

Today we dive into the second chapter of 2 Peter. And I’m going to be honest with you (that sounds bad...I’m always honest with you!), I kind of didn’t want to preach through the entirety of this letter, specifically because of this chapter. It was very tempting to just have a series on “selections of 2 Peter,” and conveniently skip over this chapter, or spend minimal time on it. There are a couple reasons. First, the subject matter is challenging, though that on its own is not enough of a deterrent. There’s lots in Scripture that’s challenging, and we ought not to be afraid of reading those passages or studying them. But still, it’s worth noting.

Second, it’s a chapter that is very difficult to sort out in terms of its structure, and to break up into “preachable sections.” As one author puts it, **“An exposition of this passage is difficult because of its length. Peter does not divide his teaching into neat little packages or short paragraphs. Instead, his teaching flows freely as he presents an extensive expose of the false teachers and their false teachings”** (Paul A. Cedar).

So, you put it all together, and I was not really looking forward to this chapter. And yet, we’re actually spending two Sundays on it, which only proves I’m crazy and a glutton for preaching punishment 😊. Anyway, that intro might make you either really curious about the passage, or want to run or the hills...but there you go. So, let’s dive into 2 Peter 2. We’ll read the **first 12 verses** this morning...

See, isn’t that exactly what you want to read each morning for your devotional to inspire you to live for Jesus? Now, you may recall that chapter one ended with a couple sentences about prophecy, and prophetic messages. The key point he makes is this, **“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”** (2 Peter 1:20-21). So, that’s looking back at the Old

Testament and the prophets there such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Obadiah, Micah, and everyone's favorite: Famous Amos, plus all the others.

Then he transitions here at the start of chapter two to say, "But there were also *false* prophets among the people." So, this is a further comment on prior centuries, and we read about some of this in Scripture. For instance, in Ezekiel chapter 13 we read this, "**The word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel 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 who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! ...Their visions are false and their divinations a lie. Even though the Lord has not sent them, they say, 'The Lord declares,' and expect him to fulfill their words''**" (Ezekiel 13:1-3, 6).

False prophets are those whose teaching isn't grounded in the truth of Scripture. And remember, Biblically speaking, a prophet's main purpose isn't to predict a future event happening. Some are – like a coming king and savior prophecies that Jesus fulfills...But Biblical prophecy usually calls people back to God's ways, back to relationship with him, back to worshipping him above idols, back to living as God commands. The future events prophesied about are usually given as warnings and consequences that the prophet hopes *don't* come to fruition, because people do come back to the Lord and start living in right relationship with him.

So, Peter writes, "**But there were [back then] false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you**" (2 Peter 2:1, **emphasis added**). In one sentence he goes from like 650 years earlier and more to the present day. There are people in their community who are false teachers. Now, you may have noticed the change in language from "prophets" to "teachers." Although the New Testament affirms the Spiritual Gift of prophecy, and we see the presence of prophets in the New Testament, the much more common gift and type of person we encounter are teachers. Even Jesus was called "rabbi" by people of his time, which is a Hebrew word

that simply means, “teacher,” and specifically for one who teaches the Jewish faith.

Here, writing in Greek, Peter uses **“pseudoprophetes” for false prophets, and then “pseudodidaskolos” for false teachers.** We’re probably familiar with the prefix “pseudo” in our English language, and it’s the same in Greek. What we see is that false teachers, within the Christian faith, are what he’s telling them to look out for. This would include teachers of various types – prophets could certainly be included as there is teaching that comes with their message, but also pastors, scholars, evangelists, Bible study leaders, those who write curriculum for Bible studies, and so forth.

Peter uses a couple of terms here that give us a window into what makes their teaching false. Both terms are financial ones. In verse one he says that these false teachers “deny the sovereign Lord who bought them...” The Greek word’s normal usage is as a financial term. Other than 6 or 7 instances out of the 30 times it is used in the New Testament, that’s how it’s used – buying land, buying food, etc. It’s used as a spiritual “purchase” the other times, but usually in more passive language. For instance, twice in 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, “you were bought at a price...” **Notice here, however, it’s more active, with the emphasis squarely on what Jesus has done: they deny “the sovereign Lord who bought them”.** We might expect “saved” them, “died” for them, “was crucified” for them, or “rescued them” as he writes just a few verses later even...but he says that the Lord “bought” them. Jesus purchased them. And these false teachers deny this spiritual truth.

Then in verse three he uses another financial term: “In their greed...” This word, “greed” is “pleonexia” in the Greek, and again it’s financial: greed for money and stuff and possessions. Later in verse 14 (next week), he calls them “experts in greed” using the same root word again. And in verse 15 he says they love the “wages of wickedness.” Again, “wages” is another financial term to describe these false teachers and what they love – and its wages of wickedness, not wages of love or wages of serving others or wages of generosity. It’s wages of wickedness.

But the harshest word he uses for them is another one back in verse 3 when he writes, “**In their greed, these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories...**” (2 Peter 2:3). This word “exploit” gets to the root of the problem with their teaching, and again it’s a financial word: “Emporeuomai.” It is where we get our word “emporium.” Some of you might be aware of the drugstore chain that exists in parts of our country called, “Drug Emporium” ...well, these false teachers were setting up shop as “Jesus Emporiums.” Anyway, Emporeuomai means “to trade in” or “to deal in” or “traffic in” or even “to use a person or a thing for gain.” In the King James version, it’s translated “they will make merchandise of you.” Ouch. It’s teaching that uses people for their (the teachers’) own gain – most likely for their financial gain. It’s not genuine, honest, forthright or really about making disciples of Jesus.

Now, money itself is not wicked, but it becomes wicked when our hearts prioritize it above our relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it’s a slippery slope. Money is seductive. There’s a whole strain of Christianity wrapped around this called the prosperity gospel. When you judge your relationship with God by how much money you make and how much stuff you have and all the rest that comes with it...it’s very easy to have a goal of, and to make your god, “getting more money and stuff” because you’ve decided that money and stuff proves your worth as a disciple, proves God’s blessing upon you. The thinking is: The more you have, the better the disciple you are, the more you have God’s favor. And the reverse becomes true as well, and people think: “If I have a lot of money and a lot of stuff, I must therefore be blessed by God.” By this thinking, all the wealthiest people in the world have the best and holiest relationship with God, and poor people apparently have a terrible relationship with God. This simply is not true. It’s a pseudo-theology from pseudo-teaching, and it minimizes and even replaces Jesus.

If it were true, Jesus himself set a terrible example because he was not wealthy. As he himself says, “The birds of the air have nests to rest in, foxes have holes to sleep in, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Jesus didn’t have his own home. He wasn’t wealthy. So: **If wealth = holiness, Jesus failed miserably.** And Jesus has all kinds of teachings warning about

the seductive and slippery slope of money and possessions, and how easy it is for that kind of thing to become your god...the place where you find your identity rather than finding your identity in Jesus. The financial resources you have – be they great or small – are simply a tool for ministry. You're a steward of finances for God's purposes and God's kingdom. And whether you've got a lot or a little, it's not indicative of your standing with God: Jesus has paid the price for you on the cross because of his incredible love for you.

So, as he writes here, in their greed these false teachers end up denying the sovereign Lord. The irony is that Jesus bought them...he paid a price for them – not a financial price, but he paid it on the cross. Then in verse 3 Peter says something that speaks to the heart of a question today. It might seem to us that people who have made money their god don't seem to have troubles or difficulties. If a problem arises, they're able to fix it by throwing money at it, and life just seems easy, and they seem to escape any kind of judgment or accountability from God for their love of money.

And there's something about this that feels a bit unjust, and we might ask "where is God in this?" Why do people who live for the almighty dollar seem to get away with it? Why doesn't God teach them a lesson? Isn't that kind of what goes through our heads? But read all of verse 3, where he starts with a warning to his audience, and then an assurance about these greedy false teachers: **"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"** (2 Peter 2:3).

"Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping." The judgment of God is coming eventually. For each and every one of us judgement is coming, on the other side of the grave when we stand before our maker. That's the ultimate judgment. But even in this life, God's judgment comes to those who don't follow the voice of the prophets and get back in line with God. Remember, the prophecy of a negative outcome hopefully actually *doesn't* come to fruition because someone gets right with God. But sometimes the negative consequences do end up happening.

And so, in verses 4, 5, and 6, Peter turns to the Old Testament for some examples of God’s judgment. “For if God did not spare...” and then he lists three different “people groups” we might call them, who were living in a way that flaunted God’s authority in their lives, and lived independently of God and yet God brought destruction to them: so...if he did not spare the Angels who sinned and God sends them to hell; if he did not spare “the ancient world” as he puts it, who were destroyed in the flood that Noah was saved from because of his and his family’s righteousness; if he condemned Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of what happens to the ungodly...he then writes in verse 9, **“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” (2 Peter 2:9)**. And he goes on to say in verse 12 that these false teachers are “born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish.”

So, what he’s saying is that there will be judgment for false teachers – whether it’s false teaching driven by and built around financial exploitation, or something else. There will be accountability and consequences. It’s all in God’s timing, and the accountability will happen “on the last day” as he puts it – in other words, on the other side of the grave. Next week we will talk about the consequences, but suffice it to say: it’s not just a slap on the wrist or a couple of minutes in the penalty box.

So, look, today – and I really am a “we Christians are all on the same team” kind of believer, but we remember Peter’s words here – there are still false teachers in the church – whether it’s exploiting people for money or other kinds of false teaching. I hope and pray I’m not one of them. Taking on the mantle of being a teacher of Scripture is serious business, even if I have a firm belief that a good sermon should make us laugh or at least smile a couple times 😊. In the end, I want to teach God’s truth, not some pseudo-truth that I’ve concocted in my head. Undoubtedly, you’re getting Christian teaching in your life from other sources as well (and that’s good) – books, Bible study curriculum, podcasts, even on some Sundays when you go home and you think “That sermon stunk today” and you listen to or watch some other preacher, and so forth: We just want to make sure it lines up with God’s Spirit and His Word. This passage is a warning to us that just because

someone says they follow Jesus – just because they’re in a church or have a Bible next to them, that doesn’t mean their teaching lines up with Scripture. If something sounds a little wonky or too good to be true, then it probably is. That goes for what I teach, too. Keep your brains engaged on Sundays. If something I say seems “off” to you, then let’s chat. I want to learn and grow as well.

So, don’t let false teaching creep into your faith. Be discerning. Get insight from others about what you’re reading or listening to if you need some help with that. Because Jesus is king – not our money or our power or influence or any other thing that might seek to become our motivator as a disciple of Jesus. Those things too easily end up replacing Jesus as lord of our lives. We end up finding our identity in our stuff or our influence or something else, other than Jesus. He’s the one we want to be identified with. So, let’s make sure what each of us is being taught is completely centered on Jesus – no distractions from our focus on him – so we stay centered on Jesus. Let’s Pray...Amen.