

Title: Big promises, empty results
Text: 2 Peter 2.17-22
Theme: The effects of false teachers
Series: 2 Peter
Prop Stmtnt: False teachers promise much and deliver even worse than nothing.

Read Text:

Let's say you have a niece who was in a cult and she recently left it and started attending church with you. You'd be so excited. But if she was taken in by the impressive teaching of a leader only to be targeted by him and propositioned, you would be beside yourself. What would be worse, would be if the leaders of the church knew of this teacher's predatory behavior but did nothing about it. The book of 2 Peter is in the NT because the true church has always been the target of false teachers. We need to have this category in our thinking and not be naïve to think that this could not happen to us, or if it did, it couldn't happen again. This also means that I and all of us need to guard our own hearts and not assume that this applies just to others.

There are some who love controversies and are always looking for ways to get people riled up. Ken Sandee calls these people, peace-breakers. They aren't happy unless they can get people to attack one another. The other end of that spectrum is a peace-faker. I am more tempted in that direction. I do not relish conflict. I want people to enjoy God, enjoy life, enjoy each other, laugh and have joy. I do not savor the part of my responsibility as a pastor and as your pastor to warn you about false teachers. But these verses are so important to consider because they remind me and you of the effects of false teachers. It's no fun to have to address these guys or deal with this stuff, but look at what happens if you don't. It's like this. Let's say that you smoke or vape and you really want to stop and you are looking for some motivation to quit this habit that just seems to have a hold on you. Have you ever googled "images of a smoker's lung?" It is really graphic, because it shows you the actual consequences. In a similar way, these 5 verses focus on the effects that false teachers have on others as well as themselves. This is good motivation. In fact, one of the marks of a healthy church is a commitment to and a process of addressing false teachers because if you don't, your church will not be healthy for very long.

1. **The aftermath of false teachers** (17-19a)

There are different kinds of false teachers. Some, as we looked at last week are teaching right things and are effective communicators. As a result of teaching the truth in an effective way, they have appeal, influence and trust and they use that influence in order to identify people whom they can take advantage of. Sometimes it is because they are greedy and sometimes it is because they are lustful. I was approached by a fellow staff member of another church I was serving in years ago, who acted like he wanted to get to know me, be my friend, only to ask me if I wanted to invest in oil wells through him. I was new to the situation but found out that he had been doing that to others. He was using his position of trust to take advantage of others. That is an example of a false teacher. In these verses (17-22) Peter is describing false teachers who are twisting the truth of God's Word in order to justify their desires. The result is devastating for the church and for them.

A. **Their deception is disillusioning.** (17a)

Peter calls them *waterless springs*. One-night Cathi and I were on the road. We don't like to stop nor slow down. But, we had to get some gas and we needed to get something to eat, so we got in line for a drive-thru which was going excruciatingly slow. I wanted to get a large vanilla shake and then sip it all the way home. I could already taste it and after waiting in line for at least 20 maddening minutes knowing that I was going to have to repass all those trucks again, the person in the drive-thru informed me that that the milkshake machine was broken. I was trying to tell myself, "Bob, it's just a milkshake" because, it's just a milkshake. You don't die if you don't have a milkshake, right? There are posters in the windows of milkshakes. They advertise milkshakes but what was promised was not what was delivered. If you are in a desert and you don't have water, you will die. A waterless spring refers to a place in a desert region where it appears that there is water. There is the promise of water, only to discover that there is no water. False teachers are waterless springs. They promise things they can't deliver which is one of the reasons why major media "ministries" or events suit them so well. These false teachers were teaching things that made promises that were appealing. They sounded good.

Mists driven by a storm is a similar analogy. In this country farmers were able to get crop insurance starting around 1938. Before that, if didn't rain, you didn't get crops and if you didn't get crops, you had nothing to sell in the market and your family had no money and you would lose the farm. You had to have rain in order to survive. If a mist approaches your land, then your hopes are raised, but if a storm of wind drives that mist away, then your land is left parched and your hopes are crushed. Both of these illustrations refer to the promises made by false teachers who fail to deliver and it leaves the listener worse off. Like the Benny Hinns, Kenneth Copelands and Joyce Meyers they promise you a life of health, a life of financial success, they use the Bible, but twist it for their purposes and people are sucked in. They believe that they are promised healing of all diseases here and now and when their little boy's cancer is not cured, or their spouse's dementia is not reversed, and they are told that they just didn't have enough faith or send in enough money, they are wrecked. The spring that promised water was dry. Have you ever heard one of these say, "get off your couch, go to a faithful local church, join, serve, and support that?" No, they promise you rewards if you send them money. They are not accountable to you. They are deceivers.

B. **They bring severe judgment on themselves** (17b-19a)

1) Their doom is reserved (17b)

"for them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved." These charlatans think that they can play others, while, in the ultimate sense they are being played. By using the truth of God's Word for their own devices, thinking that they can fool others, they are the ultimate fool. They are reserving for themselves a seat in hell. Those who think they can fool others, are themselves the fools. Truth is truth. God's truth will never surrender to the schemes of pretenders.

2) 3 reasons:

Peter gives three reasons why this judgment is so severe. First of all, they acted like they knew what they were talking about. They were speaking loud boasts of folly. They were acting as if they were so confident. Brothers and sisters, I do not think that we can overestimate the value of humility in the life of a believer and particularly in the life of a teacher. You cannot be full of yourself and full of Jesus at the same time. A second reason for why their judgment is so certain and so severe is that they prey on those who are vulnerable.

they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error

These false teachers were targeting new believers and were twisting God's Word particularly as it relates to matters of sexual ethics. We are all well aware of the pressure of our world to accept the ideology, practices and demands of the LGBTQ+ movement. But, there are people who claim to be followers of Christ, believers in the gospel, and believers in the Bible and they are teaching that God's Word allows for and endorses homosexuality. What kind of an influence would this have on a person who follows Christ and struggles with same-sex attraction? What kind of influence would this false teaching have on a person who has recently come out of the gay lifestyle and has come to faith in Christ? Those who are promoting this are false teachers and the third reason why their judgment is so severe is because they are not only misrepresenting God's Word, they are not being honest about themselves. They promise freedom. They promise that this is the way to live. This is not sin. God does not judge. God affirms everyone. This is fine, but the truth is, they are trapped in their own corruption. They try to sell the lie that there are no moral restraints. They try to sell that lie because they want to believe it. They want to justify their own behavior, but the consequences of their own behavior proves the fact that they are not telling the truth.

We can see how timely this book is. False teachers make many emotional arguments, they play upon people's sympathies, they are masters at pulling on heart strings and eliciting pity, but the bottom line is that they are twisting God's Word and like the false prophets in the OT, they will face the music for this.

2. **The proverb** (19b)

A proverb is a truism, a principle. It is a maxim that has universal application. Here Peter quotes a proverb. *For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.* That is true in war. If you are defeated and captured as a prisoner, then you are enslaved to the other side. If you are overcome by debt, then when you earn money, you are not free to spend that money on whatever you want. You have to pay your creditors first. If you are overcome with a disease, then that disease controls your life. If you are overcome with alcohol or pain meds, then your life is not your own. You are owned.

Peter is taking that proverb and applying it to this situation with the false teachers. They are teaching that biblical sexual ethics do not really exist. But, they are controlled by their own desires. They are owned. They are in bondage to their own sin. They can't stop sinning. Their lust owns them. Their lust owns them because they have given themselves away to it. You are a slave to that which controls you. Their teaching is only shaking the chains of their own shackles.

I read of a young man who was carrying a placard down the street of a busy city. The front of it read, "I am a fool for Christ." The backside read, "Whose fool, are you?" We are all owned by something or someone. When you give yourself to the sins of this world that promise freedom, you get bondage. But, when you sell yourself as a slave to Christ, you get freedom. You get freedom from judgement, freedom from hell, freedom from guilt, freedom from shame, freedom from deception, freedom from spiritual blindness, freedom from folly, freedom from hopelessness and meaningless. The world promises freedom and then switches the price tags and gives you bondage. Jesus calls you to follow him, surrender to him, be subject to him only to find that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Two questions: 1) What (or who) do you have a difficult time saying "no" to? Sometimes we joke about that, but in many cases, this is no laughing matter. If you cannot say no to some things, then they own you and those things that own you do not love you. They will take and take and take until they have taken everything from you. Now, having identified who or what you have a difficult time saying no to, 2) how dependent are you on that for your happiness?

Now, Peter is applying this proverb to the false teachers. There is something that enslaves them because it has overcome them. And because they are enslaved by it, they are teaching in such a way that attempts to justify their own behavior. Now, one of the natural questions that we are all asking in this series, is how can we protect our church from false teachers? These guys can be so sneaky. Can we trust anyone? Are we supposed to live in a context of beady eyes, and suspicious glances? That can't be right, but how can we protect the church and can we protect the church? The answer is, "yes" and I believe that one of the best ways that we protect the church is by faithfully following the requirements for leadership as laid out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Think of it like this: A guy is overcome by a particular sin. Let's say that it is a demand for respect. Being respected can be a good thing. Expecting respect as a husband or father can be a good thing. Teaching my children to respect is good and right and part of my responsibility. But, if I don't get respect and I explode or I build up resentment and give myself to pornography, then I have made respect an idol. The qualifications for leadership in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 reveal if there are other things that are going on. If a man is the husband of one wife (literally, "a one-eyed man") then he is not owned by lust. If he is sober-minded and self-controlled then he is not owned food. If he is respectable, he is not owned by folly and poor decisions. If he is not a drunkard, he is not owned by alcohol or other intoxicants. If he is not violent, but gentle, he is not owned by anger. If he is not quarrelsome, then he is not owned by his ego and pride. If he is not a lover of money, then he is not owned by money and greed. If he manages his own household with dignity, he is not owned by an obsession with power and control.

A man who is owned by any of these things is going to be tempted to either ignore what the Bible says about it, or he is tempted to over emphasize it in an effort to deflect the fact that he is owned by it. Therefore, I think that one of the very best things that we can cultivate in our church family is a consistent emphasis on these qualities for all of the men of our church, and never compromise them as qualifications for our elders.

3. **The warning to them and us.** (20-22)

There is no one specific profile that fits all false teachers. That is why Peter warns of those who blatantly teach false doctrine and warns of those who teach right doctrine for impure motives and warns of those who teach bad stuff stealthily. But, the bottom line is this. False teachers are a serious problem for the church and the church needs to be on guard against them and be on guard for the sake of the false teachers. The warning in verses 20-21 is very strong.

A. The judgment of false teachers will be worse than an unbeliever. (20-21)

Look at verse 20. They escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that is, they knew the gospel, they professed faith in the gospel, there was an initial change in their life, but they became entangled and overcome by sin. I think it is very possible that Peter, who loved fishing, is referring to the fact that he caught a lot of fish by getting them entangled in his ropes and his using the same analogy here. The picture here is of a person who is trapped in sin and has no desire to get out. Look at v. 21. These teachers knew the way of righteousness. They knew the gospel. They knew it and they taught it. They knew it, they taught it and they turned their back on it. Some believe that these false teachers were at one time genuine believers who turned away from the faith and lost their salvation. There are a number of passages that have convinced me that this cannot happen. But, at the same time, I take this as a genuine warning from Peter. I think that these false teachers were like the soil with the weeds in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. The seed of the Word landed, began to show evidence of taking root, but eventually was choked out.

Therefore, it would have been better for them if they had never known the gospel in the first place. Why is that? 1) They may falsely believe that they are a Christian. They may look at their past and say, "Oh I did that. I prayed that prayer. I taught that class. I was involved in that church. I served in that ministry or on that committee." They were involved and looked the part. 2) They may falsely believe that they already know that gospel stuff. They confuse knowing the facts about the gospel with knowing Christ and trusting Christ.

Several years ago, I read one of the most comprehensive historical accounts on the Reformation that has ever been done. The author did a masterful job in tying together so many strains and movements and I found his work to be second to none. In his discussion of Luther and Calvin he explained the gospel as faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone. He clearly knew how they viewed and taught the gospel and yet he hated it and he made it clear. Knowing the facts about the gospel is not the same as knowing and trusting Christ. That is what makes v.22 so important.

B. The true nature of false teachers is revealed in their desires. (22)

If you have ever had a dog, you've seen this truism and its disgusting. It doesn't matter how clean a pig may be, it will wallow in the mire. This is the nature of a dog and a pig. It is disgusting to us, but not to a dog and a pig. This is their nature and when they act this way they are only revealing their nature. Some of you think your dog is human, right? And, if I was a younger pastor, I might talk about that and on Monday would find my inbox full of unhappy emails. Since that is not the primary point of the text, and since I am not a younger pastor, I will not say anything more about that. But, the primary point of the text demands our attention. And it is a

warning to false teachers and to all of us. The desires that control your behavior, reveals your true nature.

Conclusion:

The Christian life is the narrow way. It is the way of Christ. It is the way of the cross. It is the way of denying ourselves. It is the way of ridicule and misunderstanding. But, it is the way of truth, the way of grace, the way of life, the way of genuine hope and eternal joy.