

The Promising Life in a World that is Perishing

Part 3: 2 Peter 2: 1-10

The Picture Galleries of Judgment and Grace

Preached May 21 2007

The Passage

False Prophets and Teachers

1 But false prophets also arose among the people, 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. **2** And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. **3** And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; **5** if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; **6** if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; **7** and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked **8** (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); **9** then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, **10** and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. (ESV)

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At the top of this page is a reproduction of a painting by Vincent Van Gogh, which he composed in 1885.¹ You will notice that there are two books. The larger of the two is the Bible. The other book is entitled: *La joie de vivre* (Joy of Life) by Emile Zola. Zola was the leading French novelist in the latter part of the 19th century. In 1884 he wrote *La Joie De Vivre*. It was part of a series of twenty novels he wrote rooted in a philosophical school called *Naturalism*. Zola helped establish this school.

In summary naturalism taught:

Individual characters were seen as helpless products of heredity and environment, motivated by strong instinctual drives from within and harassed by social and economic pressures from without. As such, they had little will or responsibility for their fates, and the prognosis for their "cases" was pessimistic at the outset².

What do you think Van Gogh was attempting to do by juxtaposing the Bible with Zola's *La Joie de Vivre*? I think he was illustrating what was happening in late 19th century intellectual thought. Although the Bible was still open, it was no longer being illuminated. You will notice that the candle is not burning. Rather than the teaching of the Bible guiding

¹ Taken from Vincent Van Gogh Links at:
http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/art/19th/vangogh/vangogh bible.jpg

² naturalism. (2007). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved May 18, 2007, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online:
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9055047>

life, it was now philosophies, like naturalism, that were in the foreground of intellectual thought.

Well if that was the case in 1885, I would suggest that in our own day we are facing something similar within the Anglican Church of Canada. Philosophies like naturalism are shaping our theological thought and moral conduct. And it is for this reason that our Communion is currently in Crisis.

As many of you know, there is a debate within the Anglican Church of Canada, and in the larger Communion, around how we relate to homosexuals. There are those who say we should bless committed same sex relationships. There are resolutions to be debated at the upcoming tri-annual meeting of the Anglican Church of Canada that want to take this even farther.³ The way the resolutions are framed, by 2010 the Anglican Church of Canada could endorse gay marriages if the resolutions were passed.⁴

Michael Ingham, the Canadian bishop spearheading these resolutions said in Ottawa last March:

Today we have a better understanding of homosexuality as a basic and natural orientation experienced by some members of the human community, just as we find the same thing among some animal species, and in Christian terms we must come to think of this as not only natural but also God-given and good

But these developments in the social sciences and therefore in popular understanding are still relatively new--since about the 19th century. They have not yet penetrated the Church's thinking except at the edges of its consciousness and greatly against its will.⁵

Notice the language he is using:

- Homosexuality as a basic and natural orientation
- We must not only think of this as natural but God given.

Do you see what was going on here? The Bible is still opened, but it is not longer in the foreground. When Michael Ingham did appeal to Romans 1, while in Ottawa, he misinterpreted the text to fit in with his

³General Synod will meet in Winnipeg, starting on June 19th 2007.

⁴There is a possibility that these resolutions could be defeated. However, what is striking is how biased the are in favour of full endorsement of same sex marriage.

⁵The Anglican Planet April 2007: <http://www.anglicanplanet.net/TAPCanada0704b.html>

pre-determined conclusions.⁶ For the likes of Bishop Ingham, naturalism has replaced biblical theology as the basis for arriving at our understanding of sexual morality.

Here is a painting brushed 120 years ago that not only commented on late 19th century European thought, but is also a metaphor of the Anglican Church of Canada in 2007.

But you know there is a much older series of paintings we can turn to when thinking about our contemporary scene. They are found in 2nd Peter 2:1-10. Here we have the Apostle painting for us a number of canvases that he collects in a Gallery I have called *The Paintings of Judgment and Grace*

In verses 1 through 3 he uses a series of brush strokes to create an image of false teachers. As he paints these images for us he has a message to convey. It is this:

Expect false teachers. But do not be distracted by them. Witness to Jesus Christ by proclaiming righteousness and living righteously

So let's take some time now to walk through the Gallery of Judgment and Grace. It is my hope that when we come out the other side of the gallery we will be renewed in our commitment to live righteously in a larger church community that often condones and even celebrates false teachers.

At the end of chapter 1 Peter has told us that no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

However as he now comes to chapter two, he says there were those during the prophetic times who did produce their own prophecies. These are what he calls false prophets. He then goes on to say that amongst those to whom he was now writing there would also be false teachers.

But false prophets also arose among the people, 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. 2 And many will follow their sensuality,

⁶ Please see Diocese of Calgary Newspaper *The Sower* for an article I wrote in response to Michael Ingham's misinterpretation of Romans 1. It can be found at: <http://www.calgary.anglican.ca/Sower/SowerMay07.pdf>

and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2 Peter 2:1)

Here Peter gives a brief profile of these false teachers. He avoids specifics at this point, painting with broad brush strokes to impress upon his readers the seriousness of the threat they pose for the community.⁷

(1) They are devious in their manner. Realizing that an open resistance to apostolic teaching would be useless, they introduce their false ideas "secretly." Since Peter accuses the false teachers of arrogance later in the chapter, he probably does not mean that they are hiding what they are teaching. Rather, he suggests, they are covering up the degree to which their teaching differs from the accepted apostolic teaching.

(2) They are perpetrating a serious error: "even denying the sovereign Master who bought them." "Sovereign Master" translates *despotes* (from which we get our word "despot"), a term applied to God or Christ only four other times in the New Testament⁸ It carries a strong sense of commanding authority, and Peter probably uses the title here to underscore the seriousness of the false teachers' denial.

But how were these false teachers "denying" the Lord? Was it a theological denial, related to their skepticism about Christ's return in glory? Or was it practical denial, according to which their licentious lifestyle amounted, in effect, to a denial of the Lord? Probably the denial involved both teaching and practices that were incompatible with acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

This is a serious deviancy because Christian maturity can only be achieved as we grow in our knowledge of Jesus.⁹ Here these false teachers are blaspheming the way of truth and encouraging others to live in ignorance.

(3) Their impact on the Christian movement is disastrous. By following this erroneous teaching and lapsing into the kind of licentious behavior that Peter ascribes to the false teachers, they bring the way

⁷ What follows is taken from The NIV Application Commentary on 2nd Peter by Douglas J. Moo (Pages 92-94)

⁸ Luke 2:29 Acts 4:24,- Jude 4; Rev. 6:10.

⁹ The theme of "knowledge is key to this letter. The word knowledge forms what is called a chiasm (bracket) that appears at the beginning of chapter 1 and then at the very end of chapter 3.

of truth into disrepute. When believers deviate from the truth, and especially when they live immoral lives while professing Christ as Lord, they cause the Christian movement to be "blasphemed"

This is a frightening indictment. Here Peter is saying that while these false teachers claim to be representing Jesus, they are actually maligning his name and character.

The verb "Blaspheme means:

1. to speak of or address with irreverence
2. revile impiously
3. to speak evil of ¹⁰

(4) The popularity of these false teachers is great: "Many will follow their sensuality or shameful ways." Sadly, there are always those within the church who are attracted to new and different teaching, especially if, like the ideas peddled by these false teachers, it removes the bounds of moral constraint and accountability to a holy judge.

(5) The false teachers are motivated by greed. The ancient world was filled with wandering teachers who had the reputation of propagating almost any doctrine that would earn them a living. So the false teachers, Peter claims, are "exploiting" the believers, trading in "stories that they have made up."

(6) Stories they have made up: This phrase brings us to the final characteristic of the false teachers: The basis of their teaching is "stories they have made up." Peter probably intends us to see here a contrast with 1:16. It is the false teachers, not the apostles, who build their doctrine on the basis of "cleverly invented stories," that is, on fabrications and forgeries.

(7) The Consequences are devastating: The destiny of these false teachers is, like those who follow them, "destruction." In saying that this destruction will be "swift," rather than predicting the time of the judgment, "swift" probably indicates its certainty. This is what Peter means when in verse 3 he says: "Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." The false teachers may

¹⁰ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged.* Merriam-Webster, 2002. <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com> (18 May 2007).

think that they will not have to reckon with God's judgment, since they hold the view that this world will continue indefinitely as it is now.¹¹

Having established a profile of these false teachers Peter then turns to Israel's history as we read from the Book of Genesis, where he refers to stories in Genesis 6; 7; and 19. Here Peter is presenting to us other paintings in the Gallery of Judgment and Grace.

He chooses these paintings because he wants us to see that not only were there false prophets long before there were false teachers; long before there were false prophets, in the earliest days of Israel's history similar problems existed.

So here are the paintings:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked 8 (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard);

You will notice the repeatedly there is the use of the word "if" as we walk through this gallery. I do not want to focus on the images other than to have you capture the impression. Here Peter says that there were those creatures, both angelic and human, that rebelled against God. And such rebellion led to judgment. However there were those, like Noah and Lot, who while living among them were in fact rescued from this judgment.

If it was so then, Peter concludes in verses 9 and 10:

9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

¹¹ See 2 Peter 3:2-5.

So do you see what he is going here? He wants to encourage us to understand that while we live in this world there are times when false teachers will be busily at work. However we do not need to give up hope, nor do we need to stop persevering because the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials.

To carry my painting analogy a little further, Peter is saying:

Some people will be destined to have their portrait hung in the Gallery of Heaven. Others will be found wanting and judged and they will be destroyed and consigned to the trash heap of hell.

Application

So Given What Peter has taught us here what is the application?

There are two things to remember:

- 1) God is to judge.
- 2) We are to witness.

God is the Judge: As I studied this text during the week I was encouraged to remember that I am not to judge anyone, nor are you.

You will notice in this text that repeatedly it says that God is the one alone who is able to pass a true judgment on anyone. He is the museum's curator and is alone the one who can see deep into the heart of those who are destined for heaven and those who are destined for hell.

I admit that I find it hard not to judge the likes of Michael Ingham, whom I believe so arrogantly blasphemes the way of truth.

I need to always remember that what I am called to do is pray for him and others who are leading others astray. Jesus' words are so important here for me to remember: 1 Judge not, that you be not judged.¹²

And while I am never to judge a person as to their eternal destiny, we are to be discerning in judging their teaching. This is because it is through sound judgment of a false teacher's writing and speaking that

¹² Matthew 7:1

we can determine whether they are be inspired by the Bible or books like Zola's Joie de Vivre.

This is where yours and my judgment does matter. For there will be an accounting that I will face if I remain silent while false teachers secretly introduce their destructive heresies. There will also be an accounting for those who follow their heresies so you need to be discerning in what you believe.

Therefore we at St. Augustine's while choosing to never judge a person are called to judge what they are teaching. We could say that this is the defensive posture we are to take.

But there is also an offensive posture that we are to assume. This happens as we learn to be witnesses.

Peter tells us two things in this passage about how we do this. In verse five he refers to Noah as a herald of righteousness and then in verses seven and eight he refers to Lot as a righteous man.

These are very interesting examples to give. Do you remember how in chapter 1 I told you the theme was: "We are to work out our salvation" and the theme of chapter two is: Watch out for false prophets.

In working out our salvation Peter calls us to pay attention to scripture and to pay attention to the ladder of faith.

To pay attention to Scripture means that we will be people who are heralds of righteousness. What I mean by this is that we will ensure that the candle is lit so that we can read the Bible for all it is worth. We do this because we know it is the Word of God and not the Word of Naturalism that we need to pay attention to in our own day. To be heralds of righteousness will allow us to proclaim God's Word written even while we at times will face ridicule, insults and disdain.

As we live as heralds of righteousness we will more fully understand what it means for us to also live a righteous life as we ascend the staircase of faith and therefore follow in the example of Lot.¹³

So here is the bad news:

¹³ Look back to the sermon from two weeks ago.

There are some false teachers in the Anglican Church of Canada today, like Michael Ingham. He is successfully leading many astray in the church today.

Here is the good news:

As we watch out for the false teachers we can actively live as heralds and righteousness and re-commit ourselves to righteous living within a church that is at times quick to celebrate false teachers.

Yes, the Bible and Zola's Joie de Vivre are so often open on the table together. May we choose to close the one in the foreground and light the candle that will brightly illuminate God's word.

Then we will hear Peter's message for us today:

Expect false teachers. But do not be distracted by them. Witness to Jesus Christ by proclaiming righteousness and living righteously.

Let us Pray:

Gracious Father, we thank you so much that the Apostle Peter teaches us to both expect false teachers but not to be distracted by them. As we apply this text to our lives, help us in the power of your Holy Spirit to be heralds of righteousness and witness of righteous by how we are living as those who delight in working out our salvation while we watch for false teachers. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

