

FGBC: In Light of Last Days: Destruction Doesn't Sleep

2 Peter 2:1-10

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Religious freedom is a bit of a paradox. We live in a time where people advocate for the freedom to believe whatever you want as long as it doesn't affect your life.

So when I volunteered as a chaplain at UNBC I signed a no-proselytizing clause which said I would not attempt to draw people towards Christ and salvation. And this was in a chapel. You might think that if you were going to a chapel you would expect to be proselytized. But this is Canada.

Or right now in Quebec a new law has come into practice that demands that all public figures refrain from wearing religious symbols in the workplace. And the idea behind this is: believe whatever you want but leave your beliefs at home. The rest of us don't even want to see a hint of what you believe.

And to a secular state this makes sense. When you don't believe in anything it's hard to understand that people who do believe can't believe without action. Belief and action always go together – or do they?

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So we are coming back to our series in the book of 2nd Peter. If you've got a Bible on your phone or see one in the pew in front of you open it up to 2nd Peter 2. If you're new with us you will find 2nd Peter pretty close to the end.

Now Peter is Jesus' right hand man. A man of passion and charisma, as well as an eyewitness to arguably the greatest events in human history. And these events had a profound affect on this simple fisherman. Peter was a bit of a redneck when he met Jesus. He was bigger on the outside than he was on the inside. He was brash and arrogant and also a bit ignorant and fearful. And then he saw, touched and spoke with the resurrected Jesus and everything changed. Peter became the head of the church in Jerusalem, and a powerful source of inspiration. He was an eyewitness.

Now Peter was never really much of a writer, but he did put together at least two letters. And as he writes this one he is at the end of his life, about to be executed for his faith. And he wants to use his last will and testament to give the church an unshakable confidence in their salvation.

So he says:

Make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:10)

Peter says if you stand firm in your faith you can be assured of your salvation. And we need that. Knowing you are saved is one of the things that separates Christianity from every other religion. Every other religious system is built on works and the big question is did you do enough. In Islam there's a scale and when you stand before Allah you will find out which way it tips. In Eastern thought your karma accumulates and if it turns out to be positive then you might move up, if not there's a good change you come back as a frog.

But in Christianity our salvation isn't dependant on what we do, it is dependent on what Christ has done for us. Jesus bought our salvation on the cross – we are saved by grace.

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But hear this, God won't be played. There will be no one in heaven who brags slyly under their breath, "I sure pulled a fast one on the Big Guy. I took what He was offering – His salvation – but it meant nothing to me. I lived how I wanted.

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Friends, people get saved when they realize how much Jesus went through to give His gift of love to them, and they fall in love with Him. Saved people love Jesus. And when you love somebody you make every effort to please them.

And that's what chapter 1 is about. Peter is encouraging us, "stand firm in your commitment to holy living – please Jesus with your life – and then you can have the assurance of your salvation."

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Now chapter 2 is the other side of the same coin. In chapter 1 it is encouragement – you can do it. Give yourself to faithful living. Make every effort to add goodness and knowledge and self-control and godliness to your faith. And if you do this you can have the assurance of salvation. Chapter 1 is the carrot of Peter's argument.

Chapter 2 is the stick. It's the same point, but the other side of the coin. So here Peter warns that those who know Jesus but live for their own glory instead of His get judgment. And he's particularly hard on leaders.¹

So let's pick the text up in 2 Peter 2 verse 1

[2 Peter 2:1-3]

Peter says "false prophets are coming." Actually if you look a little lower it's clear they were already there. And they were, verse 1, "introducing destructive heresies" and "denying the Lord who bought them."

Now heresy is a word we don't regularly use at Starbucks – "I'd like to try your grande heresy latte with an extra shot of debauchery please."

¹ Outline adapted from John Piper <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/destruction-is-not-sleeping> (Accessed August 1st, 2019)

Heresy is belief or doctrine that opposes the truth. So if you believe “Jesus sinned or didn’t rise from the dead” – that’s heresy. Heresy diminishes God in your mind – it makes Him smaller than He is.

But when I started studying this past week my initial thought here was “who does this in church?” Peter isn’t writing this letter to the atheist club; he’s writing to church folk. And I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone stand up in church and say “Jesus is okay, He just isn’t that awesome.” – nobody says that. So what’s Peter talking about?

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Well as Peter continues it becomes clear that the “denying Jesus” he’s talking about isn’t about what people say they believe it is about how they live. These false teachers were denying Jesus with their actions. And if we look down at verse 10 we can see what they were doing. Peter says:

[Read 2 Peter 2:10a]

Another translation says “[God] is especially hard on those who follow their own twisted sexual desire, and who despise authority.”²

So Peter says “God punishes rebellious, loose sexuality. And if you live like this you are preaching heresy with your body. What you do says what you believe.

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Really? I mean can’t I just believe in Jesus in my heart and then my soul will go to heaven? Isn’t my body a little less important in the long run?

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Peter says “No, there is no disconnect between your beliefs and your actions. And if you are a Christian then the Sovereign Lord has bought you. He owns your body and your soul.” And this kind of language is all over the Bible. So in 1st Peter we read:

You know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold... It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

And in 1st Corinthians Paul says:

For God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

So all of us start out enslaved to sin and Satan. If you sin you are a slave of sin. But by grace Jesus purchases us from sin and then we belong to Him. And we change from serving our sinful desires to serving Him. And one of the biggest areas this plays out is in the realm of sexuality. Christians stop gratifying their sinful, sexual desires and start gratifying Jesus.

² New Living Translation

“Now wait a minute. I’m not serving my sexual desires. I’m just enjoying them. I could quit if I wanted to. My sexuality is free.” Peter says “That’s not how it works. There is no freedom with sexuality. It either dominates you – you think about it all the time and pursue its pleasure. Or you harness it and subject it to another Master. Either way you are serving a master.

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Now hear this, every master promises something in return for your service. Sex promises fulfillment and fun and pleasure and intimacy. If it didn’t promise any of those things we wouldn’t be interested. Sex says “Give yourself to pursuing me and all this will be yours. If you could just have more sex you would finally arrive.”

And our culture buys in. It doesn’t matter whether you’re buying hot sauce, deodorant or beer, sex is the sales pitch. It’s powerful, and most Canadians serve this master.

But here’s the problem: illicit sex lies. Pornography, sexting, hooking up, just having sex with your significant other. The lie is this is going to bring happiness, but there is no lasting happiness in any form of sexuality outside of marriage between a man and a woman.

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That’s a controversial statement isn’t it?

I’ll go one step further: if you’re married, or want to get married, and you are looking to find lasting happiness in sexuality you are setting yourself up for disappointment too.

And that’s because happiness doesn’t come from sex, it comes from Jesus. Sex is an awesome gift, but it makes a terrible god. If you make sex god in your life it will eat you. So don’t let it run rampant, put boundaries on it. Give your sexuality to Jesus.

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But we aren’t sure. Right. I mean that sounds old fashioned. Keeping sex for marriage sounds like repression. It sounds like we will end up with less if we submit to doing it Jesus’ way. We don’t want a master telling us how to use our sexuality. And so we deny the Master who bought us. We despise His authority. We think we’ve moved past our need His rules. Isn’t that the message in our society? Has it crept into the church?

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Here’s the thing friends, loose sexuality isn’t a new invention. Peter was fighting it 2000 years ago, David wrestled with it a thousand years earlier and Abraham confronted it 1000 years before that. Friends, sexual immorality is as old as morality. It’s always been a choice about who you are going to make god in your life.

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So does sexuality control you or does Jesus control you?

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Now Peter’s biggest beef is with leaders in the church who are encouraging others to pursue “sexual freedom”. So in verse 2 he says “many will follow their depraved conduct” – the Greek here can be translated licentiousness and refers to blatant sexual immorality.

And Peter says this is being taught in church! Pastors were teaching this – it seems absurd, or does it. They were probably saying something like “Don’t worry so much about sexuality, it’s not that big a deal. The main thing is love, so just love. Don’t worry about rules, they were for the olden days. Just love and relax on the whole sexuality thing.” Right?

You see this kind of thinking isn’t new, marriage was under attack in Peter’s day. So if you are down on the institution of marriage you aren’t being innovative. You’re old-fashioned. The push to free sex from marriage was there long before we had any prudish Victorian ethic to rebel against. But the result is the same.

In verse 19 Peter says:

They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you. (2 Peter 2:19)

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In chapter 1 Peter said “You can do it! You can make every effort to confirm your calling and election. You can pursue holiness and receive the assurance that you are saved.” But here he says “There is another side to this. God punishes unrighteousness. He’s done it in the past, and He will do it again. Look at verse 4.

[Read 2 Peter 2:4-10]

Peter says God has always been committed to punishing sin and delivering the righteous. So God punished the angels who arrogantly rebelled. Now angels are awesome beings. They are way more glorious than we are. But when they figured they didn’t need to serve a Master God sent them to hell, and He’s keeping them for judgment.

So Peter says “If you think you can be your own master you’re wrong - judgment is coming.”

And God did the same thing with the people in Noah’s day. He swept them away. And so if you lead people into this kind of behaviour you will be swept away. In verse 3 Peter says these false teachers “condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.” Judgment is coming.

And then Peter says, if you won’t take warning from either of these then surly Sodom and Gomorrah will wake you up to fear God’s wrath. These cities were destroyed for the exact same depraved conduct that these teachers are commending.

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This is Peter’s stick. In chapter 1 he seeks to motivate us to pursue holiness by the assurance of our salvation, and here he seeks to motivate us with fearful consequences.

It's like those mothers in the MADD group – Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. They are cool with people getting licences and enjoying the freedom of being able to go where you want. It's a good thing so pursue it. But if you aren't going to follow the rules they want you to fear the consequences.

In the 90's I remember school presentations with graphic pictures of mangled cars smeared with blood. It was sick, but true. MADD's message is "hey, if you won't be motivated by how great it is to drive soberly wherever you want to go then maybe fear of the terrible things that can happen when you drive under the influence will keep you sober."

And similarly Peter wants you to know that if you won't pursue holiness in order to gain the assurance of your salvation; if you choose to arrogantly mock Jesus' authority by feeding your sinful desires, then there is another side to the coin. He doesn't want this for you, but it's a reality.

And the strongest warnings are for pastors. Peter says if you've got a position of influence and you teach that it doesn't matter what people do with their bodies. If you give the impression that our souls and our bodies are two different things, and you can be saved in your heart and live however you want with your body then condemnation is hanging over your head and your destruction will not sleep.

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So this isn't exactly a warm and fuzzy passage. This is one of those chapters that gets skipped in preaching calendars. But here at Lighthouse/Fort George we believe that the scripture is God's word to us. And so we don't get to pick and choose our texts. We do the whole thing.

So when we come to a passage like this we need to ask ourselves how do we respond? I'd like to propose 3 things:

First, we need to be aware of falls prophets – people who would come into the church and bring a heretical message – they are a reality. So we need to guard ourselves, and make every effort to fill ourselves with the truth so that we will be able to discern error when it comes. What out for churches that don't make sexual holiness a big deal.

Second, we live in a world that blatantly flaunts sexuality and sees this as a virtue. This is such a strong message right now that if you stand up and say "I believe sexuality should be reserved for the marriage relationship between a man and a women" you will be mocked as a prude or possibly charged with speaking hate. That's how prolific the message against Christian sexuality has become.

But we serve a different Master. We know that what we do with our bodies is directly connected with our souls. And we see our world destroying itself with sexuality. So we have to be open and visible with what we believe.

Immorality is heresy. It's an offence against our Lord who bought us for an exorbitant price. And so, because we love Him and want to please Him we choose to keep our sexuality within the bounds He has established. Prepare yourself to bear this message in a culture that opposes it.

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Now third, and finally, I want to leave us with the most important message Peter, and the rest of scripture wants us to get. Jesus' message is primarily a message of hope not condemnation. The reality is Jesus died for sinners – and that's us. We've all fallen short. Nobody here is better than anyone else. And so if you've inadvertently or deliberately bought into our culture's lie that sexuality is no big deal then you need to be forgiven and you can be. You can be saved from judgment.

Noah wasn't perfect, and yet he and his family were saved from the flood. Lot wasn't perfect and yet he escaped Sodom and Gomorrah, and so you too can be delivered from judgement. But that deliverance requires a change in master. You can not be delivered and continue to serve sin.

Now friends, this isn't easy. Sexual sin has deep claws that hold on tightly, but it can be defeated. So receive Jesus' grace. Let His blood cover the multitude of your sins, and make every effort to give yourself to living for His glory today. Get software that will help you do that. Get rid of devices that cause you to stumble. Break off relationships that are bad for you and surround yourself with people who are going to help you stand strong. Make every effort. If you will do this you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.