

West Valley Church
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07/05/20

On This Rock Part Twelve *2 Peter 2, pt. 2*

I want you to know that I always pray about what I am going to preach on, even when we are going through a series like this one; we are continuing in our series called “On This Rock,” and we’ve been going through the letters of Peter in the New Testament. Although the Scripture passages are laid out for us, there is always a fresh word alongside the important reminders and instructions that maybe we’ve heard before. I want to make sure that what I say is aligned with the Spirit and with the Word. But that doesn’t mean that I don’t wrestle with God over what to say. Part of me this week wanted to talk about how we are doing with this pandemic, because I know we are all getting very weary of it. Some of us are discouraged, depressed, and lonely. Some of us are grieving the loss of a loved one due to the virus, or because of the virus we aren’t allowed to visit a loved one who is hospitalized. Some of us have been out of work. I know *all* of us want to get back to church soon. Some of us think we are victims of political over-reach, and others of us think our community isn’t doing enough to protect us from the virus. And all those opinions have been shared with me from people, who are letting me know when we should open up church again!

And there is the angst and upheaval that we constantly hear on the news or on social media. We realize that there are major changes going on in our culture – many of them for the better, some of them being propagandized, and it is unnerving and frustrating and makes us fearful or angry or helpless. I want you to know, your Leadership Team (the Church Board you elected) and pastors are watching the situation closely and we’ve had many, many conversations about how and when to open. For sure, we will err on the side of caution for the safety of our most vulnerable people in our church. Your leaders are setting their own feelings of their individual rights aside, and doing what the Bible tells us to do: looking out for the most vulnerable.

I know this time is frustrating; I understand all of that, believe me. I’ve experienced all those feelings and thoughts. And it makes my prayers for you that much heavier, because I feel the weight of this on all of you. So while it is heavy on my heart and in my prayers, I wanted to preach about it, and have prayed about that. But while I am acknowledging these things with you, the Lord has also been clear that he wants us to turn to his Word. It’s been amazing to me how at times, these passages from 1 and 2 Peter have spoken directly to our situations. Other times it becomes more of a way to put that stuff aside and focus on God. But either way, how can we ever go wrong – whatever our circumstances might be – how can we ever go wrong by leaning into God’s Word, by learning to be closer to Christ and by allowing the Spirit to transform us more and more into Christ’s likeness and nature? I pray that is what this time will do for us.

Last week we looked at 2 Peter 2, and we saw the warning signs to look for in the behaviors of false teachers and preachers, and that was helpful to keep us from getting spiritually off track. Today we are going to look at chapter two again, and this time I believe it will challenge our own walk with Christ and sound some warnings for us. Because even though this chapter is primarily about the false teachers, we can learn from their *negative* example just as much as we can learn from the Bible's positive examples.

Let me read the first twelve verses, and let's learn from them:

“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness 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 depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after 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 the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish.”
(2 Peter 2:1-12, niv)

Last week we identified these bad guys and what they do. Now we will learn from their example, starting with...

1. Don't believe them (vs. 1-3)

Peter gives us plenty of warning here not to believe what they are teaching. False teachers and preachers are sneaky; they will very subtly and secretly introduce destructive heresies, Peter says. A heresy is any teaching or doctrine or idea that is outside of, or counter to, established biblical truth. They'll start with something innocuous or small, but before you know it, they will have worked their way to cause you to even question that Jesus is God – the One and Only. It's bad enough that they teach false truths, but they do it to manipulate you. They do it out of selfish motives and self-satisfaction. Sometimes they'll do it just for

the sheer power and control, but they'll usually do it to get your money from you, to make themselves rich. Now we talked about this last week, so I'm not going to repeat myself, but you've got to know the truths that the Bible teaches so you don't fall into their trap. That's why we provide you the sermon manuscript and we put the Scripture references in the notes: so you can look up the verses and make sure I'm telling you the truth according to the Bible. Don't take my word for it; go to the Word for it! Be like the Bereans in the book of Acts; this is what it says about them:

“But the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and gladly listened to the message. They searched the Scriptures day by day to check up on Paul and Silas’ statements to see if they were really so.” (Acts 17:11, tlb)

Go to the Word so you won't be misled. The problem is that these false teachers are often very charismatic personalities, so you *want* to believe what they are saying, which makes it all the more important to know the difference; to know the truth. It's important not to believe them, because if you do, that will soon impact your attitudes and behavior.

If you play any sports, you realize before long that it's not just a physical activity or game; there is a mental side of the game, too. If an athlete is going to do his or her best, then he or she can't get into their own head, and neither can they let their opponent get into their head. Once you've listened to any voice – yours or your opponent's – that causes you to question your skill or ability, or distract your focus, then your ability to execute will reflect that line of thinking.

That's why Peter next warns us...

2. Don't act like them (10-12)

If we start to believe what they are saying, before long we will begin to act on those beliefs. The Bible warns us in Proverbs 23:7:

“For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he.” (Proverbs 23:7, nkjv)

What we think is what we become. If we believe these false teachers, it won't take long before we will start acting like they do. I don't think we need to spend too much time on this because really all you need to do is review what we learned last week to realize that their behavior is *not* something we want to copy. Peter uses these words to describe their behavior: depraved, greedy, exploitative, shameless, arrogant, unreasoning, instinctual, carousing, reveling in sin, adulterers, seducers, empty, boastful, lustful, slaves of depravity, animals, like dogs and pigs. All that is in chapter two! We hear that and think, “Well I'd *never* act that way!” But if you are *not* on guard and let a little false teaching in, you *will* be acting in those ways before long. Remember what the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 5:9:

“This false teaching is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough!” (Galatians 5:9, nlt)

That's why Peter has been warning us over and over again to be vigilant, to be sober minded, to be on our guard.

So don't believe them, don't act like them, and...

3. Heed the warnings and assurances (4-10)

Peter warns us by sharing a reminder of God's history in dealing with sin, and gives assurances to us if we keep living for Christ and not ourselves. I want to show you that he gives us three warnings, or negative examples, and two assurances, or positive examples. I'll show them to you and then quickly explain them.

Essentially Peter says, IF: God didn't spare angels (negative example, vs. 4), and God didn't spare the ancient world (negative example, vs. 5), but God protected Noah (positive example, vs. 5), and God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (negative example, vs 6), but God rescued Lot (positive example, vs. 7-8), THEN: God knows how to rescue godly people (positive conclusion, vs. 9a) and God knows how to hold the unrighteous for judgment (negative conclusion, vs. 9b-10a).

So quickly let me explain, and then we'll be on our way to a better walk with Christ.

When Peter talks about God not sparing the angels, that's kind of difficult for us to understand. The original readers understood it, but us, not so much. Part of the problem is that Peter's not referencing our Old Testament; he's referencing some other well-known Jewish spiritual writings. In the Bible we have some indirect references to the sin of angels, but nothing to the extent that Peter is referring to. Peter is likely getting this information from the Books of Enoch, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus, which are well-known ancient Hebrew spiritual books that have several stories in them that we don't find in our Bibles. I don't want to spend a great deal of time going down that rabbit hole, so let me just say this: if angels, who are far more powerful than us and are always in God's presence but *still* sinned, if they won't get away with it and God sent them into the pit and locked them up until judgment day, then we can be sure that God will do the same to false teachers – and to any of us – if we sin. *That's why we need Christ!* We can talk about those angel stories some other time!

Next, if God didn't spare the ancient world, but instead sent the flood, and if God didn't spare sinful cities and societies like Sodom and Gomorrah who faced destruction, then the false teachers and anyone else who sins won't get away with it either. On the positive side, if God spared a righteous man like Noah and his family, and if God spared a righteous man like Lot, then certainly God can rescue and protect and take care of those who put their faith in Christ, when we remain faithful – even and especially in this pandemic.

Now, one last thing before we share communion and then close: if you read the stories in the Old Testament about Noah, and about Lot, those guys were not exactly paragons of virtue or sterling examples of sanctification. The book of Genesis shares a shameful story of drunken Noah after the flood, and Genesis also amply documents the shortcomings of Lot. So are these guys really that good of examples for us, and why did God spare them? Well, because God is merciful, and despite their failures, they never lost sight of the Lord. Peter selected these guys because the original readers – and us – we can identify with them. Every Christian knows that we are saved by grace, not by good works, but even after we are saved, and even after the Spirit fills us, we are still prone to struggle and we are aware of how short we fall sometimes – like Noah and Lot. But because of Christ's death and

resurrection, we can keep doing better and growing more and more like Christ; not excusing sin, but confessing it and repenting of it, being forgiven, and stopping sinning. So let's never lose sight of Jesus, let's keep living for him, and let's not let an ounce of false teaching into our lives. God can deliver and sustain you, even in this difficult time. Keep your eyes on Jesus and stay committed to following him; he will deliver and sustain you!

Let's prepare now to share together in communion.

We acknowledge our need for, and dependence on, Christ's death for us as we share together in communion. May this affirm and strengthen our faith in Jesus.

Communion

Let me close with Peter's closing words, that we'll look at in a couple weeks, from the end of 2 Peter:

"Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." (2 Peter 3:17-18, niv)