

The Alternative to Truth

by David Roper

The prophetic word is a lamp that dispels darkness and teaches us how to live in the darkness, while false prophecy is a seductive and insidious alternative that leads to destruction.

Duration: 37:26

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:3

Topics: "Purpose"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker, Peter, emphasizes the importance of the Word of God in our lives. He explains that the apostles were responsible for preaching the good news and recording it in the Scriptures so that we can have a relationship with the Lord. Peter uses three terrifying illustrations from the Old Testament to highlight the judgment that awaits those who do not follow the teachings of the apostles. He urges believers to not only possess the Word of God, but to allow it to master their lives and dispel the darkness. The Word of God is described as the only source of lasting value and guidance in times of difficulty and uncertainty.

Transcript

Let's turn to the small book of 2 Peter, his second epistle, and we'll continue on where we concluded last week. We've been talking about human potential and how to achieve it. It's a very relevant topic both for our day and for Peter's day.

Much of the Scripture is directed toward that end. How do we become what God has determined that we shall be? I think all of us somehow intuitively know that we were meant for more than merely sitting around the house and watching television and drinking beer or making automobiles or making money or building buildings, no matter how worthwhile some of those enterprises may be. God has a greater destiny in mind for us, and essentially what the Scripture says is that we were destined to do the works of God.

Jesus said we will do the works that He did. In fact, we'll do even greater works than He did. That's a high and holy calling that ought to challenge any of us.

And it's the Word of God that tells us how to achieve that destiny. Now, that's the concern of 2 Peter, Peter's interest in this little epistle. He tells us in this book the process by which we work the works of God.

And he says essentially it's through coming in contact with the nature of God itself, through the impartation of a divine nature. And that makes sense, because if we think for a moment it's only God who can do the works of God. It takes a divine nature, the very character of God Himself, to be God-like in the world.

And it's the concern of Peter to tell us how we come into relationship with God so we can have imparted to us the divine nature on the same basis on which the apostles had that relationship. Now, in chapter 1, as we saw, Peter describes how the apostles came to know Jesus Christ and through submission to Him the divine nature was imparted to them. But the process wasn't concluded there.

It was the responsibility of the apostles to preach that good news to their times and then to record that proclamation in the scriptures so that we can have the same relationship to the Lord that these first century Christians had. Through the precious and very great promises, as Peter describes them, we can have a divine nature so we can escape the corruption that's in the world through lust. Now, that's Peter's concern in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 1. And then he goes on in verses 5 through 11 to describe our growth toward potential.

And he says in summary fashion, it's not enough to merely possess the word of the apostles, the good news, as we have it contained in the New Testament. It has to master us. It has to possess us.

We have to cooperate with God's nature and allow Him to work out in our life the character that we want to see there. It's the word who tells us what we ought to be and it's the divine nature that makes it possible for us to live God-like lives in the world. And then in verses 12 through 19 he makes an appeal to his readers to pay attention to this word, the word from the apostles.

In verse 19 he concludes with the statement, and so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. He reaches that conclusion because, he tells us in verses 12 through 19, the word which the apostles taught is essentially the same word which the prophets spoke, the Old Testament prophets. As you read through the Old Testament, the inescapable conclusion that you come to is that the prophets predicted the coming of one who would set everything right and his coming would be a glorious occasion.

And the one who was to come was the Messiah of Israel. That's the burden of all Old Testament prophecy. It focuses on the coming of Jesus Christ.

And Peter tells us that the word which the apostles proclaimed is the same word because they themselves were eyewitnesses of the coming of the one which the Old Testament prophets had predicted. They predicted that he would come. Peter says, we saw him.

That's what he means in verse 16 when he says, we did not follow cleverly devised tales, not made up tales, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty, we apostles, and specifically the three men, Peter, James, and John, which the Lord took with him to the top of the mountain and before whom he was transfigured. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to him by the majestic glory.

This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. And we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word made more

sure.

That is our eyewitness accounts certify that what the prophets said was true. We saw him in his glory. What occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration was a prefiguring of the coming of Jesus in his glory, in his second coming.

Peter says, we saw it. We were eyewitnesses of it. What we're telling you is not some cleverly contrived tale.

It's simply the report of men who saw what the prophets predicted. And therefore our witness, the apostolic witness, the New Testament as we have it, is on a par with all of the prophetic witness of the Old Testament. The apostles have the same authority as the Old Testament prophets.

That's what Peter is saying. Therefore, Peter says, we ought to take heed to it. We ought to listen to it.

We ought to subject ourselves to the message of the prophets and the apostles. Because, Peter says, it's like a lamp shining in a dark place. The world he symbolizes as a night of darkness before the dawn comes.

That's what the world is like today. Those of us who, like the apostles, are waiting for the coming of Christ are waiting for the dawn to break when everything is going to be set right. We'll see things as they ought to be.

But until the day dawns, until Jesus comes again, or to use this very colorful symbol that Peter uses, until the morning star rises in our heart, until the dawn comes, we have the prophetic word now that dispels darkness. It's the word of God that tells us how to live in the darkness now. It's the light that we have.

It's a lamp, he says, that shines in a dark place. And all other alternatives, though they may occasionally illumine some aspect of life, never dispel the darkness. All the other alternatives, TM, TA, assertiveness training, EST and all of its derivatives, though they may appear to have answers that illuminate some aspect of our life, ultimately flicker and fail.

They cannot really deal with the darkness. They can't tell us how to cope with life. They're like trying to fix something in the darkness with a match.

I remember one time my car conked out on a country road and there were no street lamps and I had no flashlight and I was trying to repair my car with matches. All I had was a book of matches and it's not a very sane thing to do, leaning over your engine, striking matches, and go up in a puff of smoke, but it's all I had. And I'd strike a match and I'd work frantically for a moment and then the light would go out.

And I'd strike another one and I'd work for a while and the light would go out. And of course, in that sort of circumstance, the darkness that follows is even greater because your eyes are no longer accustomed to the darkness. That's the effect of every alternative to the prophetic word.

It just leaves us in greater darkness. It may look good for a time, but it has no lasting value. It can't dispel the darkness.

It can't teach us how to live when your husband leaves you. It can't teach you how to cope with your circumstances when your means of livelihood is failing. When you sense that during the next year you may be laid off and you have heavy mortgage payments and you have insurance payments and you have

to provide for the needs of your family and you have no certainty that you're going to have a job at the end of this year.

It's only the Word of God that teaches you how to cope with that sort of thing. How do you deal with the encroachments of darkness on your family and your own personal life? This is the lamp that tells you how. I remember once when I was a kid, I went down to what's called the Big Bend country in Texas, the part of Texas where the Rio Grande makes that swing to the south.

We were camped out under a big sycamore tree out in the desert. It was Christmas and it was cold up in the mountains, so we went out into the desert and found a big tree to camp under. In the middle of the night, about 2 o'clock in the morning, a car pulled up beside us.

People got out and started unloading all their camping gear. They had a little tiny dog. It looked like a little fur-covered mouse.

They locked it up in the car and it began to yap. It just barked and barked and went on and on. We were trying to sleep and I heard something rustling around in the darkness.

You get that sort of prickly feeling up the back of your neck and you wonder what it is out there. We poked up the fire a little bit and you could see eyes all around the fire. There were coyotes that had been attracted by this little dog barking.

We got up and pumped up the Coleman light and set it up on top of the car and you could see all these coyotes sitting on their haunches just outside the circle of light. I'll tell you what I did. I spent the whole night pumping on a Coleman lamp.

There's no way I was going to let that light go out. They kept saying, coyotes never hurt anybody, but you can never convince me. See, that's the effect of light in our world.

We need that sort of light to dispel the darkness. The word is that sort of a lamp, keeps the darkness at bay, teaches us how to walk in the light, how to deal with things as they are. And that's why Peter says we need to give heed to it in contrast to all the other alternatives to life.

Here is a word that tells us how to live in the darkness, so we need to listen to it. And he goes on in verse 20 to explain why it is a lamp, why it dispels darkness. But know this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.

The word interpretation means explanation or origin. The point is the prophetic word as we have it both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament did not originate with man. It didn't come through the will of man.

But, as he says, it came as men, in verse 21, were moved by the Holy Spirit and spoke from God. That is the process by which the prophets received the word of God was through a divine disclosure. God revealed himself to men and what they have written, therefore, is the word of God.

Now, all of the nations of this time had prophets, so-called prophets and sinners were oracles were given. But their prophecies were always arrived at through divination or through magic or narcotics or through some self-induced state by which they received what they considered to be a prophetic word. In contrast to that, the apostles received the word of God directly.

It was disclosed to them. As the Lord says of Moses, I spoke to him mouth to mouth. There was a direct disclosure of truth.

Moses then turned and spoke and then wrote the five books of Moses and this became the prophetic word, the word from God. This is what made the prophets of Israel unique. There are no prophets like them anywhere else on the face of the earth.

Paul says in speaking of the nation of Israel, one of their distinctive marks, one of the marks of their uniqueness is that to them, to the Jews, were given the oracles of God and only to them. It was through the prophets of Israel that God's word was given. And that's why it's a lamp, because it's God's word.

God understands the light, the darkness. He knows how to cope with it. He knows life.

He understands it. He's revealed it through the prophets. It becomes a lamp to us in a dark place.

Peter says, therefore, we should give heed to it. Now, that's the message of chapter one. It concentrates on the uniqueness and the importance of the prophetic word.

And he says it's something to be taken seriously. But in chapter two, he points out that there is an alternative, which he describes as false prophecy, which you will frequently find displayed alongside the truth. And we're constantly forced to make a choice.

Are we going to believe the apostolic word, the prophetic word? Are we going to believe the Bible? Or are we going to choose some alternative witness to so-called truth? Now, that's the issue. Chapter one represents the true witness through the prophets and the apostles. Chapter two contrasts it with the false witness through false prophets and teachers.

Now, let's read through the first three verses. And what Peter is going to do in chapter two is describe these false prophets first in their ministry in verses one through three. And then he tells us what their destiny is in verses four through ten.

Or put another way, their deeds are described in one verses one, two and three, and their doom in verses four through ten. Verse one. But in contrast to what appears above, false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of 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.

And here we have their ministry described, which he describes in three ways. He talks first about their methods, the methods by which they approach people. And secondly, he talks about their morality, their lifestyle, and thirdly, their motives, what motivates them.

Their method is that they introduce truth, false truth, seductively, insidiously, secretly. Their morality is that they follow the way of sensuality. And the motive that generates their message is greed.

First, their methods. He says that they will be introduced, this message will arise from among you. That is, they will consider themselves and will call themselves Christians.

This will arise within the church. Paul had pointed out in Acts 20 when he spoke to the elders at Ephesus that there will be two attacks on the church. There will be an attack from the outside.

There will be wolves that will attempt to tear the sheep who will come in from the outside. And there will be attacks from within the body, wolves in sheep clothing. It's these that Peter is referring to here.

Now, attack from outside is very easy to recognize. It's obvious. They call a spade a spade.

They make no bones about the fact that they are in opposition to the Christian message. These are people who will designate themselves Christians. They will look good.

Their message will appear to be the Christian message, the message of the apostles. But, he says, alongside the gospel which they claim to preach, they will secretly introduce heresies. In other words, they don't appear to be in opposition to the gospel.

This appears to be another perspective on the gospel. It will be difficult to recognize that they're false prophets. They will secretly introduce heresies.

Now, the heresy which he describes here is that of denying the master who bought them. That is, though they will say that they worship Jesus Christ, they're unwilling to submit themselves to his teaching. They're not subject to his word.

They claim to agree with and to preach the apostolic message, but they're not willing to put themselves under the lordship of Jesus Christ and allow himself to control their lives and allow him to control their lives. The second thing that he says in verse two has to do with their morality. Many, he says, will follow their sensuality.

Now, sensuality here, as it's used in this context, is not sexuality. We often use the term that way. But, he's not talking about their sexual behavior.

He's talking about their preoccupation with things in the here and now. That is, their primary concern is what tastes good and what looks good and what smells good and what feels good. What we wear, what we ride in, what we live in, physical things, the world of the seen and the obviously known.

These are the things that they'll be preoccupied with instead of spiritual things. They deny the master who bought them. They deny the cross.

They will not submit to spiritual realities and the lordship of Jesus Christ. They live for things that are seen, for sensual things. And, as he says, there's a two-fold result.

Because of them, the way of truth will be maligned and many will follow their sensuality. In other words, they not only will turn on many people to error. They'll be popular.

Many will follow them because, basically, they're saying what we want to hear. But, they will also turn off many people to the gospel, to authentic Christianity. They'll gain a vast following because they're telling people what our nature wants to hear.

And, many will follow them. But, they also will cause many people to be turned away from the truth of the gospel. Because they'll see people who are so-called Christians, who are just as greedy, just as inquisitive.

They drive just as hard in their business. They call themselves Christians, but their lifestyle is essentially sensual. They see no spiritual reality.

They see that they're not able to cope with life any better than they are. Who wants to be a Christian and if it makes no difference, no concrete difference in your life. As Jesus said to the apostles, what do you more than these? If it makes no practical difference in the way a person lives, then it has no ultimate appeal.

I'm sure you've seen some of the bumper stickers that appear in opposition to the I found it stickers. I don't know how you feel about the I found it stickers, but regardless of how you feel about them, there's a lot of antipathy toward it. Some of it is opposition to the cross.

But, some of it I believe is opposition to the way Christians have lived their lives. So-called Christians. And, you see things appearing like this.

Who needs it? Or, who wants it? Or, I lost it. Because they don't see anything really attractive in people's lives who consider themselves to be Christians. The third thing he tells us in verse 3 is that in their greed they will exploit you with false words, plastic words, made up words, words which they stretch and change in order to appeal to people's interests and likes and desires.

Manufactured words which they will use to exploit you. That is, they exploit the spiritual hunger that people have. Everyone has a hunger for God.

Everyone has a desire to be able to face life and to be what we were intended to be. And, this passage tells us that they will exploit that hunger that we have. They will spiritually rip people off.

That's what the religion or the hunger that people have for spiritual things in order to gain personal advantage. They're greedy. They're greedy for power and prestige, for ego fulfillment or for money.

And so, in order to feed their egos they will exploit those who have a great hunger for spiritual things. And, the result is destruction both for them and for those who follow them. Because in verse 2 we're told that by denying the master they bring swift destruction upon themselves and the heresy which they teach is described as a destructive heresy.

It causes their own lives to degenerate and it causes the lives of those who follow them to degenerate. And, this will go on within the church in the name of Christian faith. You see, these are not opponents of Christianity.

These are not people outside who are attacking. These are people within the church who look like Christians, who sound like Christians, who seem to be teaching apostolic doctrine, but who deny the cross and the lordship of Jesus Christ whose eyes are on sensual things instead of spiritual things, who have no higher goal than the satisfaction of their own ego. And, the church is full of them.

But, Peter says that it's destructive. It's going to destroy people. It will destroy them and it will destroy their adherents.

In fact, he says in verse 3, their judgment from long ago is not idle and their destruction is not asleep. I believe what Peter was thinking of is the statement in Deuteronomy 13 that a false prophet was to be judged. Long before Peter wrote, Moses had written that if a man preached a message which was contrary to the message which they had heard from God, he was a false prophet.

And, it didn't matter what credentials he had or how powerful he seemed to be, how many miracles he could work. All of these things were irrelevant. If he taught a message that was contrary to the apostolic message, he was to be stoned.

That's how they dealt with false prophets. And, Peter, I'm sure, says this with great sadness. He's not gloating over the fact that these people stand under the judgment of God.

But, the facts are, they are and we are if we have aid or abet or follow in any sense the teaching which they promote. And, verses 4-10 are an elaboration of that judgment. And, what Peter does in this section is bring together three illustrations from the Old Testament which to the people of Peter's time would have been terrifying.

They're hard for us to identify with unless we know the Old Testament well. But, to his readers who would know the Old Testament, these illustrations would have a very powerful effect. Verse 4, For if God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell and committed them into pits of darkness reserved for judgment, 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, 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 thereafter, and if he rescued righteous Lot oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men, for by what he saw and heard that righteous men while living among them felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.

He uses three illustrations, the angels who sinned, the ancient world that was destroyed in the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah that he reduced to ashes, and his point is that if they did not escape, neither will these false teachers and those who follow them. The angels who sin, that's a reference to Genesis 6, apparently, in the account of the rebellion of the angels who cohabited with mortal women and produced the Nephilim or the giants that are described in the flood story. It's because of the actions of these angels that the flood came upon the world.

Peter's point is this, if the angels didn't survive in their rebellion against God, how can a mere man? And secondly, the reference to the ancient world and its destruction, which is familiar to all of us, is the account of the flood, which was brought upon the world because of its ungodliness. Peter's point is this, again, if the ancient world didn't survive, how can a mere man? And thirdly, the illustration of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which he says stand as an example hereafter to those who live ungodly. You know, they know now that these cities, of course, it's never been a question to me because it's well established from scripture that they existed, but they know now historically that without question the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah existed.

From the tablets that they've just recently uncovered in Syria, this vast empire, Ebla, was trading with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their names are mentioned in the tablets. So, the cities existed, but they're no longer there.

They're under the Dead Sea. And if you stand by the Dead Sea now, there's no trace of any civilization there. Peter says that stands as a great illustration of God's judgment.

Here was a vast civilization that rebelled against God, and he judged them. They fell under God's judgment, and they were buried under ashes, and today they're buried under the Dead Sea. And his point is this, if God judged the angels, and he judged the ancient world, and he judged Sodom and Gomorrah, then, in verse 9, the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.

He goes back again and focuses on the primary error in their teaching. They indulge the flesh. That is, they're preoccupied with physical things, with sensual things, with the satisfaction of the flesh, and they despise spiritual authority.

They will not subject themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And that's the issue. That's the underlying issue.

You can look at any of the so-called Christian cults, and you find underlying them this preoccupation with sensual gratification and an unwillingness to submit themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And Peter says the tragedy is that to do so is to face judgment. It's inescapable.

It's not something that we should say with glee. It's something that ought to be stated with great sadness. To reject the message of the apostles is to be judged.

To accept the message of the apostles, the prophets and the apostles, is to have the capacity then to face the darkness, to face life, to face any situation, and do so with power and with authority. Those are the alternatives. As Paul puts it, there are those who are perishing who have despised the message of the apostles, and there are those who are being saved who have believed it.

There are three conclusions then that I would draw from this passage. The first is that we must not teach evil. Don't teach evil.

It's a serious thing to teach evil. James says it's a serious thing to be a teacher, because there is always the possibility that someone may teach error. Error taught inadvertently, I'm sure, is covered by the grace of God.

Any one of us, any of you or any of us who teaches occasionally will say things that are in error. That's a different thing. But to knowingly teach error is a serious thing.

I stood yesterday or a couple of days ago with a friend in the hospital and listened to someone give counsel to my friend who was having a very difficult time. And the counsel was unwise. Not only unwise, it was contrary to biblical truth.

And my friend very wisely rejected it. But it was false counsel. And I don't know if it was given knowingly or not.

If it's given knowingly, it's a serious thing. Those of you who are teachers need to take heed to this word, myself included. It's easy for us to buy some current philosophy or some psychological movement and begin to teach it as though it's Christian truth and it may be contrary to the truth.

If we do it knowingly, then we stand under God's judgment. As the hymn puts it, all the evil we have wrought, all forbidden things we have sought, all the sins to others taught, forgive us, Lord, for Jesus'

sake. The second thing I would say is that we must not learn evil.

Not only must we not teach it, but we mustn't learn it. You can't help being taught evil. We're taught evil constantly through the papers, magazines we read, the books we read, television, the classes we sit in.

Evil comes at us from every standpoint. We can't keep from being taught wrong, but we don't have to learn it. We can subject ourselves to the word of God and know its message and use the word of God to try every teaching and screen out teachings that are contrary to the word of the apostles.

The third thing that I believe we can learn from this passage is that we must subject ourselves to the apostolic word. This is the lamp that dispels darkness. This is the light and we need to give ourselves to it.

We need to study it. We need to read it. We need to know it.

But more than that, we need to allow it to master our lives. It's a good exercise, I think, to think through your day and your priorities and determine how much time you spend doing various things in your life in contrast to what you do with the word of God. We do the things that we believe really count.

And if we believe that the word of the prophets and the apostles really counts, if that's the lamp that dispels the darkness in our life, then we will set up time in our life, in our day, in our busy schedule to let the word of God minister to our souls. So as John Fisher puts it in one of his songs, read the Bible. The words inside are true and reliable.

Let's pray, shall we? Let's stand together. Father, we are confronted daily with such a dazzling array of things to believe. Things that come at us from every quarter.

Often things that have great charm and allure that seem to be right and yet represent the great sort of error that will destroy us if we take it seriously. We ask that you give us a hunger for the word. We ask that like newborn babes we might desire the milk of the word and thus grow by it, subject ourselves to it and its message.

And by means of that word, may Christ Lord in our life, we ask that we might then be able to face life and the situations that we're placed in and cope with them in the power of your spirit. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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