

## "Wolves Among the Sheep" - 2 Peter 2:1-3

Shortly before the Apostle Paul was martyred for his testimony of Jesus, he wrote to his younger protégé Timothy. One of the most critical admonitions in that letter speaks loudly to me. I take it personally. I take it very, very seriously.

*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:2)*

This is why I am committed to expository preaching. I believe I am called to read distinctly from the word, to give the sense, to explain the meaning. I am not to be innovative; I am not to deliver my own ideas. I am to convey God's revealed truth. I am

*... to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 1:3)*

To Timothy, Paul gives the reason this admonition is so critically important:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)*

Peter wrote his second epistle to warn us, to protect us from danger that lurks within the visible Church. Not every preacher who claims to be a Christian actually belongs to Christ. Not every preacher who claims to be a Christian actually speaks for Christ. Not every so-called Christian author delivers God's truth. There are wolves among the sheep.

I believe some of the wolves are actually quite well-meaning. They actually don't realize they have become agents of Satan.

*But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, **deceiving and being deceived.** (2 Timothy 3:13)*

Let me give you just one example ... and yes, I am going to name names. Andy Stanley is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, a Baptist guy, a co-founder of North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Those are some solid, evangelical credentials. His church is huge. It now has five campuses and over 32,000 folks attend services each week. I truly believe he has a passion for souls and a passion for Jesus Christ. So I was shocked to read what he said about the Bible:

*"So, if you stepped away from Christianity because of something in the Bible, if you stepped away from the Christian faith because of Old Testament miracles, if you stepped away from the Christian faith because you couldn't reconcile 6,000 years with a 4.5 billion year old earth and something you learned in biology, I want to invite you to reconsider, **because the issue has never been, 'is the Bible true?'**"<sup>1</sup>*

I beg your pardon? It seems like we just covered that last week:

*... no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)*

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://northpoint.org/messages/who-needs-god/the-bible-told-me-so>  
Wolves Among the Sheep Canyon Community Church  
Sermon delivered September 25, 2016 by Pastor Ken Ainsworth

Stanley goes on to say:

"If the Bible is the foundation of our faith, it's all or nothing. Christianity becomes a 'fragile house of cards' religion. Christianity becomes a fragile house of cards that comes tumbling down when we discover that perhaps the walls of Jericho didn't."<sup>1</sup>

As I said before, I believe Pastor Stanley is motivated by a heart-felt desire to reach out to those whose faith has been shattered by a secular world-view. But if you abandon the Bible, then you are on a slippery slope indeed because ...

*... faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)*

It breaks my heart to hear an evangelical pastor say that the Bible doesn't need to be true.

Other wolves are far less honorable in their motivation than pastor Stanley. Consider the Jesus Seminar, that was active in the 80s and 90s. According to the scholars and seminarians that made up the seminar, Jesus was a mortal man born of two human parents. He didn't perform miracles and he certainly didn't die to save sinners nor did He rise bodily from the dead. Marcus Borg, one of the movement's leaders wrote this:

"As a child, I took it for granted that Easter meant that Jesus literally rose from the dead. I now see Easter very differently. For me, it is irrelevant whether or not the tomb was empty. Whether Easter involved something remarkable happening to the physical body of Jesus is irrelevant."<sup>2</sup>

The resurrection is irrelevant? That's not what Paul thought!

*And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. (1 Corinthians 15:17-19)*

I give you these examples to demonstrate the fact that there are false teachers and false teachings among us. There are false doctrines that masquerade as Christianity. And so Paul has told us that we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Peter tells us that we are to take our faith seriously ... expend effort ... and add to our faith. We're to add virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and agape love.

*For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:9)*

It is very instructive that Peter stressed the importance of knowing scripture before he talked about the false teachers themselves. If we know what the Bible says and what the Bible means, we will never be deceived. If we know what we believe and why we believe it, those false doctrines that come boiling up from the pit of hell will have no effect.

But now, as we begin Chapter 2, Peter tells us about the characteristics of the deceivers themselves.

*But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. (2 Peter 2:1)*

Since the fall of humanity, false teachers have always been around. That first phrase in chapter 2 is linked directly with what Peter told us in Chapter 1.

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<sup>2</sup> Marcus J. Borg and N.T.Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco:HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), p. 234.

*... holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21)*

*But there were also false prophets among the people ...*

There have always been people who claim to speak for God, but in fact do not. God does not take kindly to those folks. It's a serious offence. How serious?

*But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, (Deuteronomy 13:5)*

False prophecy was a capital offense! You would think that would be a pretty effective deterrent, but such was not the case. By the time Ezekiel came around, false prophets were everywhere.

*Thus says the Lord GOD: "Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the LORD. They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, 'Thus says the LORD!' But the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, 'The LORD says,' but I have not spoken." Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you," says the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 13:3-8)*

Old Testament history is punctuated by those who told folks what they wanted to hear rather than what they needed to know. And Peter tells us that it will be exactly the same for us.

*... even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies ...*

Now, notice that these heresies come in "secretly". They're not immediately obvious. They sound good. They can even make perfect sense to us, but that's because they appeal to our sinful flesh. It is because we have itching ears that we heap up these teachers to ourselves.

Why do you think so many people fall prey to the prosperity doctrine heresy? It's because these preachers tell us what we want to hear. "Cast your bread upon the waters by sending me a generous donation," they say, "and God will bless you. Ask anything you want. He'll give you a better job, a luxury car, perfect health, perfect kids. God wants you to be a champion!"

Friends, it is a Ponzi scheme!

*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:3)*

You get what you ask when you ask according to God's perfect will. (1 John 5:14) The only way you can live "your best life now" is if you are planning to spend the next one in hell.

As these destructive heresies are propagated, false teachers actually deny the Jesus they claim to represent. They are ...

*... even denying the Lord who bought them ...*

Jesus said:

*For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. (Matthew 24:24-25)*

We have been warned ... multiple times! Let us not be deceived. These false prophets will get theirs. They will ...

*... bring on themselves swift destruction.*

But more on this later.

*And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. (2 Peter 2:2)*

You know, this absolutely breaks my heart. I look at the number of gullible people who are absolutely taken in by heretics, and I'm moved to ask "Why, Lord why?" I talk to people who have their bookshelves lined with the latest so-called Christian self-help books, but they never open the Bible. As Spurgeon famously said "There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write "damnation" with your fingers."

Many will follow their destructive ways! Oh, Lord, may it not be so! But I know that it is so. Jesus said:

*"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. (Matthew 7:13)*

This is a hard truth for me!

*Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:14-15)*

These wolves in sheep's clothing do not have your best interests at heart. They are in it for themselves.

*By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; (2 Peter 2:3a)*

By covetousness! Now, that is often the motivation of the false prophets. They covet money, power, fame. But it is also the most common tool they use to deceive. They pander to the flesh. And they will exploit you. They will do so with deceptive words. Their message may sound really good to you. It's Satan's most successful trick. He's been using it since the garden.

*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:13-14)*

Don't allow yourself to be deceived. Don't allow yourself to be exploited. Do not fall in behind the false teachers because their judgment is inevitable. You want no part of their future.

*By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. (2 Peter 2:3)*

I'll have much more to say about this next week as Peter expands on his point. But know this: God will hold every false teacher responsible for his or her blasphemy. It's why James says:

*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. (James 3:1)*

Believe me when I tell you I take it to heart. It's why I pray that the Lord would keep me from error as I expound on His holy Word.

We know that many will be deceived. We know that many will proceed down that broad way that leads to destruction. You must seek out the narrow gate. John tells us:

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1)*

Okay, but how do you do that? How do you test the spirits? It's like John says "Well, I'm glad you asked."

*By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (1 John 4:2-3)*

It is a simple test: It centers on Jesus Christ alone. If the preacher is telling you the truth about Jesus, he speaks for God. If the preacher is not telling you the truth about Jesus, he is to be rejected. The truth about Jesus is found in this Book. The whole thing is about Jesus. The whole Book points to His work on the cross. Here's the truth, as summarized by the Apostle Paul:

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)*

Notice that Paul appeals to scripture. The Bible is important because it is God's truth. Sorry, Pastor Stanley! The Bible says that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, entered His creation as a human being. He lived a perfect, sinless life, the only One who will ever do so. Then He allowed Himself to be murdered on the cross at Calvary. He died to pay the penalty for your sins ... and for mine. He was buried in a rich man's tomb, but then He rose, miraculously, bodily, on the third day. That resurrection proves that His sacrifice was accepted.

All you have to do is believe God. This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He sent. (John 6:29) Believe Jesus died for you. Believe He lives so you can have a living relationship with Him. Confess Him as the Lord of your life, and you will be saved.

*For "WHOEVER CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED." (Romans 10:13)*

That is a bulls-eye doctrine folks! That is a doctrine you must be willing to die for. Cling to that truth. Cling to that promise. Do not be distracted by the siren song of the false prophet who is really good at spinning pretty lies. If he denies the truth of the Bible, he is not a Christian. He is not one of Jesus' lambs. He is a wolf in disguise.

*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (James 4:8a)*

God is not hiding. God's truth is readily accessible. But you must seek it out; seek Him out. Draw near to Him in prayer. Draw near to Him in Bible Study. Draw near to Him by assembling with the saints.

*Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. (Psalms 37:4)*

God's greatest gift is Himself. Accept Him. Delight in Him. Cling to Him.