

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Adult Bible Class
2 Peter 2:1-22
January 31, 2021

As is the case in just about every letter in the New Testament, one of the biggest concerns to the writer are false teachers who have arisen in the congregations they have served. Paul often contends with teachers who have invaded the congregations he founded, bringing in new teachings and in some cases undoing all the work he had done. Peter's churches in Asia Minor were no different. False teachers had arisen within the church and were causing division and error. Their particular focus was on what they perceived to be an undo delay in the return of Christ as Lord and King, which then led to the promotion of lifestyles and behaviours quite contrary to the Gospel.

Pseudo-teachers, Pseudo-prophets - 2 Peter 2:1-3

The second chapter of the letter opens with a general introduction to the subject of false/pseudo teachers. As long as evil has been in the world false teaching has abounded. It should be no surprise to the church then or now, that false teachers will work to "secretly" bring in the teachings and will even deny Christ, himself. Jesus, himself, said this would happen:

- Matthew 24:24 "For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect."
- 2 Corinthians 11:12-15 "And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds."

Of particular interest in Peter's description of the false teachers is their focus and their motivation.

False teachers focus upon themselves. They live in sensuality or shameful ways. While this type of behaviour has sexual connotations, it is really a deeper problem. This sort of behaviour ultimately glorifies humanity, rather than the cross. Any undo focus upon ourselves or self-gratifying behaviour pulls us into the same sort of error, regardless of our sexual actions.

The motivation for this is greed. Peter had encountered this earlier in his ministry in his dealings with Simon Magus (Acts 8:18-20) and greed would continue to be seen as a sure sign of false teaching long after Peter's death.

"Let every apostle that comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet. ... But whoever says in the Spirit, Give me money, or something else, you shall not listen to him." The Didache (The Two Ways) a very early book on Church Order.

They Will be Punished - 2 Peter 2:4-16

The next paragraph of the letter begins with one long, extended sentence in which Peter reminds the readers of three ancient instances where false teaching and the resulting behaviours did not go unpunished. **“If God did not spare,**

- **The angels who rebelled against God (v. 4)**

While we don't know exactly who these angels are, it would seem that this is a reference to Satan and those who, like the evil one, turned against God before the creation of Adam and Eve. These creatures have been “confined to Tartarus.” Tartarus was a place of punishment in Greek mythology. Peter here is not buying into the mythology but is using a term his readers would understand as the place of eternal punishment. Jude in his letter, which parallels much of 2 Peter 2, describes these angels as not “staying within the bounds of their own position of authority.” Jude 6

- **The people who perished in the flood, but preserved Noah (v. 5)**

For as important a person as Noah was in the history of God's people, he is only mentioned a handful of times in the New Testament and 2 of those mentions come from Peter. Interestingly Peter refers to Noah as a “herald of righteousness.” In Genesis Noah is not noted for being a preacher, but more than likely as he built the ark he had plenty of occasions to explain why he was building this big boat.

- **The people of Sodom and Gomorrah, but preserved Lot (v. 6-8)**

Just as the people before the flood came under judgement so also the folks of Sodom and Gomorrah came under judgement. Here again the focus is not just on the judgement but on the preservation of Lot and his family. He also gives us a picture of the distress of Lot and his family.

If God did not spare false teachers but protected his faithful, so also God will judge the false teachers and preserve the faithful in Peter's churches. This is great comfort for the church yet today. False teaching abounds yet God will preserve for himself a righteous remnant, even if he has to resort to a talking donkey.

Peter continues by talking of the false teachers as being blots and blemishes upon the church, predicting that they will be caught in their own sins. They have abused the “table fellowship” of the early church, profaning the Body and Blood of Christ as well as the love feasts that were common in the church at that time (Jude 12)

But God will not abandon the faithful. There is one more Old Testament example of God ensuring his word is preserved -- the somewhat comic story of Balaam and his donkey from Numbers 22-24. Here's a summary of that story:

- Balak, king of Moab is concerned about the people of Israel travelling through his land on the way to Canaan.
- He hires a reluctant Balaam, to curse the people of Israel.
- As Balaam travels to Balak he is confronted by his own donkey who sees what Balaam cannot

- Instead of cursing the people of Israel, Balaam pronounces three blessings upon them, much to the chagrin of Balak the king of Moab, who is powerless in the face of God's plans.

Summation of the Problem - 2 Peter 2:17-22

The chapter concludes with some rather scathing assessments of the false teachers. While this reveals Peter's anger, in a backward way it also reveals his pastoral heart for the people of his congregations. He loves them deeply and is deeply distressed that they should suffer these false teachers.

- Springs without water – A similar description is found in the book of Jude
- They promise freedom – in this case from moral restraint, which has led them to become enslaved in their own passions and lusts.
- Verses 20-22 are a solemn warning about falling away from the faith.
- In the end they are like dogs and pigs who return again to what is unclean.

Luther: "Through Baptism these people threw out unbelief, had their unclean way of life washed away, and entered into a pure life of faith and love. Now they fall away into unbelief and their own works, and they soil themselves again in filth.... But if you want to become pious, you must ask God to give you a genuine faith, and you must begin to desist from unbelief. When you receive faith, then good works will come automatically, and you will lead a pure and chaste life. Otherwise you will preserve yourself by no other means. And even if you are able to conceal the knave in your heart for a while, yet he will finally emerge."