if we return to our sin. Or imagine a pig having a splash in the water, washing all the dirt off. It comes out squeaky clean, only to go straight back to roaring the moat. Let's not be dogs or pigs, returning to the uncleanness which we've escaped through Christ. There will be false teachers among you. They will entice you to sin, but they are headed for help. Don't be enticed. Let's pray.

Our Father God, what we've just heard is very serious. Your word is said that false teachers and those who follow will face judgment. And yet we trust that you will keep the godly through trials. You rescued Noah. You rescued us. You will rescue those who are yours when the judgment comes. Help us not to be enticed by sin, but to make every effort for godliness by your divine power at work in us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.