

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 2 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

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Message Title: Rescued from Judgement Pt. 2

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(2 Peter Chapter 2) Verse 2:

Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (NASB, Vs. 2-3)

Idle means basically a do-nothing, so essentially Peter is saying, “Don’t mistake the patience and mercy of God as if God is a do-nothing and God has fallen asleep on the job. Just because God has not zapped the false teachers dead today doesn’t mean He’s okay with it.” There is a judgment coming and people will be held accountable—accountable based not on people’s own relative standard, but on the absolute standard of righteousness of the character of God. Starting in verse 4, then he’s going to support that case using three examples:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to the pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; (Vs. 4)

First example: the angels. When the angels sinned, God judged them, cast them into hell. It’s the Greek word Tartarus. That would have been the Greek concept of hell, basically a place of judgment, to be chained in darkness awaiting final judgment. So, the first example is the angels. Verse 5:

...and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; (Vs. 5)

Second example is Noah. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. This affirms our interpretation from 1 Peter Chapter 3, that Christ spoke through Noah as a preacher of righteousness, warning the ungodly that judgment is coming. How many years did Noah warn the people? Answer: 120 years! Can you imagine that? It took him 120 years to build the ark, to build a monstrous boat on dry land. Just imagine the level of mockery and laughter that he put up with for 120 years, as year after year he tried to tell them, “Judgment is coming!” Don’t mistake the patience and mercy of God for a God who is a do-nothing or has fallen asleep on the job. Judgment is coming, and it did come and only eight were rescued: Noah, his wife and his kids.

There are two parts to the historical record that Peter is reminding us of. One is: God has a consistent pattern of judgment; don’t think He won’t do it. But the second is: God has a consistent pattern of rescuing His children from judgment, and you can trust Him with that, which leads to the third example, verse 6:

...and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), (Vs. 6-8)

The third example is Sodom and Gomorrah that was judged for their wickedness before God. Its interesting Peter tells us clearly why that was done: as a warning to the ungodly that would come thereafter. God is serious about judgment. Don't mistake His patience or mercy for a God who will not act. Judgment will come. But in the midst of that is also the reminder that God has also been faithful to rescue His children. And you can trust Him with that.

Now Lot makes for an interesting discussion. There's a lot of discussion around calling Lot righteous. What is the basis for that? I would say—to use New Testament, new covenant language—Lot was a believer. Even in the old covenant people weren't made righteous on the basis of their works, but on the basis of their faith. Lot was Abraham's nephew and Lot had come to believe by faith in the God of Abraham, in the righteousness of the God of Abraham. So, in today's language, Lot was a believer, but I could not find a single commentator that believed that Lot is being referred to as righteous because he made such good decisions in the Lot story. Actually, quite the opposite, and I think that's a significant part of the point.

If you're not familiar with the story, Lot was Abraham's nephew. Lot went with Abraham when Abraham went down into Egypt. Lot liked Egypt. In a sense, Egypt got into Lot's heart, so when Abraham and Lot came back into the Land of Promise, God so blessed Abraham and they had so many cattle and livestock, that they could no longer stay together because they needed more grass to sustain the livestock. So, Abraham said, "We need to separate," so he said, "Lot, you choose the direction you want to go and then I'll go the other way." Lot specifically chose the valley of Sodom. The text tells us in Genesis it was because the valley reminded him of Egypt. Also, there is an editorial comment in that part of Genesis that says, "Sodom was an exceedingly wicked city!" There's no question that the comment is made to tell us this was a very foolish decision. Lot moves into the valley, eventually moves all the way into the city of Sodom. God comes to Abraham and tells him, "I'm going to destroy Sodom because of their wickedness." Abraham pleads with God on the basis of the righteous in Sodom, and basically God promises to spare Lot and his family. So, He sends His angels into Sodom. What we are told here is that Lot lived in the midst of such gross, sensuous sin that it tortured his soul every day. The text is saying Lot was not participating. Lot still believed in the God of Abraham, still believed in the righteousness of the God of Abraham, but without question Lot had lost his way and put himself in a very miserable position. As a matter of fact, the Greek really reads that Lot tormented his own soul, meaning he made the decisions to put himself in the midst of this wickedness, and now it tortured his soul every day. But God is so committed to His children that before He cast judgment on Sodom, He rescued Lot and his family. If you go back and read the story in Genesis 19, the angels literally had to grab Lot by the wrist and drag him out of Sodom. Whatever reason, he was so stuck on being in that place that God had to drag him out to rescue him before judgment fell. This is a very important part of the story.

The fact of the matter is false teachers are very clever; they are very good at what they do. They are very good at smuggling in that which sounds right—that this is the way of happiness, that this is the way of life, that this is what’s going to fulfill me—and little by little you get farther off the track until one morning you wake up, and you wonder, “How did I get here?” My soul is tormented by the evil all around me now, and you start to wonder, “Have I drifted so far off the path that there is no longer any hope for me?” The point of the Lot story is that God has a clear pattern of judgment, but He also has a clear track record of faithfully rescuing His children, which is exactly where Peter goes with the story.

...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. (Vs. 9-10a)

So, Peter affirms that God has a track record of rescuing His children, but He also has a track record of judging the ungodly. Verse 10 I think beautifully describes our culture today—those who indulge the flesh. Those who are false teachers and those who willingly follow want to formulate their own beliefs, their own behaviors and to convince themselves somehow God is okay with that, so they indulge the flesh. Then someone like me comes along and has the audacity to say that actually that behavior before a holy God is offensive and sinful. When people in our culture hear that, they are outraged! “How dare you judge me? How dare you tell me that I cannot live as I please?” They despise authority. They despise the concept that God is God—that God has absolute truth, that God has absolute morality—and at the end of the story God will judge and the judgment will not be on the basis of a manmade, relative standard, but on the basis of His own righteousness!

The false teachers and those who follow them today should not mistake God’s mercy and God’s patience for a God who is idle and asleep on the job. God has a very clear established track record. He will ultimately judge evil. There’s also a message for those who have been deceived, those who have listened to the false teachers and little by little have drifted off the path of life. Some of you woke up this morning, you looked in the mirror, and you thought to yourself, “How did this happen? How did I make such a mess of my life? How did I end up in such bondage?” And honestly, you thought to yourself, “I’m not sure there is any hope for me.” God has a clear, established pattern of rescuing His children, even if He has to grab you by the wrist and drag you out of your mess. God has always been in the business of rescuing His children. For all of us, we need to be reminded that there are false teachers all around us. Every one of us is bombarded by hundreds of lies every single day. It is not possible to keep up with all the lies. Therefore, there is only one hope, and that hope is, “You must know the truth!” As long as you know the truth, the truth exposes the lie. If you want to travel down the path that will deliver what your soul is longing for—the path of life—we need to take seriously the words of Jesus. “You shall know the truth and it is the truth that will set you free!”

Our Father, we celebrate that it is Your truth that sets us free, but we also acknowledge the enemy is clever; the false teachers are subtle and sometimes we go on adrift and we wake up one morning in a place we never thought we’d be. God, I know there are people here, that is their story. They are wounded; they’re broken; they are hurting; they are disillusioned; their souls are tormented day after day. And they’re wondering, “How did this happen?” and they are wondering if there is any hope. God, remind them anew and afresh that You have a clear and established pattern of rescuing Your children and there is every reason for hope. It’s in the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Cara: Bryan. Truth is freedom. And I am a living example of that. I know because I experienced what it meant to live within the lies of this world. And I can tell you that now that I have clarity in Christ, I can actually see how much I was bound by the lies of this world. Like you said, it's really impossible to keep up with all the lies.

Bryan: Yeah, it is impossible. And I think, and you'd probably agree with this, people think that that's going to be the way of freedom. You really do think that. And then you end up in bondage. And for us as Christians, we come back to Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." So, we wrestle with, is that true or not? Is Jesus a liar or is he telling the truth? Because at the end of the day, I think a lot of people aren't convinced the truth is the way to freedom. That's why they choose otherwise.

Arnie: Bryan, you described false teachers as those who create their own beliefs to suit their own lifestyles and that's pretty convenient for them. But Peter also tells us they're motivated by greed. Do you think that's true?

Bryan: I think it's absolutely true. Biblical greed isn't limited to money. It's greed for money, it's greed for power, it's greed for significance, for control. So, they're just people using other people for personal gain. And I think the challenge is we all have legitimate needs and desires that are very real and they're very strong. It's part of how we're made in the image of God. And it's very easy to exploit people in their area of longing or desire. It makes them vulnerable to the false teachers.

Cara: The Bible gives us this consistent pattern of judgment on those who fight God. So just look at our past messages. God didn't spare the angels, or the mockers of Noah's time, or the people of Sodom. Why does Peter remind us of this then?

Bryan: So, I think it's because people have always had a tendency to convince themselves there won't actually be judgment. I mean, my opinion would be that's the motive behind relativism, is people want to convince themselves there's no truth, because then there'll be no accountability. So, then they're free to live as they please.

Cara: Right. At the same time, God never takes His eyes off of His own children. He's right there protecting Noah and Lot, and Lot was living sort of that double life.

Bryan: Yeah. So strangely enough, there's even encouragement in that. So, we do the right thing. We do the best that we can and the rest we have to trust God with. And that's really all you can do. But there is a reminder in the Lot story, even when we fail and drift off the path, that God's grace is sufficient. We're still God's child. But it's not an excuse to presume upon God's grace. Arnie, from research and a scientific standpoint, how do you see false teaching affecting the culture today?

Arnie: We see it everywhere and probably the main theme is, living the dream isn't what I thought it was. And so, you get people so afraid that the false teaching that they've accepted and are basing their life on is going to fall apart, which we all know it does, but we see it over and over and over again. Living the dream isn't what we thought it was.

Bryan: So, Peter maybe knew what he was talking about.

Arnie: Very well could have.

