

Destruction Is Not Sleeping

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being established firmly in our faith and warns against the destruction that comes from false teaching and immorality.

Duration: 37:39

Scripture: Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:1-17

Topics: "False Teachers"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a lamp shining in a dark place. He describes the world as being covered in irrational darkness and enslaved to passions. The speaker then focuses on verses 4 to 10 of chapter 2, which warn about God's punishment of unrighteousness and licentiousness. He uses three cases, including the fallen angels, to illustrate that God has punished in the past and will do so in the future. The main point of the chapter is to warn about destruction and the consequences of falling prey to false teaching. The speaker concludes by urging the audience to repent and turn from their evil ways, seeking the power of Christ to free them from corruption.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.desiringgod.org. We've spent four weeks now looking at the first chapter of 2 Peter, and the main point of that first chapter, I tried to argue, was verse 10, which says, Brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never fall. In other words, Peter's main concern is that we enjoy the certainty of our salvation.

He wants us to be established firmly, rooted deeply, and unshakable in our faith, not blown by false doctrine or temptation. He closes the letter in chapter 3, verse 17, with this admonition, Beware, lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability. So Peter is devoting this last will and testament, as it were, to make us firm and stable and unshakable in the truth and in our faith.

Now, the way he goes about doing this in chapter 1 is by reminding us of his precious and very great promises, and then assuring us that if we cleave to these promises, there will flow into our lives divine power which enables us to escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion and to grow in godliness and self-control and love. And then he reminds us in chapter 1 also that the source of these promises is the holy scriptures. And he tells us that these did not come by any human impulse, but that men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

And then he says not only that, we have this prophetic word made more sure by an eyewitness experience, namely the encounter with the majestic Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. So, putting it all together, in chapter 1 what we have is something like this. God's word is confirmed, and the confirmation of that word gives confidence to his promises or in his promises, which brings power for godliness, which in turn makes us assured of our calling and our election.

Now we turn to chapter 2, and a very, very significant shift in his approach takes place. And I say shift in his approach, not his goal, because I think the goal is the same in chapter 2 as it was in chapter 1, namely to make us firm and stable and unshaken in the faith. But his approach is very, very different in chapter 2. Chapter 1 was mainly encouragement, a very positive summons to heed the promises of God, avail ourselves of the power for godliness, and be on about the Christian life.

In chapter 2, it's mainly warning against the destruction that is coming upon people who do not avail themselves of that power and do not walk in that godliness. If chapter 1 was the carrot that he hangs out in front of us, chapter 2 is the crack of the whip over our heads. There are no commands, no admonitions, no imperatives whatsoever in chapter 2. It is all pure, horrifying description of what becomes of people who fall prey to the false teaching that he has in view.

The main point of the chapter is warning about destruction. You can see it in four places. Let's just sum them up so that you can know ahead of time what the high points of the chapter are, or low points, depending on how you look at it.

Verse 1, at the end, Those who deny the Master who bought them bring upon themselves swift destruction. Verse 3, at the end, From of old their condemnation has not been idle and their destruction has not been asleep. Verse 12, down a ways, But these, speaking of the false teachers, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed, reviling in matters of which they are ignorant, will be destroyed in the same destruction with them suffering wrong for their wrongdoing.

And finally, in verse 17, For them the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved. So it's very clear what the main point of this chapter is. It is a warning that destruction awaits the false teachers and those who follow them.

Chapter 2 is simply the flip side of the coin from chapter 1, verses 10 and 11. In chapter 1, verse 10, he said, Make every effort to confirm your calling and election, for if you do this you'll never fall, but instead there will be open for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Chapter 2 turns it over and says, If you contradict the character and the doctrine of the elect, you will fall, and there will be no entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What would you think of those Argentine and British commanders, if, in deploying their troops in these very days, they acted as if this were a war game? And they didn't pause one minute to think that sons and brothers and fathers and husbands are going to be maimed and killed in this maneuver. Wouldn't we say of such commanders, they're heartless? How much more, then, should we regard pastors and teachers and counselors as heartless, who do not pause to ponder that in the matters of Christian preaching and doctrine and behavior, it is not a game? There are eternal things at stake. We are heartless to give the impression that in the matters of doctrine and faith and obedience, we are playing a game.

We are heartless to give the impression that the weightiest concerns of the Church are really the alteration of psychological states or the modification of behavior. If that's the weightiest concern of the Church, then

preaching is nothing more than another form of psychotherapy, and Christian doctrine is just another means to mental health, and the Church is just another institution to foster psychological and social welfare. That's the way a lot of people today think about doctrine and preaching and the Church, more and more.

And it's heartless. It is heartless because it treats life as if it's just a historical game, and there's nothing more at stake than what happens in the here and now. It treats life as if there is no eternal joy in the kingdom of Christ and no eternal misery in the kingdom of Satan at stake.

When I preach, when you teach, when you live out your lives, 2 Peter 2 is a word to me as a pastor not to be heartless. It aims to keep me from playing games in the pulpit. It aims to keep me from letting my messages dissolve into little pep talks about the power of positive thinking.

It aims to make me earnest in my calling, angry at false teaching, grieved over the destruction of the ungodly. It is no accident that 2 Peter is in Scripture. It is a word from God, and it is profitable for reproof and correction and training in righteousness that everybody in this room might get earnest about confirming your call and your election.

Let's look at the first ten verses together today. We'll begin with verse one. False prophets also arose among the people, that is, the people of Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

Wherever important truth is at stake, there will be counterfeits. In the Old Testament, there arose prophets who said, Thus saith the Lord, when the Lord had not said thus. And in the church, Peter says, there are going to be teachers, that is, people who say, When Paul says this, he means this, and it isn't so.

That's what chapter three, verse sixteen said. They are twisting the doctrines of Paul, making them mean what they want to mean to fit their own passions, and it isn't so. Now, it says it in the future tense here.

There will be such teachers. Well, we know when we read the rest of this book, they're already on the scene. This prophecy has already been fulfilled as far as Peter is concerned.

These false teachers are at hand. They have always been at hand in the church. And the first thing we learn now about them is in verse one, somehow they are denying the Master who bought them.

Now, what does that mean? Well, every heresy at root is about Jesus. In some way, the person or the work of Jesus is being diminished. Something important about Him is being denied.

But when you read the rest of this chapter, it doesn't tell us anything about what's being denied, and you get the impression that what's wrong is a moral problem, not a doctrinal one. But we've learned, haven't we, that those are never separated. You can never separate your esteem of the Savior from your life.

The higher you esteem Jesus, the higher will be your level of obedience. And they rise and fall together. Life and doctrine always go hand in hand.

And I think what we've got here is a situation in which there is such blatant disobedience of the Lord that in that sense His Lordship is denied. Let me try to show you some clues for that from the text. The first clue is this little phrase, the Master who bought them.

Why do you suppose Peter said, who bought them? You track down that little phrase in a couple of other places in the New Testament. Listen to them. 1 Corinthians 6.20 You are not your own.

You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your bodies. And that put me on to something here.

I tracked it on into 1 Peter 1, verse 18, where it says, You were ransomed or bought from your futile ways, inherited from your fathers by the precious blood of Christ. When the apostles spoke about being bought, they had a picture in their minds. It seemed to be something like this.

Everybody is a slave of sin or of Satan. Jesus lays His life down to buy them for Himself. Redeem them from their old master so that He can be their master, their Lord.

And the way they show His new Lordship is by walking in His ways. And the context in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Peter 1 is sexual morality. And therefore, very specifically, to be bought by Jesus Christ means to be bought from the domination of sexual desires and brought into the purity of Christ to live lives of holiness in this matter of sexuality.

We belong to a new master whose promises, a la chapter 1, are so promising that the promises of sex lose their domination. Now, the way we exalt Christ, therefore, is by walking in His pattern of sexuality, not in the way of the world. Now, here are some other indications in the text that that's what's going on in these false teachers, that they are coming along and propagating sexual immorality in the name of Christian freedom.

Verse 2, many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled. Now, notice, right after saying that they are denying the master who bought them, it says that their real seductive power is licentiousness, not a doctrinal error. Now, that word licentiousness, in the Revised Standard, you may have sensuality or lasciviousness or something like that.

It's a big fancy word for sexual, blatant sexual immorality. If you track it down in Romans 13, 13 and 2 Corinthians 12, 21 and 1 Peter 4, 3, it's always side by side with sexual immorality. Now, you remember what happened at Corinth.

This letter might have been written to Christians in the Corinthian area. We're not told who received it, but here's a very similar error that had already happened. First Corinthians 5, 1 says, It is actually reported that there is immorality among you of a kind that is not found among the pagans, for a man is living with his father's wife, and you are arrogant.

Now, notice the connection between immorality and arrogance. That same attitude is right here in these false teachers. Drop down to verse 18.

Notice boasting and licentiousness. For uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error. These false teachers are mingling arrogance with immorality.

They're proud that they are commending this kind of sexual openness. Look at verse 10. They indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

They're bold and self-willed. Why do they despise authority? They don't want any controls on their passions. And that sheds a lot of light back on verse 1, doesn't it? Because in verse 1 it says, they deny

the master, the master who bought them for sexual purity.

They don't want anything to do with it. Authority means submission, and they won't have it. They despise authority.

Now, if we wanted to take the time, we could go back and re-read chapter 1. Because we didn't notice it at the time, but now we could notice that many things in chapter 1 were written with a view to chapter 2. I'll point out two of them. Verse 4, where it talks about the promises freeing us from the corruption that is in the world through passion. Verse 6, add to your knowledge self-control.

Why did he pick out self-control of all the possible virtues he might have listed? Here's the reason. He knows what he's after, and he was after it from the beginning. Now, it might seem to us almost impossible today that somebody could be promulgating sexual immorality in the church, and be a teacher in the church.

But it's true. What were they saying? Well, look at verse 3. In their greed, evidently some monetary motivation here too, in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Now, don't get the impression that what's happening here is just some kind of seductive people who for good looks or money have swept away some weak-minded people.

That's not the case. They're teaching. They're using words.

They're giving arguments and reasons why you should follow them in their particular sexual morality. Probably, they were saying as much as today, it's okay for kids to experiment with sexual intercourse. It's okay for couples to live together and get married later on if it happens to work out.

It's okay for a husband and wife, if they don't get enough fulfillment at home, to just borrow somebody else's wife or husband or go to a prostitute. That's all right, they were saying. There's nothing new today about all the pursuit of sexual openness and freedom.

The assault on the sanctity of sexual intercourse within marriage is old-fashioned. Jesus wasn't gone thirty years before there arose teachers in the church. Teachers in the church, mind you, who were saying in the name of Jesus Christ, it is okay to pursue sexual relations outside marriage or in other kinds of weird forms.

So listen, especially you young people, listen to this. You know who the old fogies are today? The old-fashioned people are today, they're the swingers who live together unmarried. The old fogies are the prostitute patrons.

The old fogies are the wife swappers. The old fogies are the kids at school who twitter about their weekend connections. And the old-fashioned, perverted, Christian authorization of that is as old as the church.

You can see what they were saying a little bit in verse 19. Glance down at that verse with me. Here's the way they were probably coming on.

They, the false teachers, promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. Now, doesn't that sound familiar? The push for free sex was around long before there was any Puritanical or Victorian ethics to rebel against. The false teachers, according to Jude 4, which is a very close parallel

here, the false teachers were taking the grace of God, it says, and twisting it into licentiousness.

They were probably the same sort of people who in Romans 6 were saying, let us sin that grace may abound. The grace of God was simply being used as license rather than as power for godliness. They were saying that what we do with our bodies, that doesn't really matter.

The grace of God has redeemed our spirits. We are free in the holy God above and will be taken away one day. Do what you please and magnify the grace of Christ therein.

Isn't that amazing? I think that's exactly what they were saying. And now here's an answer to give to people today who say, you evangelicals are just enslaved to an old-fashioned sexual morality. Two responses I give to them.

One, look, all immorality is just as old-fashioned as morality. So let's forget this old-fashioned talk, all right? And two, why should it be called slavery when I freely choose to govern my passions according to the principles of God and be called freedom when you follow your impulses? That doesn't make any sense to me. If we choose to follow God and you choose to follow your passions, who's the fool? Now, I hope that you can remember that because we are surrounded, just like Lot and Noah in our day, with people who think any kind of continence is ridiculous.

But I hope you remember verse 19 of chapter 1, the world is covered with darkness. We need a lamp shining in a dark place. The world is covered with irrational darkness.

They are enslaved to passions no matter how sophisticated the arguments become. And that, by the way, and their doom, is what the rest of the text is about. So let's look at it briefly.

Verses 4 to 10 of chapter 2 warn us that since God has punished unrighteousness and licentiousness in the past, he will do it in the future. And he illustrates, Peter illustrates this truth about God with three cases, and we'll look at them just briefly one at a time. First, the case of the fallen angels in verse 4. If God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom, or as a better translation may have it, into chains of darkness, to be kept until the judgment, and then the sentence breaks off and it's finished in verse 9. What a lesson here.

Just picture this. Angels are the most mighty, dignified, glorious creatures under God. You'd think that angels at least would get some special treatment.

God is unsparing in his treatment of the angels who forsook their first place and rebelled against the Holy Trinity. And it says they are being kept for the day of judgment, and that is described for us in Revelation 20.10. They will be consigned to the lake of fire and brimstone to be tormented day and night forever and ever. And the really horrifying thing about this text is that it's addressed to human beings, the false teachers and those who follow them, and they are warned, this will be your fate too.

Someday there are going to be people who thought that they were teaching in the church, and they are going to hear Jesus Christ say what he said in Matthew 25.41, Depart from me, you cursed of my father, into eternal fire prepared for Satan and his angels. The second illustration is the case of Noah's generation. Verse 5, If he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly, then that sentence breaks off and it's completed in verse 9. In other words, if you don't go to school on the fallen angels, then please go to school on Noah and his generation.

God swept the ungodly away in the flood. His patience does not last forever. As verse 3 says, even though we might think we're safe from of old, their condemnation has not been idle and their destruction is not sleeping.

It is on the way. And then the third and final illustration is the case of Sodom and Gomorrah in verses 6 to 8. If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, he condemned them to extinction and made them an example to those who were to be ungodly, and if he rescued righteous lot greatly distressed by the licentiousness, notice the same theme, of the wicked. For by what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds.

And then that sentence is completed in the next verse, verse 9. So here we have it. If the fallen angels do not convince you, if the flood on the unrighteous generation of Noah does not convince you, then surely, surely the lesson of Sodom and Gomorrah will convince you because they were put to death for the very sin of licentiousness that he accuses the false teachers of commending. And then to make his lesson from history perfectly clear and to bring it up to date, verses 9 and 10.

So, in view of all this, the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial and he knows how to keep the unrighteous under judgment or under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. And you know, of course, that when it says he knows how, it doesn't just mean he knows how. It means he's done it in the past and he will do it in the future.

So, let me close with four lessons that we should learn from this text. Lesson number one. We should learn that the church is not immune to false teachers and therefore we should take heed to root ourselves in these Bibles, kids.

Send your roots down into that book. Nothing will keep us pure and safe from false teaching and from immorality like that blessed, inspired book. The second lesson we learn from this word is that advocating sexual promiscuity is heresy.

It's heresy because the master who bought us is belittled when we do not bring our lives into conformity to his precious will in regard to our sexuality. We deny the master who bought us when we do not follow his revealed pattern for sexual fulfillment in marriage. There is nothing new under the sun as far as sexual suggestions in our day and we ought to resist false teaching regarding sexual fulfillment as resolutely as the blessed apostles did in their day, surrounded like we are with illicit sex.

And third, the lesson we should hear is divine judgment is coming upon those who do not repent and turn to the Lord. And it is heartless, remember, it is heartless to encourage people to go on about the business of their lives as though nothing more hung on their behavior than psychological stability or the ability to cope. Hell and heaven hang on whether we follow Christ in righteousness or deny him in immorality.

And finally, fourth, we learn that you can be delivered from trial. The Lord knows how to deliver from trial and from judgment the godly. Now, when it says the Lord knows how to deliver the godly, it does not mean he knows how to deliver the perfect.

Lot wasn't perfect. It means the godly. And we've talked for weeks about what that means.

Those who look to the promises of Christ trust in his purchasing them on the cross and set their face to swim against the current of ungodliness. Whether we make much progress or not, we're swimming with

Jesus and not in the other direction. And if we are, he says, we will not fall.

And there will be open to us a great access and entrance into his eternal kingdom, the kingdom of the glory of Jesus Christ. And if we fall, there awaits a terrifying prospect of judgment. Shall we pray? Done in the past, the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, like Noah and Lot.

And he knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. And of course, it doesn't just mean God knows how to do it. It means since he has done it in the past, he will do it in the future.

Destruction is not sleeping. So what do we learn now from this text for our lives? Just four brief comments. Number one, we learn that the church is not immune to false teachers.

Don't get the impression this is always going to come from outside. We must make every effort to keep ourselves rooted and grounded in the word of God to maintain our stability, lest we be carried away by some breeze of false teaching and immorality. Second, we learn that advocating sexual immorality is a heresy, a heresy about Jesus Christ.

The practice and propagation of sexual activity outside of marriage is a denial of the Master who bought us, because he died for us to free us from the domination of sex. If we therefore live under the mastery of sexual passion, we deny the Lordship of Jesus and fall under the judgment of this text. We should rather glorify him in our bodies by submitting to his pattern of sexual fulfillment.

There's nothing new about the offer of free sex, and we should resist it resolutely, whether we're the only one. Noah was all alone. Lot was all alone in Sodom.

So don't think that it makes any difference that we might be surrounded by an ocean of illicit sex. It matters that we remain faithful. Third, we learn that divine judgment is coming upon those who deny Christ in this way.

And it is heartless, remember, it is heartless of us to give our friends and neighbors the impression that they can go on about their business and live their lives as though nothing very significant hangs on the way they live. Heaven and hell hang on whether we follow Christ in righteousness or whether we deny him through immorality. And finally, we learn that you can be saved from judgment if you repent and submit to the Master who bought you.

He bought you with his blood. And when it says in verse nine that the Lord knows how to rescue or save the godly, it does not mean he only saves the perfect. All you have to do is read the story of Lot, and you know that's not the point.

Lot was far from perfect. The point is, if we will repent, turn from our evil ways, no matter how bad our past has been, if we repent and turn, submit ourselves to this saving work of Christ, this precious blood by which he bought us, then it atones for our sins, and if we press on to love what he loves, then we will never fall, and an access into his eternal kingdom will be granted to us in all glory and freedom. Let's pray together.

Almighty God, my prayer is that nobody in this room will leave unrepentant. If there are any here who have been living in sexual immorality, experimenting outside the sacred bounds of marriage, grant them in this hour to repent, to turn from their evil ways, to seek the power that flows through the luscious promises of

Christ, to free them from the corruption that is in the world through passion. May no one leave this room resolved to deny the master who bought them through immorality.

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