

False Teachers and Justice

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[0 : 00] Good evening. My name's Archie. If you don't know me, I'm the pastor in training here. Whoa, what a passage. Do get it open in front of you. It'd be really useful for me and for you to have that open in front of you. The first time I remember feeling it, something we all feel, probably every day we feel it. I wonder if you feel like this. I must have been eight years old. I'd amassed a really good collection of Pokemon cards. Pokemon cards. It was the game in the playground, right? If you don't know what Pokemon is, it's a little bit like Top Trump's, but a bit more complicated. Some of my cards I'd saved up and bought from the local shop. Some I'd won fair and square in the playground. But some of my collection, I'm ashamed to say, was definitely ill-gotten, right? Pinched out of the pencil case on the next door desk.

One by cheating in the playground sometimes. And when my mum found out about my dishonest enterprise, she took my cards. She grabbed me by the scruff of the neck. She marched me into the woods. And then right in front of my eyes, she burned my entire collection. From a hundred yards away, apparently, my sister could hear the screams, it's not fair. The injustice I felt as a stupid little eight-year-old. It was just so unfair. Apparently, that became a bit of a regular refrain for me. That's not fair. I actually asked my sister if she could remember a time when I said something like that. Which time, she responded. That happened about 10 times a day. I asked my mum something similar.

What did I think was particularly unfair growing up? Her answer, life. And it's true, isn't it? Sometimes our sense of injustice is slightly ridiculous like that, and maybe even wrong. I'm sure in hindsight, my mum was probably quite wise to get rid of all my Pokemon cards. But it's true, isn't it? We all feel it.

The world we live in is just full of injustice. How can you not feel that? Right? If you ever watch the news, look around the world today.

[2 : 07] Russia, Russia preying on Ukraine. Human trafficking, maybe even increasing as a result of that conflict. The clothes that most of us in this room are wearing, made in sweatshops.

The wealth and income inequality, even in this country and this city. Gender discrimination all over the globe. The cost of living crisis. There's just an overwhelming amount of injustice in this world, isn't there?

And there's something especially jarring about this, when a person or a group, when they cause injustice and they claim to do that in the name of Jesus. I'm sure we've come across that. Let me give you an example. Actually, I was told this story just earlier this week. A friend of mine, her aging grandmother, she's got a very old grandmother, and her grandmother just loves watching preachers on TV and listening to them on the radio. You know, the sort of preacher. Bible in hand. And they calmly urge their viewers to donate. Often very specific amounts of money. Don't delay. Invest in God's kingdom and your investment will be multiplied to you.

[3 : 18] And this friend of mine's poor, well-meaning grandmother, starting to suffer from signs of dementia, desperate to provide for her family's future, has given crazy money to these greedy preachers on TV. When I hear stories like that, everything inside of me, and I trust everything inside of you, is calling out to God for justice, isn't it? I mean, how are these men and women exploiting people, using Jesus's name, praying on the vulnerable, ruining lives? How are they allowed to get away with it? And what are you and I supposed to do about it? Well, that's the thrust of our passage this evening. What do we do with all this injustice? And maybe in particular, the injustice caused by false teachers in the church. We'll begin in verses 1 to 3, where Peter says to his readers, false teachers will come. And then in verses 4 to the start of verse 10, where Peter reassures them, justice will come. And as we do that, we're going to be driving towards this verse, verse 9. It's a key verse for us this evening. Have a look at verse 9. It's on the screen. Look at it in the text.

The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteousness for punishment on the day of judgment. Do you see what Peter's saying? Essentially, this is where we're going. God has made a way to bring justice and to rescue his people. So let's dive into our first point. False teachers will come.

See how our passage starts in verse 1? Look down with me. But there were false prophets among the people. Now, I don't think that you'll be able to understand that without chapter 1. I mean, what does the but refer to? Before I explain that, though, just a quick note to say, this letter wasn't really written to be read and digested in chunks like this, as we're doing through this series. It's good to do that. There's nothing wrong with doing that. But it was supposed to be read or listened to in one go. And you know, it actually only takes about 10 minutes to do that. On the Bible app, if you press play on whatever translation you've got, it'll take about 10 minutes to listen to it. Why not try and do that a couple of times this week? Maybe 10 minutes on the bus, listen to it as you walk to work or do the dishes. It's a really good thing to digest a letter like this in one go as it was written to be digested. Our Pete, Pete Irvin, preaching last week in the second half of chapter 1, he said this, remember, we can trust God's word. Jesus will return in power. Right? Have a look at verses 19 to 21 of chapter 1. Just scan your eyes over those. Peter, the apostle Peter writing this letter, he's writing there about the Old Testament prophets. And he's saying that because the Holy Spirit was speaking through them, and because God's promises through them have been and are being fulfilled, we can trust what they said. So we can trust that Jesus will return to rule and reign in justice. But as the apostle Peter begins chapter 2 saying, there were also false prophets among the people. It's as if to caveat and clarify, the Holy Spirit wasn't speaking through just anyone just because they called themselves a prophet. There are lots of examples in the Old Testament of false prophets setting themselves up against the prophets of God. And so Peter says, continuing in verse 1, it should be no surprise that there are false prophets in his day too. Peter's warning about the false prophets that are going to be teaching amongst them. And so what are the marks of that teaching in this text? Well, two things, I think. It's the things that they teach, and it's the lives that they live.

The things that they teach, still in verse 1, see, they secretly introduce destructive heresy. Just think about how different that is to the apostle's witness that we saw in chapter 1.

[7 : 33] And just there, the apostle's teaching was rooted in eyewitness testimony of Jesus's life-giving glory. It was anything but secret. Their teaching was well known, and it was the truth. It wasn't a new introduction. It was simply a reminder of the gospel, and it was in absolute continuity with God's Old Testament prophets. These false teachers, on the other hand, what they teach is secret. It's new, introduced, destructive, and it's divisive. That's really just what heresy means. It couldn't be more different at its roots. And what does this teaching lead to? Keep reading with me.

They will even deny the sovereign Lord who bought them. In other words, their teaching is so wayward, it is so false that it's actually a departure from saving faith in Jesus. Secret, new, destructive, and divisive. This is the things that they teach. And friends, I think it's probably fair to say that the same is true today. Right? False teaching can take many forms. We'll have a chance to discuss some of those later on. But most common, I think, probably in our country and in our city today, I think, maybe just to fuel your conversations later, is a teaching that basically says that the Christian life is always an easier life. That faith equals comfort, healing, happiness. Doesn't sound so bad, that, does it? Like, it doesn't sound like that bad of a false teaching. But friends, it's so destructive.

Because when the follower of that teaching finds the Christian life as it is to be a difficult life, a good life marked by hope, but difficult, in that disappointment, how many walk away?

Generally speaking today, false teaching, it's not changed. Whatever it is, the things that they teach are secret, right? They require some kind of special access or knowledge or insight, maybe from a particular leader. Their new introductions probably requiring something additional, something more than Jesus to be really Christian. They're destructive because they ultimately lead people away from life-giving faith in Jesus. And they're divisive because they cause people to walk away from his church.

It hasn't changed. But notice also the lives that these teachers live. In verse 2, many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

[10 : 22] That phrase, depraved conduct, is really more specific than that. It's sexual immorality, indulging their sexual desires however they please. And so even when what they preach looks

something like the way of truth, what they teach by the lives that they live, by example, is contrary to the gospel.

And it ruins the reputation of the Christian community and its message. It's the lives that they live. In verse 3, not just marked by sexual immorality, but in verse 3, in their greed, these teachers will exploit you. In other words, those things that they teach, secret, new, destructive, and divisive, they wanted to teach like that because it fed their greed. It manipulated and exploited its hearers. The lives they lived marked by material greed. So we see the lives that these false teachers live marked by two things, right? Sexual immorality and material greed. And maybe that sounds really very specific. But again, I think that this is often true today. Sometimes today's false teaching actually explicitly encouraging people to live these sorts of lives. Denying what the Bible says about sexual ethics, moving the goalposts of what sexual morality is, encouraging people to indulge whatever their desires. And it also often promises some sort of material gain. Like the example we used at the start, that's actually really quite common. If you give X amount for God's purposes, he will multiply it back to you. So sometimes false teaching does explicitly teach those things. But whatever the false teaching might look like, I think we've also seen this to be true. Even if it's not explicit in the teaching itself, very often it's evident in the lives of those teaching it. There are countless examples of that, aren't there? Where teachers' lives are marked by sexual immorality or material greed. And their lives, when it all spills out, as it spills out as an example, their lives do just as much teaching as their words ever did. And as they do that, members of their churches are led away from Jesus.

Out of the door, their faith is destroyed. It's tragic. But here's the thing. How are we supposed to know? Right? All the books that we read and blogs and online sermons and seminars and podcasts and YouTube videos and TikToks and Instagram reels. There's loads of good stuff out there. And it's great to learn.

But it's just so difficult in the world that we live in, with all the information that there is, how are we supposed to know? And we don't just want to mindlessly bash all the teaching that we get in order to work out whether it's false. And actually, I just don't think that we should be consuming the majority of our soul food, forming the way that we think about Jesus, primarily from people that we don't know. It's why I love the church. It's one of the reasons that the church is so important. Our primary input should be from the elders of the church in which we are members, in a place where we are known and loved, where we trust that our leaders are prepared to ask each other tough questions and hold each other accountable, where we know that they're helping each other avoid these things, sexual sin and material greed, where we see evidence of that, of that ministry to each other in their lives. And so I've been slightly dreading saying this all week, but to the elders in the room, just specifically to you, a plea from us, the members of this church, be brave enough to challenge each other. I don't think it's unfair to say that your potential to fall into sexual sin and material greed is the greatest threat to our mission and witness as a church. It has the potential to lead our people out of the door of this church, never to return, destroying their faith. What are you doing about it? Will you hold each other accountable?

[14 : 43] Peter says, these are the things that mark them out. Their teaching pattern is secret, new, destructive and divisive, and their lives are marked by sexual immorality and material greed. False teachers will come. And I don't know about you, but all of this, it just makes me really angry. Right? Some of it I'm sure is unintentional, but there's just so much clearly willful, intentional exploitation of God's vulnerable people. And everything inside of me is calling out to God for justice, for God to do something about it. We live in this world that's just full of injustice. Why will our God not act?

Well, Peter says, justice will come. Remember verse nine, key verse for us. God has made a way to bring justice and to rescue his people. See the second half of verse three for these false teachers in particular. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them and their destruction has not been sleeping. In other words, God sees the injustice of this and he intends on doing something about it. Indeed, in a sense, he already is. Justice is coming. Peter then uses three examples of God's justice from Genesis, the angels, Noah and Lot. We're going to unpack each of those, but first just see how they work.

The logic of these verses, look at the text. This won't make sense unless you're looking at the text. Beginning in verse four, you see the first two words of verse four. For if, then each verse repeats the word if, and then verse nine, if this is so then.

And so each of these examples is pointing to verse nine. It's where the passage is driving. They're all there to convince us that God has made a way to bring justice and that he is going to rescue his people. That's the logic of these verses. Let's begin in verse four with the angels.

[16 : 59] God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment. Now, there are lots of things that we could say about that verse. There's plenty of speculation available. The truth is, we just don't really know exactly what Peter is talking about, and that's okay. What we do know just from a plain reading of this verse, right? Angels, spiritual beings, have rebelled against God. They've sinned, right? That's in the verse.

They are in hell, again, in the verse, though that's actually quite an unhelpful translation, given all the popular baggage associated with that word. The word used here describes a place in Greek mythology, actually, where demigods are sent when they've done bad things.

I think all that Peter is trying to say there is that God has put these sinful angels, these angels that have rebelled against him, he's put them in a place that belongs to him. He's chained them up. They have no power anymore. They are under his control, and they're there waiting judgment for their rebellion. That's the angels. Justice is coming for them. Next is the Noah story, probably more familiar. In verse 5, if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, right? We know this story. Sin rages across the face of the earth, people everywhere increasingly rebelling against God. In Genesis 6, it's put like this, the Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. It's a pretty damning condemnation of what the world had become. But by God's grace, Noah is found to be a righteous man. And when God tells Noah of his coming justice, when he warns him about the flood, Noah trusts God, and he builds a big boat. And so, in verse 4 of 2 Peter, God protected Noah. Just notice how this works, right? By God's grace, Noah is warned about what is coming, and is provided with everything that he needs to sail through that judgment and out the other side. And all those who go with him are also kept safe. Just last weekend, a friend of mine asked me a pretty tricky question. I think it's worth dealing with here. Maybe you've had people ask you this question. Maybe if you're honest, this is a question that you have yourself.

Here's the question. How can you say that I'm going to hell, but that God could send a murderer to heaven? It's a good question, that, isn't it? At the time, I definitely didn't do that question justice. In fact, I kind of dodged it. But this week, reflecting on the story of Noah, where the entire ancient world faced justice, I think we probably have to say that that probably included murderers, but it also probably included some pretty normal people like you and me. Not perfect people, but not that bad. But that's just not how the Bible views the world and the people who live here.

[20 : 15] It's not the case that we're all either too bad or just good enough. You see, the murderer isn't being judged by God for that single act of murdering. Evil though it is, though it grieves God, it's a heart that's in rebellion turned away from God. Yes, that's spilled over into an act of evil, but it's the heart that's the problem. And the same is true for any one of us. Jesus equates anger to murder. Have you ever been angry? He equates lust to adultery. Have you ever felt lustful? Part of the reason that Jesus does that, I think, is because those hearts turned away from God, they might not result in such outward grievous evil as murder or adultery. I think where people are living relatively comfortable lives, that's probably even more unusual. But exactly the same hearts turned away from God as they are, with all the same awful circumstance and life experience of someone else, might very well end up committing murder or adultery. And so it's the rotten condition of the heart turned away from God, it's by that that each of us falls short of the glory of God. We'll come back to that idea, but for now just acknowledge that this is true of each of us. Naturally, our hearts are turned away from God, prone to wonder, each of us battling anger and lust and greed and envy. In other words, if justice is to be done in this world, we all deserve this judgment. Before we return to that, let's just quickly have a look at our last example, the lot story. Maybe a slightly less well-known story in verse 6. He condemned the cities of Sodom and

Gomorrah by burning them to ashes. Why does that happen? Well, this is what God says in Genesis chapter 18, their sin is so grievous. And so he sends angels to destroy this city, and the people of that city, they seek to gang rape the angels. There's no way of sugarcoating that. It's a horrific story.

And before the angels destroy the city, before anyone's able to rape them, Lot offers them hospitality. He even tries to protect them, right, from the people trying to rape these angels. Now, he's not a perfect character by any stretch. In fact, it's his daughters that he offers in place of the angels. The angels don't let that happen. But like Noah, again, clearly by God's grace, Lot is found to be a righteous man. And when the angels tell Lot why they're there, when they share this message of justice, they share it as a means of mercy, because it gives Lot the opportunity to escape. And again, by God's grace, Lot trusts God's word to him by these angels, and he flees from judgment. And again, those who go with him, most of them, are safe. So just notice how each of these work, right? You've got the angels, they're being held for a time when God's eternal justice will come.

And then you have the ancient world, which is judged in its wickedness, but Noah is rescued through God's judgment, because by God's grace, he trusts God's word. And those who go with him are safe.

It's worth just pausing at this stage, and again, thinking back to the wickedness of the false teachers that we've met in this passage. Maybe you've been personally affected by that sort of thing in some way, fallen captive to that attractive teaching yourself. Maybe you've been hurt by those who call themselves Christians, but whose lives are marked by sexual immorality and greed. If that's you, notice verse 10. Justice is coming for them. This is especially true of them. Maybe that's not you, but you are nonetheless calling out to God for justice. Maybe that's about specific things in your life, past abuses or things that are currently ongoing. If that is you, by the way, please talk to us. We'd love to pray with you, pray for you. But it might just be that you see the horrible injustice in the world that we live in. Maybe a bit like Noah and Lot, you recognize that there is desperate, something desperately wrong, as human evil and death seem to reign in the world that we live in. If any of that is true of you, friends, what Peter wants you to know is that God's eternal justice will come.

[25 : 22] That we can trust his word to us, because through it, we see that he has made promises. We see promises fulfilled, and so we can trust his promises to us. Would we see in these stories from Genesis, as we see God's desire for justice in them, would we see the wonderful promise that it will all one day be made right? That all will be held to account? That all the exploitation of the vulnerable, all the false teaching, all of the abuse, all of the wars, all of the wickedness of this world. All of it will be dealt with. The world will be made new. Justice will come. Because in verse 9, God has made a way to bring justice and to rescue his people. But there's a tension here, isn't there?

How does that work? I mean, if it's true what we said about our hearts being turned away from God, about us falling short of his glory, I suspect we all know that to be true about ourselves.

Well, if God really is a perfectly just God, then don't we face this justice too? Are we going to be struck down by the eternal judgment of the flood like the ancient world in Noah's time?

And how do we measure that with the claim that God is also perfectly loving? How can a loving God judge us like that? Well, God has made a way to both bring justice and to rescue his people. And it's the person of Jesus. You see, this is exactly what happened at the cross.

As Jesus died, God's perfect love and his perfect justice met. As Jesus took the full force of that justice on his shoulders. It is finished. And so we trust that Jesus's death on the cross has achieved his purposes, satisfied God's justice, and contains the power of love and grace to free you, to free me, to free the murderer, and to restore our hearts to him so that we might live with him in his new creation forever. Peter's mate John just puts it so well. He says this, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his son in the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. This is Noah's big boat. Right? Well, you get on.

[28 : 09] Sail through God's judgment and emerge on the other side of the flood. This is the merciful warning from God's angels to Lot. Jesus is his word to us. Will we trust him? Will you believe in his name?

Guys, this world is full of injustice. I felt that intensely as I watched my Pokemon cards devoured by flames. I felt it profoundly this week as I heard about those evangelists on TV swindling money from my friend's grandmother exploiting the vulnerable, and I desperately want justice to come. But if I'm honest, I have to say that there are ways that I contribute to that injustice.

I'm sure the kids that I took those cards from as they learned about injustice, that it was really me. heart turned away from God spilling over into action, and justice will come. And you know, I'm going to have to flee to the safety of Jesus. Will I find you there? Will I find you there?

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we recognize that you are perfectly just, that you are a holy God. And Lord, we're so grateful that you are also a loving God. We're grateful for your mercy to us. We're grateful for your word to us.

[29 : 46] Lord, we're grateful for your mercy to us. As we see the injustice around us, and we recognize the warning of the coming justice, and we know that we deserve it too. Lord, we're so grateful for Jesus.

We recognize what he's done for us. And we fall to our knees at the foot of the cross. Where we find shelter from the storm.

Lord, would you send your Holy Spirit to help us? To keep us firm in that faith, we pray.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.