

2 Peter 2:17-3:2 'The Character Of Evil Part 2, and Sincere In Our Faith'

In last week's message on 2 Peter 2, we did a broad sweep of chapter 2:-19 'The Character of Evil'. Revisiting v1-3 from the previous message and then seeing what those deceivers looked like, as well as their final outcome. V12a "Brute beasts, creatures of instinct born only to be caught and killed." That picture of ravenous animals with an insatiable lust for the blood of their prey. Always acting only and according to their nature. these people prey upon the flock having no regard for the sheep. They are only out for self and their father the devil! V13-14 they are drunken lust filled stains and scars upon the body of the church. "Experts in greed." And I explained that such people get a foothold in the church, by us failing to Remind, Refresh and Remember as Peter exhorts us to do in the previous chapter. They are "an accursed brood." A breed that has been literally cursed by God! Yes they get a foothold among us by us falling into apathy within our own labours in the scriptures.

And of course this is still happening today. Ravi Zacharias, some pastors of the Hillsong movement, Jimmy Swaggart, the list is endless. As Voddie Barcomb explained, such things occur because the Word of God has been undervalued and even forsaken. Yes the man is lifted up above the message, as the superstar preachers are born! Yes people crave heroes and entertainers and not the preaching of God's Word. V15. "They have left the straight way. Because they love the wages of wickedness." "They are springs without water, clouds driven by a storm. They promised so much and yet contain only dust, sand and despair and worse still, they rob people of their hope of any truth about God, in the wilderness of this world! V3b. "Their condemnation has been hanging over them and their destruction has not been sleeping" Peter says.

Then five examples of God's judgement indeed coming upon sin while He preserves his people. The fallen angels, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, Noah, lot. V9. "If this is so, then the Lord knows how to bring judgement while preserving his children." 13a "they will be paid back with harm, for the harm they have done. In the original suffering wrong with the wages of wrong." Rom.6:23 "the wages of sin is death."

And so we pick up the text 2 Peter 2:17-3:2 'The Character Of Evil Part 2'. V17b "Blackest darkness is reserved for them." The word for darkness here is 'Scotus': it means moral and spiritual gloom. Even as the scripture warns dear friends, "as we sow, so shall we reap." Beloved, the great danger is that we can fall into the trap of the world as we will see in chapter 3, which says, It's been 2000 years, when is this thing going to happen? It's all talk, it's all fairy stories. "Cleverly devised fables" as in ch1:16. But no, 'scotus', blackest darkness is reserved for them.

What a frighteningly terrifying thought. The moral and spiritual gloom of the waiting place of the ultimate judgement and wrath of God, for hell! Friends, so many preachers don't want to speak of such things. Even as though these truths were not reality, not part of God's Word. But they are. As I have said many times over the years, if we are indeed the saved of the Lord, it stands to reason that we have been saved from something. Nay, indeed someone! Yes such is the love of God for us that He saved us from His own judgement and wrath. That "blackest darkness is not reserved" for us on the contrary, at our death, (as with the thief on the cross next to Jesus) "I tell you the truth, this very day you will be with me in paradise." No not that moral and spiritual gloom but the glory of the presence of the Lord, as we wait for the physical resurrection of our bodies! V17-18. "These men are springs without water clouds driven by storm. For they mouth empty boastful words, and by appealing to the lustful desire of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from

people living error. Beloved, Peter shows us who the main targets of such people are. He spoke in v14 of them “seducing those unstable souls.” In a sense those who are on shaky ground spiritually, because they are either new in the faith, or new of understanding.

Well in v18, he elaborates upon this. These predators, (that is who they are according to Peter), prey upon the weak in the faith. “They mouth empty words” or they speak words of vanity, “by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature.” What came into my mind while I was putting this together was the thrust of just about every ad on TV today. Those obscene gambling ads preying upon the greed of people with all humour and portrayals of friendship and the promise of big dollars, (but of course gamble responsibly) to the scantily clad males and females selling everything from lingerie to toilet paper. Clearly such people have the same playbook as those of whom Peter writes, and the same coach. That is what a lot of this supposed preaching is all about today. “Appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature.”

But no, it is not only the new in the faith that can be ensnared and carried away by such people and such leading. We are all in danger within the struggles of our own walk with the Lord. When someone is promising us a different and easier way in whatever form that may take! So if the preaching and teaching that we are seasoned with, fed with and surrounded by is not convicting us with our own ongoing iniquity, (as even Paul writes of his own struggles in Romans 7) if we are not constantly convicted and challenged by such things as we measure ourselves against our Lord, (though yes, we have indeed been forgiven for them by Jesus` Blood), the danger of being enticed and lured away by those tempting's of the flesh, is ever present and all too real.

If it were not so, why does Peter use such language? As the scripture says in 1 Corinthians 10 “Let him who thinks he stands, beware lest he fall.” When we think about it, all sin is Satan tempting us by “appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature.” So if the preaching that we are hearing is in effect giving us licence to do this, while supposedly still maintaining a right relationship with God, now wonder then, that there will be those who are lured away by their own weaknesses in the flesh. Even in a sense back into those things that had formerly held them captive!

Look at what he says in v18-19: “They entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.” Now again, yes these are new converts but this also can be applied to those who though they have been near or even in the Kingdom of Jesus for many years, but are new of understanding. These are both in a sense in the infancy of their faith, and in danger of being enticed through the flesh of their former lives!

Friends, what is the gospel which is preached by many in our own day? Well, it is not grace from God through the blessed gift of His Own Son to us. His shed blood upon that cross of suffering and shame, and as an extension of that in Jesus` own words in Matthew 16 “If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” no. It is come to Jesus, and you will live your best life now. You can even bring this best life for yourself into being by merely speaking the words, even as God spoke the universe into being. I am smart. I am good. I am worthy. I am beautiful. I am deserving of all of God's good things. Yes come to Jesus and you will be healthy, wealthy, and all of God's abundance in this life will be poured out upon you.

But as John MacArthur says, if you do this, you will indeed live your best life now. Because the life to come for you, will be hell`s fires and damnation! Well what comes to my mind when I am hearing such things, (as my skin is crawling at the heresy of such stuff, (these enticing words) are the words of Jesus about the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke chapter 18:9-13: “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evil doers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get”. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy upon me the sinner.””

Yes, all of this is missing you see. That yes we are indeed blessed, forgiven by God through Jesus, yet it is not of ourselves it is all of God. “God have mercy on me, for I am the sinner!” V19. “They promise them freedom while they themselves are slaves of depravity for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” The word for “mastered” here is ‘erttersai’ and carries with it the implication of having been defeated by something. So when Peter says, “slaves to whatever has mastered him,” he means, to whatever has defeated him in his life and is now subject to or even enslaved by. Whatever that thing may be! He is saying that these heretics themselves are slaves of depravity. What can they possibly offer you? It makes no sense, steer clear of them! V20 “If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and again are entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.”

In this verse we have three powerfully descriptive words. For “corruption” we have the word “miasmata” it is where we get the word miasma from. And it is defined in the old Collins dictionary (and get this) as an infectious or noxious gas emanating from decomposing matter. And the word for entangled before us is “empakw” and it conveys the idea of being completely bound and twisted, as in the braiding of hair. And the third word is the one which we have seen before “epignosis” and it means, the full knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we put these three things together, it paints a very powerful picture.

In Ephesians 2, Paul speaks of us as being “dead in our trespasses and sin.” Well here Peter describes the depth of this death, so to speak of all people apart from Jesus in the sight of God. From which we have been delivered! There was an infectious noxious gas emanating from our decomposing lives. Yes apart from Jesus we were indeed dead. So much so that our whole lives were decomposing before God. Even though we were ignorant and oblivious of that fact. And our lives were so embraided within the world and its anti-Christ ways, that there was no escaping. Until that “full knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ” through the power of the Holy Spirit and the pouring of His Own Blood upon us, brought us to life, disentangled us from the world, and set us free. Praise God! Friends can you see? That Peter is powerfully and graphically driving home the most miraculous and significant thing that has befallen each and every believer in their life. Before we came to Jesus the stench of death was all over us. And so encompassed by, and woven within the world were we, that there was no escape!

So if all of this is true, Peter says, why would you then listen to these deceivers, these blow ins? Why would you want to go back into the realm of death and judgement? The scary thing is brothers and sisters, is that Peter says that these people had “epignosis” that “full knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ” and yet v15, “they have wandered from the straightway to follow Balaam son of Beor who loved the wages of wickedness.” Which are indeed the wages of death. So instead of being influenced and swayed by such people use them as an example to not wander from the straight way, the way of Jesus! He Himself said “I am the way.”

The early believers were not first known as Christians but “followers of the way.” No not “wander from the way” but stay the course until life's journey ends! V21 “It would be better for them to not have known the way of righteousness, then to have known it and then to turn their backs on the

sacred command that was passed on to them.” In v20 Peter said that these people “are worse off than they were at the beginning.”

But how a person who is “dead in their trespasses and sin” and with the stench of death emanating from their whole life while also being destined for hell can be worse off, I don't know. Though certainly the scriptures do speak of having tasted of the goodness of God and then turning our back on Him. In Luke 17:1-3a “Jesus said to his disciples, things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.” Or in other words, beware, watch what you teach because you will be held accountable!

And in v21 Peter speaks of these people within the past tense. Because they “have known the way of righteousness.” Twice he says this. They knew all about righteousness which literally means to be made right with God, but they only knew about such things. Yes they knew them from a distance. Yet though they had the appearance of them, they never really belonged, or participated personally in that salvation that is found in Christ!

Again friends the scaring reality is, that from the outside these people looked just like the sheep! And then he closes this section with two graphic images which to the Jew, would have been of vile uncleanness. V22 “of them the proverbs are true. As a dog returns to its vomit, and a sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.” Yes to the Jewish mind both of these descriptions speak of uncleanness. One was a scavenging animal, and the other a ritually unclean animal. Firstly, the image of a dog that had emptied itself of that which had made it ill only to return to it and then lap it up. And then the pig that is washed clean of its filth on the outside, but goes straight back to the same mire from which it had been cleansed. Both of these speak of the unchanged nature of the person, that has come to Him but then has turned their back on Jesus. For a season it appears that all is well but then in time, they cannot help but be who they truly are by nature. Empty of God's truth, and unwashed by Jesus` Blood! Surely for such people, having known all of Jesus and then turning their back on Him, it were as though they were even twice condemned!

Friends, as I said last time, you'll be wanting me to stop before I get to the end of Peter`s description and his character analysis of these inherently evil people who claim Jesus as Lord. And a part of me almost didn't want to address the remainder of this chapter, not wanting to be hammering over the same kinds of things. And yet I felt the need, that if Peter had put these things down and would then go on to pay for them with his life as it were, I also felt the least we could do to honour both Jesus and him also, would be to see it to the end.

And so we have, and now we come to chapter3. As Peter now returns to that which is really, the chief goal of this letter. Remind. Refresh. And remember! V1 from the original. “This second epistle beloved I am writing to you, in both of which I would rouse you to a sincere mind by way of reminding.” Now the NIV actually has “wholesome thinking” in place of “a sincere mind.” But the original and the NASB reads “a sincere mind” which is far better I believe here. The word “sincere” is defined, as not assumed or merely professed. Actually moved by. Feeling the apparent motives as straight forward. And of course in this context, it works beautifully. Having spoken of these deceivers and with them having hearts of evil intent and Peter warning the brethren to stay away from them, he now again explains how he will help them to steer clear of such people. He wants to “rouse them.” He wants to stir them up as he had done earlier, again by way of “reminding them.” You know to be honest, until this week I didn't really understand the complete meaning of the word “sincere.” Not assumed or merely professed but actually moved by. Having apparent motives as

straight forward. What does the scripture say? Be not only hearers of the word but doers also. Yes not merely professed but actually moved!

Yes it's a wonderful word sincerity. If we are "sincere" in our friendships and relationships we don't just tell people we love them we are moved to show them that we do. If they are in need physically we are there, if they need a hand to hold we are there also. Yes we are "sincere" our love for them. Well so too it is a wonderful description of the genuine believer of Christ! They don't just mouth the words, they are moved by His Holy Spirit to live it out. If we hurt one another, we are moved to apologise and make it right. If our brethren are in need, we are moved to help them through that time of difficulty. When we hear God's Word preached or we study the scriptures, we are moved by the Holy Spirit to respond to them. And when we sin, we are moved to confess that sin and repent of it!

Well these evil false teachers and their modern day counterparts, and none of the above. They hear and they know, but they are never moved. Unless it be for personal gain! V2 "I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles." In v1 Peter said both letters are "reminders" through which he wants to "rouse" them, to stir them up "into a sincere mind." Well in v2 he wants them "to recall." But what does he want them to recall? All of the scriptures! What was spoken through the holy prophets, what was spoken through our Lord and saviour through your apostles."

Beloved, we will look more closely at this verse next time but suffice it to say for now, the scriptures are the key. They are the key to the discerning of the true character of those who teach and preach to us and they are also the key, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to rouse in us, to move in us, that we would then be moved to adhere and respond to all of those things. So then let us continue to pray that we would be warned always of falsehood and false teachers, and that our walk with the Lord Jesus be sincere in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray!