

2 Peter Chapter 2

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, everybody. It's good to be with you again. Hope you've enjoyed this lovely day. It's great to be back amongst God's people to be able to share together in our worship around his word. Just after the people of Israel came out of Egypt and they were looking to move through the desert, they were given this encouragement. After leaving Succoth, they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place.

In front of the people. Wonderful picture there of the Lord guiding his people physically in order that they could move and travel. And it's encouraging, isn't it, to know that our Lord guides us all the way in our lives. And that is the theme of our first hymn, your hand, O God, has guided your flock from age to age.

So let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the lovely day that we've enjoyed. We thank you for the beauty of your creation. We thank you for being able to meet with one another tonight, but beyond that, Lord, we pray that we would go from this building tonight, knowing that we have met with the living Lord. Father, we do not ask that you would be here with us because we know that you are. You have promised that whenever even a small number are gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus. There you are in the midst of us. But we pray, Lord, for that sense of your presence with us.

And we thank you, as we've just been singing, that you are the God who has guided your people from age to age. And we thank you, Lord, for your word, which is our guide. And we pray, Lord, that it would be our guide tonight. So help us, Lord, to love it. Help us to have our lives individually and corporately continually be reformed by your word. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, let's sing together one sing from God's word now. And we're going to read from Matthew chapter 13. This isn't our text tonight, but it has a bearing on it. Matthew 13, the parable of the wheat and the weeds. If you have the church Bible, it's on page 979. We're going to read from verses 24 to 28.

[3 : 21] And then from 36 to 39. So part of the parable of the weeds. Matthew 13, verse 24.

Jesus told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.

But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner's servants came to him and said, Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?

An enemy did this, he replied. And then moving on to verse 36. Then Jesus left the crowd and went into the house.

[4 : 24] His disciples came to him and said, Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field. He answered, The one who sowed the good seed is the son of man.

The field is the world and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one. And the enemy who sows them is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age. And the harvesters are angels. So reads God's word.

Well, in that parable I read a little earlier, the parable of the wheat and weeds, or as somebody as old as me always thinks of it, the wheat and the tares, Jesus pointed out to his disciples that wherever God sows good seed, there is an enemy, not an equal enemy, but an enemy, Satan, who loves to sow weeds.

And that is also very much the case in the passage that we're going to look at tonight, 2 Peter chapter 2 verses 1 to 3.

[5 : 54] If you have the church Bibles, it's page 1, 2, 2, 3. So let me just read that for you.

2 Peter 2 verses 1 to 3. 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 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. If you were here with us this morning, you would have heard from the end of chapter 1, Peter extolling the Old Testament scriptures and the prophets who wrote them, these men who spoke from God, who were swept along by the Holy Spirit and wrote down exactly what God wanted them to write, both for the people who would originally read it and then even for those of us centuries later.

[7 : 30] So Peter was full of praise and extolling the virtues of this. But then as he starts chapter 2, he points out that even then there were false prophets and there were false teachers.

There were weeds amongst the wheat, tears amongst the wheat. Martin Lloyd-Jones pointed out, there is never any easy optimism to be found in the New Testament.

Yes, there's optimism, but it's not an easy optimism. We have to be on our guard. So that's what I'm hoping to do tonight to help us to be on our guard.

There's going to be four points tonight. So you'll know where I'm heading if I tell you where we're going to from the start. We're going to look at the perpetual problem of false teachers.

In other words, the problem has been there throughout all the ages and it's still here now. Secondly, we're going to look at some of the characteristics of the false teachers that Peter points out.

[8 : 46] Then we're going to look at the fruits of this false teaching. And finally, our response to it. So hopefully, you'll see the pattern as we're going on.

So first of all then, the perpetual problem of false teachers. And first of all, perhaps I need to sort of explain what I mean and what Peter means by a false teacher.

I don't mean by that everybody, anybody who has said something mistakenly from the pulpit.

Because if that were the case, I'd be disappearing out the door now and anybody who has stood in a pulpit would do as well.

Preachers are not infallible. And people will make single errors which perhaps years later you look back on and think, oh, did I really say that?

Or things that you don't even recognise at the end of your ministry. So we're not talking about mistakes or temporary lapses by genuine Christian teachers.

[9 : 56] But we're looking at consistent, deliberate error by those professing to be the people of God.

Notice that, professing to be the people of God. Peter starts off there, 2 Peter 2.1 and he's looking back to the Old Testament times and he says, there were also false prophets among the people. They weren't from outside. They were among the people. And he says, just as there will be false teachers among you.

And if somehow or the other Peter was able to make, you know, a swift visit through the centuries to the UK in, you know, 2000 and whatever we are now, I've lost it.

2018. 2018. Then I'm sure he would say the same. There will be false teachers amongst you. So let's just look at those three eras.

[11 : 07] False prophets, says Peter, in the Old Testament. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses warned the people then that once they were in the promised land, they would find this problem of people coming up with false teachers leading them away from the true and the living God.

And he said that they had to beware of that and on the lookout for it. And if you look through the Old Testament, particularly if you look at all we think of as the major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, in every one of them, you will find them warning the people to be on their guard against false prophets, against people who were seemingly talking from God and yet were not doing so.

Let me pick out just a couple of examples of that. In Ezekiel, Ezekiel chapter 13, the prophet there says, the word of the Lord came to me, son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, notice,

who are now prophesying.

Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the sovereign Lord says, woe to the foolish prophets prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing.

So these were people who were pretend, who had every appearance of being the prophets of Israel and yet they were simply spouting from their own imagination and not from what God had said to them.

[13:08] Another great example of it is found in 1 Kings 22. I was listening to somebody speaking about this passage at a conference a couple of months ago, a prophet perhaps we don't know as well as some of the others, a man called Micaiah.

And the kings of the north and the south had actually joined together at this time, Ahab and Jehoshaphat, and they had come to see whether they should go up against Ramoth Gilead, an enemy city, an enemy people, and whether they should go up against them.

And many of the prophets of Israel say, yes, you must go up, you will have success. But Jehoshaphat was just a little bit wary of this and he said to Ahab, have you really inquired of the Lord about this?

And he said, is there no other prophet in Israel? And it's interesting, Ahab's answer. Well, yes, he said, there is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but all was bad.

He is Micaiah, son of Imlah. And Micaiah was somebody who was truly a prophet of the Lord. And he came and told the king, you mustn't do this, you will be defeated.

[14:41] But Ahab never liked this guy who always said things bad about him, ignored him, still did what the false prophets were doing and was killed, along with many, many others of the Israelites.

R.C. Sproul said, the most destructive threat to the people of the God in the Old Testament was not the armies of the Philistines, the Assyrians, or the Amalekites, but the false prophets within their gates.

That, he said, was the most destructive threat to the people. What about in the New Testament age? What about in Peter's age? Well, there were obviously false teachers around then.

That is part of the reason for him writing this letter. The whole of the second chapter, and much of the third, is written warning against this false teaching, which was either in the churches or was about to come into it.

And it's not just Peter who's got a, you know, a horse about that, you know. Paul speaks about it as well. If you read through Paul's letters, in the vast majority of them, he is warning the people who he's writing to about the dangers of people coming in and teaching another gospel which is no gospel at all.

[16:17] What about us today? Is there any danger that there could be any false teaching in the visible church in the world today?

I think we'd be pretty naive, wouldn't we, if we thought that there wasn't. And there are some areas where it's very, very clear.

You might think of the worldwide ecumenical movement. Now, let's say, first of all, that in a sense the desires and the aims of the ecumenical movement is very laudable.

For the church to be united and to put on a united front against those who have no belief in God is a very laudable thing.

But sadly, in order to achieve that organizational unity, truth has just been laid on one side and there has been no discrimination made between those who hold to the word of God and those who simply follow their own ideas.

[17:35] And then there is the prosperity gospel, or sometimes known as the health and wealth, where the expectation that is laid before people is that if you follow Jesus, you're going to be wealthy and you're going to be healthy, which seems fairly obviously to go against the Lord's teaching, which warns us of hardships and persecutions if we follow the Lord Jesus truly.

I noticed that at the September Bible School that you've got coming up, James Swanson is coming to speak, and we were very privileged two or three years ago to go over to northern Cyprus and to see James and his family and Andrew and the family and the church, and it was a joy to meet with them.

But some of you will know that part of James' work now is he actually goes over to Africa to some of the countries where the students he is meeting in Cyprus come from, and he is finding there that the prosperity gospel is very widespread, and he is having to spend much time teaching these African students in Cyprus of the dangers of that sort of teaching.

To be honest, those are fairly easy targets, aren't they? And I suspect that it's unlikely that people in churches like yourselves are going to be led astray in those ways.

But perhaps more dangerous for us are teachings that have come in over the last decade or so from people who come from the evangelical wing of the church.

[19 : 27] church. And there are people who, if you like, openly come out of that wing, but who are denying things like the penal substitutionary atonement.

In other words, that the Lord Jesus died for our sins, that he bore the Father's wrath on his body for our sins, something that has been taught for centuries, centuries, and yet, in recent days, has been doubted.

Even one writer speaking of it as being a cosmic attack on the sun.

And we need to be on our guards about that as well. Cosmic abuse, the phrase was going from me.

So that's something of the fact that false teaching has been throughout all generations.

Let's look at what Peter says something about the characteristics of false teaching. The most obvious one is that the false teacher or the false prophet is one who has not been called or sent by God.

[20 : 46] Unlike the Old Testament prophets who spoke from God, and true teachers today who wrestle with the scriptures and look to the Holy Spirit to help them be faithful to them.

Jeremiah said of some of these people, or the Lord said through Jeremiah, I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

And it's interesting, we began this morning by the fact that some of these false teachers in Peter's day accused him of cleverly invented stories, whereas the reality was, as Peter says here, these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up.

they were accusing Peter and others of making up stories about Jesus coming again, where he says in actual fact it was they who were making up the stories.

But secondly, Peter tells us that they insinuate themselves and their heresies into the church.

[22 : 08] They don't come around with placards around their neck saying I am a false teacher. You know, it's not coming in very openly.

He says there in verse 1, they will secretly introduce destructive heresies. That word that is translated here, they will secretly introduce.

It has the sense of something being done in secret. It also has the sense of something being brought alongside. So the sense that much of what they say may be true, but it's almost more dangerous because the false teaching, the heresy, is brought in alongside something which is true and therefore it becomes much more difficult to recognize.

Poisonous error brought in alongside truth. Thirdly, Peter says that they deny the sovereign Lord.

It must have been quite painful for Peter to write that as he perhaps remembered back at the time at the time that he had once denied his sovereign Lord. But these were doing this consistently.

[23 : 39] Now again, how were they doing it? You know, they weren't going around saying, you know, I can't stand the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't like him. but they denied him in more surreptitious ways.

One way in which we can deny the Lord Jesus is simply by leaving him out of what we say to people, of what we teach people.

Several years ago, we received a Christmas leaflet in our house from a church that was somewhere roundabout.

And it was about light. And I think I counted it, there were about 300 words in this little message.

You couldn't believe how somebody could write 300 words and say nothing.

You know? Light was coming into the world. In those 300 words, one word that wasn't there was Jesus. Not mentioned. It was Christmas time. Here was the leaflet all about the light of the world.

[24 : 47] Jesus wasn't mentioned. We can deny the Lord by not having him central in our teaching.

We can deny him by ignoring the need for his atonement. If in any way we teach in a way that somehow suggests that we can be right with God, we without his atoning death, then we are denying the sovereign Lord.

If we make him out to be less than who he is, a great prophet, a great teacher, but not the eternal son of God, then we are denying the sovereign Lord.

God's and we deny him also by flouting his moral authority. These teachers were living in such a way that was totally against the moral teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And then there was greedy exploitation. He says there in verse 3, in their greed, these teachers will exploit you.

[26 : 07] Rather than being servants, they're out for what they can get, whether that was in terms of finance or sometimes perhaps in terms of power over people.

Again, Paul warned Timothy to be careful of people who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

I read in the paper a couple of weeks ago about a televangelist over in America who has been asking his subscribers and the people who listen to his television show for money for a new private jet so that he could get around his flock more usefully.

He had two already, but the Lord had told him that he needed this new, better private jet. Now, I don't know his heart, but I must admit when I read that, I have my suspicions.

In their greed, these teachers will exploit you. And finally, what is very common about false teaching is it tells people what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear.

[27 : 40] Verse 2, he says, many will follow them. It's attractive what they're saying. Often, in the Old Testament period, particularly before Israel was sent into exile, it was the false prophets who were saying to the people of Israel, you'll never be sent into exile.

God would never take you out of this promised land that he gave you into another one. You're his people. He would never do that. But it was people like Jeremiah and Ezekiel who would say, yes, if you abuse your position, if you turn away from God, he will not leave you unpunished.

He will send. it didn't make them popular. It didn't make them popular, but they were true. With false prophet, there tends to be a desire for popularity and to say what's needed.

So, as I say, in the Old Testament times, it was don't tell the people about exile. In Peter's day, there's no need to have a pure sexual life. That's what was being taught here.

In our day, perhaps it is, there's no need to take unpopular positions to go against the tide. And what were the fruits of their teaching?

[29 : 16] Well, what about amongst their followers? Some of the followers may have been false disciples themselves and would be led to destruction. They would be put off seeking the true way of salvation.

If you put forward a false way of salvation, it prevents people seeking after the true way. But even amongst true believers, there could be exploitation and they can be led into shameful ways.

That's what Peter was warning, presumably people who were true believers. In their greed, those teachers will exploit you. In verse two, many will follow their shameful ways.

And what about the impact on the non-Christian world of false teaching? It besmirches the way of truth.

Peter says it brings the way of truth into disrepute. truth into because the non-Christian world doesn't differentiate. Richard Baucom said the adherence of the false teachers by their scandalously immoral behavior were giving Christianity a bad name amongst their non-Christian neighbors.

[30 : 40] false And what about the false teachers themselves? Well, there's a very sober word from Peter.

He says they bring swift destruction on themselves. They bring condemnation and destruction. It's quite ironic really because one of the ways in which they were false teachers is that they were saying that there is no day of judgment to come.

And Peter is saying that they will actually face condemnation on the day of judgment that they deny exists.

It's a very somber and it's a very sober word. So what is to be our response? I wonder if you can remember where you were on the Saturday morning of Harry and Meghan's wedding.

in our street there was an interest in it and we had a knock on the door a couple of days beforehand and one of the ladies in the street said oh some of the women are going to get together to be able to watch the wedding and then they can dissect everything that everybody was wearing so Janet thought well it's an opportunity to meet up with the ladies in the street so I think four or five of you

didn't you?

[32 : 03] You all met up there about ten or eleven o'clock. What were the men doing? Well two of the guys said that they were going to go to the York Cold War nuclear bunker so I joined them and by the way it was fascinating it's a really interesting place to visit.

there we were in the Cold War bunker and when we got in there it was the place where the Royal Observation Corps met and it was still in use right up to 1991 that bunker was being used to look out for nuclear attacks anywhere in Britain but it was run by the Royal Observation Corps and as I walked in there was their motto and their motto was to be forewarned is to be forearmed and you know that's what Peter's doing here isn't he he is forewarning his people he says you know these dangers are present and it's good for us to be forewarned to know about this to recognise the possibility of false teaching and to be discriminated also the

Lord Jesus said to us and he says we have to watch and pray Martin Lloyd Jones wrote I think it was one of his first series of expository sermons in 1948 he did on 2 Peter and he said this be on your guard observe take heed watch and pray thirdly in rejecting the false let us cleave to the true in fact cleaving to that which is true reading it studying it considering it meditating on it holding that which is true is the best way of us recognising when something comes that isn't true I mentioned this morning the man through whom I was converted and he was actually trained for the ministry in South Africa in quite a liberal theological college and Mike would say that he wasn't very theological savvy at the time but he was the Lord's and he said sometimes I would hear one of the professors say something and the warning bells would just go on in my mind I just thought that isn't right but he said I didn't really know how to answer it myself but he said there was another young evangelical man called John who was also on that course who was a very quiet shy man but who knew his Bible very well so he said whenever these warning bells came on in my mind I used to stand up and say sorry professor I think that's wrong and John here I'll tell you why and poor John had that job but you see he loved the truth he cleaved to the truth and so when he heard something that just wasn't right he recognised it and he spoke against it and finally another way for us to respond to the danger of false teaching is to be

Berean you remember the Bereans in Acts chapter 17 Paul and Silas were on their journeys through modern day Greece and Macedonia they'd had to flee from Thessalonica because of the enmity against them and they arrived in the next town down in Berea Acts 17 and verse 10 on arriving there they went to the Jewish synagogue now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true that was the testimony about the Bereans they listened they they were enthusiastic about what they heard but they didn't just listen to it and say right we accept it carte blanche they said right let's go to the scriptures and check to see if what we heard is true and no preacher should ever be concerned or feel offended in any way if people go away from the message and say right

[37 : 03] I'm going to have a look at that myself I'm going to see whether these things are true in fact that's a godly approach and attitude to listening to God's word so then there we have it today Peter's teaching about the dangers of false teaching it will always be there there will always be that danger it has been throughout all the generations we've seen some of its characteristics and seen some of its fruits and hopefully we've seen we've been encouraged about ways in which we can seek to avoid it may the Lord bless us through his word let's pray in closing the Lord bless us and keep us the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us the

Lord turn his face towards us and give us his peace amen to amen