

# Ministry of Grace Church

## 2 Peter 2:15-19 - Speaker Notes



### **These are springs without water (2 Peter 2:17)**

#### **Background**

This entire 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter is focused on the issue of false teachers in the church. In the opening portion of this section, he says, “**Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray**” The way we live our lives in this world is often portrayed in the Bible as walking down a path. We all have the option of following the path that glorifies God or of blazing our own path apart from the road God wants us to travel. However, these false teachers have gone one step farther. Not only have they left the path God has for them, but they have led others off the right way unto their own path. Though to some it may seem like a better path, it never works out that way.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about taking the easy way to salvation. Although it certainly is easy, it really isn't the way to salvation at all. He said,

**Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. “For the gate is narrow and the way is constricted that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)**

It seems that most people are looking for the easy way to salvation, but they seldom find anything that way. It's the same with our faith-walk after we have been saved. We can look for the easiest path through life, or we can follow God's leading, through the difficulties of life that leads to true blessing.

There is a simple key to success and happiness in this life: Follow the path God leads you on and ignore all the promises of fame and fortune. But how do we know the path that God wants us to take? That's where regular Bible reading, Bible study, and prayer come in. The more you are washed with the Word, the more you'll recognize the prodding and leading of the Holy Spirit. Following God's leading is not the easiest way, but it is the best way.

Peter now tells us that these false teachers have not only gone down the wrong path, but they willingly lead others the same way. Why? Because their focus is not on the welfare of their flock, or on God, but on themselves. Here's one way that Peter describes their actions:

## **2 Peter 2:15-16**

**Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but he received a rebuke for his own lawlessness, for a mute donkey, speaking out with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.**

“Having followed” is the translation of the Greek word *exakolouthēō*. This Greek word is made up of *ex*, used as an intensifier, and *akolouthēō*, meaning “to accompany or to follow.” Therefore, this word means “to intensely follow” or “to pursue.”

Let's look at this prophet of the Old Testament and see what he did. These events occurred just as the children of Israel were about to enter into the Promised Land after having wandered through the wilderness for forty years. You can read about them in Numbers chapters 22 through 24. The Israelites had come to the land of the Moabites just across the Jordan River from Jericho. Balak, the king of Moab, was afraid of the Israelites and called for Balaam to come and curse them so that the Moabites could attack them and destroy them.

Initially Balaam refused to come because Yahweh had instructed him that these were “blessed” people, and they were not to be cursed. When Balak heard that Balaam refused to come, he offered him great wealth and great honor if he would curse the people of Israel. Balaam then agreed to go with him knowing full well that God had forbidden him from cursing the Israelites.

Balaam obviously was more persuaded by wealth and honor than he was by direct revelation from God himself. He was willing to “go along” with the evil doers even though he knew it to be wrong. It appears that Balaam did not intend to curse the Israelites, but he went along anyway apparently because of his fleshly desire for fame and fortune.

There is a very real warning contained in this event. Do not stray from the path that God has laid out for you no matter what the price. Do not let the allurements of fame and fortune turn you from God's way. Not only will the riches not satisfy you, but you will find that you are acting in direct opposition to God, and He will not bless your actions.

Balaam traveled on a donkey, and part way to his destination the Angel of the Lord stood in the road and the donkey, who was able to see the Angel of the Lord, refused to go forward, turning aside into the field instead. As a result, Balaam, who could not see the Angel of the Lord, struck his donkey and brought him back into the road. Then the Angel of the Lord stood in the road in a narrow spot with walls on either side of the road. This time, when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, he refused to go forward and turned into the wall, smashing Balaam's foot against the wall. In response Balaam hit his donkey again. Then the Angel of the Lord stood in yet another place where there was no way for the donkey to turn either way, so the donkey simply lay down. At this point Balaam struck the donkey with his staff. Here is what happened next, from Numbers chapter 22.

*And Yahweh* opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, “What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?” Then Balaam said to the donkey,

“Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now.” And the donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?” And he said, “No.” Then Yahweh opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed his head down and prostrated himself to the ground. (Numbers 22:28-31)

As we read on, we find that the Angel of the Lord allowed Balaam to proceed but strictly charged him to only speak the words that were given him from God. Balaam did go to Balak and when told to curse the Israelites, he blessed them instead because those were the words given to him from God.

The point that Peter is making is that the false teachers of his day (and of ours) are willing to preach their own message instead of the message that God wants to be preached, and they do so for personal gain. They know that a message of acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion will attract many more listeners (and their money) than a message of willful submission and obedience to God as the supreme authority for our lives and actions.

Here's how Peter further describes these selfish false teachers.

## **2 Peter 2:17**

**These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been kept.**

Peter has said many unkind things about these false teachers; now he boils it down to a couple of very picturesque images. He says that they are “springs without water,” and he says that they are “mists driven by a storm.” These are both descriptions of something full of promise that never delivers. Imagine a person wandering in the arid wilderness who knows that a spring is just over the next rise. He quickens his pace with the anticipation of securing a much-needed drink of water only to find the dry, parched earth where the spring used to be. Likewise, imagine a farmer who has planted his crops in anticipation of a bountiful harvest seeing clouds appear with the promise of rain only to have the clouds blown away by the wind without providing a single drop of water.

Water is a necessity of life that is both soothing and refreshing, and it has a cleansing effect on dirty things. The Word of God is like water to us, refreshing and soothing our souls and cleansing us as we read and understand the message of the God of the Bible. Thirsty souls come to church to be refreshed and strengthened. However, when these false teachers get up to preach, they may promise the refreshing and cleansing effect of the Word of God, and what they deliver may sound pleasant, but it is worthless, like a dried up spring or a cloud without rain.

Peter then makes a proclamation about the end state of these false teachers. He says that the “blackest darkness is reserved for them.” The final state of these false teachers will be the enveloping darkness of eternity without the light of God. We often think of the fiery torture of the lake of fire as the worst punishment that can happen to a lost soul, but the total separation from the light of God (for God is light according to 1 John 1:5). These false teachers will be cast into a place without light, separated from God with no prospect for reconciliation for all of eternity which is even worse than the flames. The blackest – darkness – for eternity, indeed!

## **2 Peter 2:18-19**

**For speaking out arrogant words of vanity, they entice by sensual lusts of the flesh, those who barely escape from the ones who conducted themselves in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.**

Beware! Well written messages that are delivered by skilled public speakers are not always messages from God.

The word translated “speaking out” is the Greek word *phthengomai*, which really means “to sound a musical note” or “putting sounds together to communicate something.” It is used of great orations that are like symphonic orchestrations of words.

For me this is one of the saddest parts of Peter’s letter and one that makes me the most indignant toward these false teachers. These preachers, according to Peter, “**speaking out arrogant words of vanity**” The message that they present is full of words that sound great and probably stir up the emotions of the people, but they are empty words that serve no spiritual purpose. Their objective, if you remember from Peter’s earlier writing, is to fill their own pockets, not to satisfy the spiritual needs of the people.

Peter now tells us that these teachers use such great oratory messages to lure the people through the lusts of the flesh. But let’s pause for a minute before we go on. We tend to think of “lusts” as being sexual in nature. But the word “lust” comes from the Greek word *epithumia*, which simply means “overly strong desires.” It can refer to sexual lusts, but more often it is referring to the lust for power or money or fame or even the lust for things. It can also refer to the overly strong desire for food, alcohol, or drugs.

The messages from these false teachers just feed people’s desires for these things. On the surface, these messages seem harmless and even beneficial. These are messages that are attractive to the people because they don’t criticize the sinful practices of the flesh but excuse them and make it so that the people think they can continue in their lustful ways without condemnation. Instead of the people recognizing the sinfulness of their actions and habits, they are led to believe that they can continue in them without humbling themselves before the Judge of the ages.

Now, here’s why I get incensed with these false teachers: Peter tells us that the people being deceived by these “great” messages are “people who are just escaping from those who live in error.” These are people who have come out of churches where they were being taught erroneous doctrine. They have recognized that they were not receiving the truth and have left those churches only to be entrapped by these false teachers who are catering to the lusts which the people should be confessing and forsaking instead of pursuing.

Oh, the deceitfulness and selfishness of these false teachers! When the people want the truth and are fed a lie instead, when the people are seeking freedom and are given bondage instead, when the people want peace and are given enslavement to sin instead. Woe to these false teachers! God will judge them, as Peter has said, and their judgment will be both harsh and just!

Peter now says that these messages contained promises of freedom. That’s what many people want to hear, freedom from worry and independence from guilt. They want freedom from the rules of a righteous God and independence to make one’s own decisions. They

want free will without guilt. Unfortunately, true freedom only comes from submission and dependence (on the grace and mercy of God) but that's not the message that was, and is, being preached to these people.

Why? Because the teachers are themselves slaves to the corruption of their own selfish desires. They are literally incapable of preaching the message of peace through the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross, because they are themselves slaves to sin. And, Peter says, anyone who has been overcome by something or someone else is a slave to that which has overcome them. These false teachers have been overcome by their own selfish motives and have become enslaved by them. Therefore, they are not able to see the truth let alone preach it to others.

Here's the message that we all need to take from this passage. If we want to be an effective witness for God, then we have to be slaves to God (His personal servants). We have to proclaim His message, and we have to do it His way. Anything else is selfish ambition and cannot possibly portray the truth. This applies to both teacher and disciple. In order to effectively teach or to effectively learn we must be submitted and committed to God and God alone.

### **So What?**

What do you look forward to when you come to church? Do you just come for the music that makes you feel good. Perhaps you are looking for a message that will make you feel good and allow you to indulge in the sinful practices of your flesh? Or do you want a message from God that is straight from His Word, a message that demands obedience and submission to Him?

Pastoral warning! Here it comes again!

A couple of weeks ago we talked about the fact that Christ loves His bride, the church, and wants to sanctify us by cleansing us with the washing effect of the Word of God. Let me encourage each of you to earnestly desire the washing by the Word. Learn to crave it as you do food and water. Make it part of your everyday diet, not just an occasional snack. Let me also encourage you to seek out a church where the word of truth is preached, holding fast to the fundamental truths contained in the Bible, where those who open up the Word to you each week do so because it is their ministry, not because it is their source of income!

Are the sermons you hear every Sunday the kind that make you feel good about yourself and the way you're living? That's OK, but - do you ever hear a message that God uses to drive you to your knees? There's nothing wrong with feeling uplifted by the Word of God, but if you're never challenged by a sermon, you may be listening to a symphony instead of the still, small voice of God.

Have you ever had your donkey smash your foot into a wall? Well, of course not. We don't ride donkeys these days. But maybe there was a traffic jam that made you late to work or a flat tire on your way home -- on a rainy day! Or maybe it was your favorite coat that got caught on something as you walked through a doorway and it tore the pocket. You know, one of those times when something unexpected happened to you that made you angry or embarrassed.



It's very likely that you didn't even consider the fact that it was our Heavenly Father trying to get your attention, did you? God has His own subtle ways of getting our attention. Unfortunately, however, we often ignore it when He uses subtle things to get us to turn to Him. There was a time when one of our children did something incredibly stupid and ended up suffering for it. I remember saying something like, "Don't wait for God to smack you in the forehead with a 2x4!"

Listen for the voice of God in everything you do. No, I don't mean to walk around all high and mighty telling everyone how you got a "word" from God. And I don't mean seeking out some super-spiritual "experience" that sends spiritual chills up and down your spine. I mean seeking out God's guidance in your everyday life, letting Him apply what you read in the Bible that morning to some little thing that happened to you in the afternoon.

The path that God wants us to walk does not always appear to be the easiest, but we can trust God when he gives us direction. Let us learn to be sensitive to the prodding of the Spirit so that we can overcome the allurements of our own sin nature and obey the One who knows the best path for us! We need to pay attention so that we will travel the way He wants us to go. But even more important, we need to be careful that we are not being led in a direction that seems to be easy, only to find out that we are acting against God's will.

Some time ago, our men's group went through a little book entitled "Practicing the Presence of God." We learned that He is in our presence every hour of every day, but we have all conveniently learned to ignore Him and live life as if we were doing it on our own. When we become more aware of the presence of our Heavenly Father all day long, we naturally become more aware of how He wants us to live our lives. We become more aware of what path He wants us to take.

Going through the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, we have learned that Peter doesn't sugar coat his message so neither will I. Let's be completely honest with ourselves and answer the following two questions.

Who are you committed to, God, or your own selfish desires?

What are you submitted to, the will of God, or your own will?

Let's pray.