

“The empty promises of false teachers” (8)

We’re continuing our sermon series of **2 Peter** and by now I’m sure you would have noticed Peter has dedicated a whole chapter to false teachers. He informed us about the damage these false teachers can and do cause in **2 Peter 2:1-3**. He informed us that God sees what they are doing and they will certainly not go unpunished for it in **2 Peter 2:4-9**. He informed us in **2 Peter 2:10-17** of just how corrupt these false teachers can be.

But before we get into today’s text let me share with you some items which you can get a hold of but more importantly I want you to notice the words they have on the warning labels.

On Tesco's Tiramisu dessert (printed on bottom) 'Do not turn upside down.'

On Sainsbury's peanuts 'Warning: contains nuts.'

On Boot's Children Cough Medicine 'Do not drive a car or operate machinery after taking this medication.'

On Marks & Spencer Bread Pudding 'Product will be hot after heating.'

On most brands of Christmas lights 'For indoor or outdoor use only.'

On an American Airlines packet of nuts 'Instructions: Open packet, eat nuts.'

On a child's Superman costume 'Wearing of this garment does not enable you to fly.'

Now the reason I shared those with you is to remind us all that warnings need to be listened to but sometimes they are written with those who have no common sense in mind. Like I said Peter spends a whole chapter warning us about false teachers, and that should tell us something loved ones. And if it tells us anything, it should warn us that false teachers were a very real problem for the early church and they are still very real problem today.

And today Peter is going to warn us that these false teachers are full of empty promises. In **2 Peter 2:17** Peter tells us that, “**These men are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm, for whom the utter depths of darkness have been reserved**”. Peter says they are springs without water, they are mists driven along by a storm.

Listen to how Jude describes them in **Jude 12+13** “**These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm--shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted -- twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.**”

In other words they promise much but they never truly deliver what they promise. And make no mistake about loved ones, like we saw last time they are masters in the art of deception. **2 Peter 2:18** “**For by speaking high-sounding but empty words they are able to entice, with fleshly desires and with debauchery, people who have just escaped from those who reside in error**”.

Now remember that Peter already told us in **2 Peter 2:3** that “**they will exploit you with deceptive words.**” Now he says “**they speak high sounding empty words.**”

I remember watching the build up to the general elections a few years ago where all the MP’s from the different parties were giving their last minute appeals to the public to get some votes. And if you listened closely you would find that they always use eloquent speech that sounds impressive and promises much.

Now Peter says that these false teachers use the same techniques, they sound great and impressive and they promise much but are sadly they lack any true substance. **Why?** Because according to **2 Peter 2:18** they actually appeal to the flesh. Oh on the surface it may look like they are winning souls over for Christ but when you strip away the layers you will find that they are actually using the flesh to win people over.

The very things which Paul warned us about in **Galatians 5** to stay clear of are the very things which they are appealing too. **Galatians 5:19-21** “**Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envying,**

murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

And so if you listen closely to these false teachers you will discover that the promises they offer are really appeals to the flesh. This is exactly the promise of the health and wealth gospel we hear so much about today. They shamelessly flaunt their fleshly appeals, while passing it off as something proper. In other words they display excessive wealth as something one might expect to receive as a follower of their teaching.

And Peter says it's by using this deceiving method that they seek to charm those who have escaped from those who live in error. And so not only do they appeal to the flesh, they also promise freedom from the flesh. **Now what do I mean by that?** Well let's allow Peter himself explain what I mean in **2 Peter 2:19** “Although these false teachers promise such people freedom, they themselves are enslaved to immorality. For whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved”.

Peter says they promise freedom but they don't deliver, especially if it is freedom from the lusts of the flesh. Now Peter has just told us that they appeal to the flesh to lure people in but at the same time they are promising freedom from the flesh. **What's going on here?** Well basically Peter is telling us that they are enslaving people through the very thing they promised deliverance from. These false teachers promise freedom, while they themselves are still slaves. Peter says they are slaves to immorality, trying to promise what they don't have themselves.

Can you imagine a sales person coming to your home trying to sell you life insurance from a company which they highly recommend but they themselves don't use them? Can you imagine a Christian telling someone that God can help them with their drug problem but that Christian still uses drugs every day? Can you imagine a person on the street coming up to someone and telling them they need to come to Jesus if they themselves haven't even come to Jesus?

This again reminds us of what we saw last time about just how corrupt these false teachers are. In **2 Peter 2:3** Peter tells us they try to take advantage of Christians through greed. In **2 Peter 2:10** he told us that they walk according to the flesh and despise authority. In **2 Peter 2:12** he told us that they speak evil of the things they do not understand. In **2 Peter 2:13** he told us that they love to display their evil in broad day light. In **2 Peter 2:14** he told us they have eyes full of adultery and that cannot stop sinning and they've trained themselves in ungodly practices. And so these false teachers who promise freedom, are themselves still enslaved by the very things they promise to free you from.

There is a back garden where a dog is heavily chained. The dog, however, is fast asleep, and so he isn't aware of his chains. Later on, we may even notice the dog eating his food, still chained, but as the food is close to the kennel his chain is not troublesome, and so he is still unconscious of his bondage. But soon comes the owner of the dog, who, forgetting the chain, calls the dog. The animal springs up, eager to reach his master. What happens next? All his efforts are in vain, and now for the first time he feels the trouble and restraint of his fetters.

You see loved ones these false teachers proclaim one thing but at the same time they don't even believe in what they are proclaiming because their lives don't reflect their own message. No wonder Peter goes on to tell us that they are worse off now than they were before.

2 Peter 2:20-22 “For if after they have escaped the filthy things of the world through the rich knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they again get entangled in them and succumb to them, their last state has become worse for them than their first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to turn back from the holy commandment that had been delivered to them. They are illustrations of this true proverb: “A dog returns to its own vomit,” and “A sow, after washing herself, wallows in the mire.”

Peter says their latter end is worse than their beginning. He says it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness. **What does he mean?** Jesus tells us in **Luke 12:47+48** “That servant, who knew his lord's will, and didn't prepare, nor do what he wanted, will be beaten with many stripes, but he who didn't know, and did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes. To whomever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked”.

Now I can't picture a more sickening scene than a dog that has just been sick all over the kitchen floor going back and eating it, that's just gross.

Or what sense does it make for female pig to spend hours cleaning herself just to go back into a pool of mud to get dirty again? In other words these false teachers have become like the dog returning to his vomit, and the washed sow wallowing again in the mire.

It was in the north of England in 1881, when a terrible storm swept over that part of the country. A man, who was a minister at **Evemouth**, had a great many fishermen who were a part of the congregation he served. It had been very stormy weather and the fishermen had been detained in the harbour for a week. One day, however, the sun shone out in a clear blue sky; it seemed as if the storm had passed away, and the boats started out for the fishing ground. Forty-one boats left the harbour that day.

Before they started, the harbour-master hoisted the storm signal, and warned them of the coming storm. He begged of them not to go; but they disregarded his warning, and away they went. They saw no sign of the coming storm. In a few hours, however, it swept down on that coast and very few of those fishermen returned. There were five or six men in each boat, and nearly all were lost in that dreadful storm. Those men who lost their lives at sea were ushered into eternity because they did not listen to the warning.

Loved ones, Peter has been encouraging us to keep growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ but we also need to listen to his warning and be careful of these false teachers. Because if we don't, we too may end up becoming just as lost as them.

Now you may be thinking well I'm not a false teacher so that doesn't apply to me. Well it's true you may not be a false teacher but remember these false teachers were once true Christians and if it can happen to them, it can certainly happen to us.

They were once true Christians but now according to **2 Peter 2:1** they bring on themselves swift destruction. They were once true Christians but now according to **2 Peter 2:3** their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. They were once true Christians but now according to **2 Peter 2:17** the gloom of darkness is reserved forever for them.

Think about it why would Peter warn those who have escaped from those who live in error in **2 Peter 2:18+19**, if there is no real danger of becoming enslaved and brought into slavery again? Why would Peter tell us in **2 Peter 3:17** to beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked, if it is impossible for Christians to fall away?

You see loved ones Peter warns us about falling away because it's a very real possibility and he's not alone in the Bible with that concept. **Hebrews 3:12+13** "Beware, brothers, lest perhaps there be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God; but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called "today;" lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin".

Listen to Paul's warning to the Galatian churches in **Galatians 1:6-9** "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel, not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell! As we have said before, and now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell!"

Now those are very strong words from the apostle Paul and the reason they are strong is because falling for a false gospel is a very real possibility if we're not careful. And the very real possibility of apostasy and losing one's salvation helps us to understand the grave concern expressed in Peter's words. Peter believes that Christians can fall from grace. Peter believes Christians can be led away with the error of false teachers.

That's why he dedicates a whole chapter describing these false teachers who are losing their salvation and trying to take others with them. That's why I've dedicated four sermons just on the topic of false teachers. Peter is telling us to be careful because these false teachers can and do cause a lot of damage within a congregation.

Peter is telling us be careful but don't worry because God sees what they are doing and they will not go unpunished for it. Peter is telling us be careful because these false teachers are totally corrupt. Peter is telling us be careful because although they sound good and impressive, these false teachers are full of empty promises.

And the point I'm trying to make is this, if we as Christians are growing and continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, the less chance there will be of us being led astray by any individual or false teacher.

Ephesians 4:11-14 "He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; why? So that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error."

Paul says trickery, craftiness, deceitful scheming wow; it's hard for some people to realize that there are actually people out there who are willing to mislead people for their own selfish gain. But yet it goes on and naïve people continue to fall for it. It's hard to imagine that there are false teachers like Peter has described are out there leading people away from God, but yet it goes on and naïve people continue to fall for it.

Peter says grow Christian grow but be careful. Paul says in Ephesians 6:11 "Put on the full armour of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil."

I hope and pray these sermons on false teachers have been useful but I also hope and pray that we wake up to the fact that these people are very real and if we're not careful we too can be led astray. Jesus never promised you become a Christian and you will become materially rich. Jesus never promised you become a Christian and you will never have any trouble in your life. But what He did promise is eternal life for all who will faithfully do what He says.