

Powerful Delusions

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[0 : 00] I'm not quite sure what it is about today but this is the passage for this morning which is challenging and for this evening in our study in Elisha the passage is the floating axe head which is probably also one of the most difficult verses or sections in the Bible so you're really going to have to be on your metal today and hear what God's word is.

The great thing about these passages is that they are part of God's word and you know we like drifting towards passages we know well and passages that are easy and passages that don't stretch us but this certainly and others are passages that stretch us and make us think and make us say well what is God saying?

What does He want us to learn? What do we want to know? So you need to interact with me in this as you think and as you are challenged and as you consider the importance of God's word for your life as I must do for mine because you know a lot of the time we spend saying well what is God saying to me?

Is God speaking into my needs? Is God speaking into my problems? And we're looking for some kind of word that will come down from heaven that will float down to us nicely on a feather and come and tell us exactly what we're looking for but it's really what we're looking for rather than what God necessarily wants to tell us because we'll find as I said in my prayer that Jesus even as the perfect Son of God as He lived it, when He was looking for guidance and direction it was to God's word He went, it was to what was the scripture that He had the Old Testament scriptures and we know and recognize that God chooses to speak to us, we might not like it sometimes but He chooses to reveal Himself and speak to us through that.

So this is a kind of passage that would be a difficult one to read on Princess Street or somewhere where a lot of people were listening who didn't believe or trust or love God and maybe some of us even as those who do find it like Martin Lloyd-Jones terrible and terrifying and it doesn't get any better the second half of the chapter which is one of the reasons why split it into two so you get two terrible deep and terrifying sermons which is good.

[2 : 24] But we look at a passage like this and we recognize immediately that it's the kind of passage that offends our 21st century sensibilities because it's speaking in such authoritative and strong terms about the nature, the character and the purposes and plans of God.

We are far more used to dealing with God in the dock of God having to defend Himself rather than declare what His purposes are and maybe you and I are very intent on putting God in the dock in our own lives that we want Him to do what we want Him to do rather than what is in line with His own character and the whole focus of revelation and the gospel.

But we need and are significant for us that we come to terms with the God who reveals Himself as truth because the most important thing about our faith is that it's not make believe.

We haven't just cobbled together something that makes us feel good and that is nice and that is significant that is our own making.

We are strongly convinced that the faith in which we put our trust or the person behind the faith that we have is a real person, is Jesus Christ.

[3 : 52] It's not make believe. He's not on a par with Santa Claus. He's not just someone that is a religious figure that happens to satisfy our sensibilities for some kind of spiritual experience.

He's real. He is outside of ourselves. He is eternal. He is personal and He reveals Himself to us and that's very important.

So what I want us to do is initially to take a step back with me as we look at this passage and try and unpack it for us because if we are justifying what we believe then it's important that we have some kind of apologetic behind that.

I think it's a fair comment to say that all of us and most of the people that we will deal with in our lives love good things and love goodness. Is that fair?

And is it fair to say that most people hate evil? So people love goodness and people will talk about goodness and people will recoil from evil and that is I think fairly standard for us in our thinking.

[5 : 04] Maybe something that we don't think about quite so much but when it's brought to our attention we also generally speaking like love justice.

So there's a common in humanity, there's a common love for goodness, there's a common hatred of evil and there's a common recounting to justice.

We want justice. People ask all the time why is this happening? Why is this allowed to happen?

Why isn't justice happening? Maybe in general terms in the world but also specifically when things go wrong in your life you're looking for justice.

When someone comes in and steals something from your home you look for justice to be done. So there's these three things that are real in our lives, justice, love and hatred.

The problem that we face is that these three things we want on our own terms and we recoil from the idea of goodness and evil and justice being something that is absolute and out with ourselves because we want to make the standards.

[6 : 26] We want to decide what's good and bad. We want to declare what is evil. We want to make the standard of justice one that is acceptable to us because the problem when it is outside of ourselves, the problem when good and evil and justice is not something we just democratically decide is that at least biblically it implicates us.

Good and evil and justice from God's point of view implicates us and so we don't like that and we recoil from that. We recoil from God saying what is good, God being the standard of what is evil and God deciding justice.

So we find ourselves in this position of tension that God declares himself as absolutely good because if he's not, he's a demon.

He's absolutely good but we know we're not. You know, if we're absolutely honest with ourselves, we know that we're not absolutely good either externally in our behavior with one another or internally with our thoughts and with our desires.

God says he hates evil perfectly as well as loving absolute goodness. But the trouble is also that we often love what he hates and that causes problems.

[8 : 00] We actually love the things that God hates. So that puts us in tension with him as well and of course he declares himself to be as he does in this passage very powerfully the judge that we want to be on the throne.

We want to make the judgments. We want to declare and make statements of justice and we find it very hard when this sovereign God who as Christians we've come to know and love in Christ is also the one who is absolute in his standard of goodness, evil and justice.

So we come to this passage with that background and see where Peter is coming from because what he is doing is he is with this power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, he is protecting the truth of God's word and the truth of Jesus Christ and the message of Jesus Christ because God's truth is under attack.

This truth that God is the declarator of good and evil and justice is under attack. There's a challenge coming from false teaching which will rip apart the church, which will rip apart these young Christians and they are challenging the truth in God's name sometimes and it's playing havoc.

So Peter comes in guided and directed by God and says you must deal with this early, there must be a lancing of this boil because if it isn't dealt with the church will be destroyed and the gospel will be destroyed and salvation and love and grace will be destroyed.

[9 : 52] So Peter both exposes false teaching, comparing it to false prophets in the Old Testament and he also I think predicts a little bit, almost like we could say prophesies himself about what is going to happen and what they are doing.

But what he does is he reveals the ugly characteristics of these false teachers. He kind of personalises it a little bit and takes it away from just the theory of false teaching which you might look at and say well that's important what you taste is that significant.

But he does that but also reveals the outworking of their false teaching and he uses different words to describe them in verses 1 to 3.

He says that they are deceptive, they are secretly trying to do things that are wrong. They are trying to change by being deceptive, they are introducing what he calls destructive heresies, that is their own opinions that are coming but are destructive rather than up building. They are delusional in that they make up stories to kind of back up the false teaching that they are bringing.

[11:16] First and that they are exploitative so they are coming into this young church and they are using powerful leadership qualities to exploit vulnerable people.

Is seeking to bring them to that place where they are either sexually exploited or where they are financially exploited and that is an ugly abuse of their position.

Also they are populist, they are gathering a crowd with them, many will follow them in their shameful ways as they preach a gospel of easy believism.

It's disreputable, it's shameful. They are living lives that don't match up to what the teaching and the preaching of God's word ought to reveal.

That is a moral and ethical purity that reflects the Savior that they serve.

[12:26] And God says that they are condemned, that they are judged by Him. Condemnation is long been handed over them.

They are being destructive and they themselves will be destroyed because of what they are doing as they change the character of the truth and the message of the truth and the people of the truth. God is protecting His people that He loves them and He sees this as being destructive. There is a very difficult verse that talks about the sovereign Lord who has bought them. If they were people who were bought by God, how could they be lost?

It seems that that is just recognizing that they are part of the outward church of God as it were, just as in the Old Testament. The people of God who came out of Egypt who were bought as it were by God and taken out of Egypt and from slavery were part of the Israel of God but not all of the Israel of God belonged to God themselves.

So they were part of the outward people of God. So that is Peter's defence of truth and defence of the gospel and of Jesus Christ against false teaching.

[13:34] It matters in other words what we believe, it matters what we hold on to and what we cling on to. How can we take that message for us for today? Well I think at that level we need to be aware of what the truth is.

We need to know what the Bible teaches, we need to know what God's purpose and plan is really from beginning to end because it is clear and it is fairly simple and the main truths of God's word are not in dispute for those who recognize its authority and its truth and it makes sense and it follows a trajectory.

But when we walk down the road of saying, well I think the Bible should say something else or the Bible, the arguments go that the Bible is now out there, it was good for a while, it had meaning a few centuries ago but it is outdated.

We need to bring it in line with society's thinking with the sophistication and the development that we have. We want just to make us feel good about ourselves and we will decide what should be significant.

When it allows for a Christian character and lifestyle that is immoral or that is exploitative or that is abusing power, in other words it is ugly, then we recognise there is something wrong.

[15:01] When our life does not match what God's word encourages us to live then there is something wrong. You know very often the world outside is wiser than us in this, they see, they say well what a bunch of hypocrites, they say this and they believe this and yet they are not living this way, just living like the rest of us and they can see that and they are wiser than us in so doing.

So we need to know what the word is, we need to learn and understand and be soaked in that because it is a living word. But also can I just say as a slight extension here, we need to strive for an inverted beauty.

In other words we need to strive as a church for the opposite of this because this is false isn't it? And I don't just mean as a church community, I also mean as individuals, we should strive to be the kind of church, the kind of people that is the very opposite of what is ugly and destructive and exploitative that is revealed here.

And so you know one of the most powerful verses about describing the early believers in Acts 4.13 is when they saw the courage of Peter, the writer to this, and John and realized that they were

unschooled ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men have been with Jesus.

There was a simple honesty about the church and about the leaders of the church that was very different from the false teachers that Peter is exposing here and as churches and as leaders we need to have that same simplicity, different character that people will note that we have been with and are with Jesus in our lives.

[16:42] But that our teaching and our understanding of the Bible is that we accept it, that it speaks about loving God for who He is and loving one another, not exploiting one another, not cheating on one another, not abusing one another and living a self denying, loving, morally, upright and holy life.

And the passage is really an encouragement apart from anything else, from God, through Peter, for the Christians to maintain, to keep going because God will keep them as He has kept them in the past.

So can I just ask a second question and I hope that you will stick with me on this and wrestle with me and fight with me through it. The second section, second question is ultimately then, but why does God's truth matter?

We've looked at it here, we've looked at it in the early church, but why does God's truth matter today? What's the relevance of it for this church today, God's truth?

What has Second Peter got to do with me? What is my life? How is my life impacted by this truth? Is it impacted by this seemingly severe truth here?

[18:05] How will I go from here tomorrow to the workplace or to my relationships, my colleagues, my family, my life and apply that? Because I think it's important for us to see God's, or our place, in the bigger picture of life and in the bigger picture that God makes, as it were, the kind of macro picture.

So what we often do is we kind of just shrink everything just to my life and what I'm going to do today and how much money I have in the bank and how I live for tomorrow, how I'll survive until tomorrow.

And that's absolutely justifiable because that's the kind of life that we live. And it's also important to step back sometimes and see God's bigger picture and be challenged by the unchanging nature of God so that, you know, God's the same yesterday, today and forever.

So He doesn't change. So what He said 2,000 years ago doesn't become irrelevant because He's still the perfect standard of goodness and hates evil and is our judge.

And it speaks about the nature of God. So we come to this, three very quick things I'll say. God's verdict in history, God's verdict in the word and God's verdict from the cross. Okay.

[19:19] I'll just finish quickly by looking at them. Because in the second section from verse 4 to 9, Peter is backing up what he's saying about these false prophets going to be judged and going to be exposed and going to be dealt with because that's what God has done in the past.

He's protected His truth and He's protected His people and He's protected His word. That's been God's verdict in history. He's done it with angels.

He's done it at the flood and He's done it in Sodom and Gomorrah and in other places. And we don't have time to look into God's judgment in the angels. It might be that that begins to unpack for us the reality or the origins of evil in the universe.

But we do know that Jesus Himself said, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. And we also know that in Revelation, there's this great description that looks back and I, there was a war in heaven and Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was not strong enough.

They lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down and an ancient serpent called the devil or Satan who leads the world astray, he was hurled to the earth and his angels with him. And could you turn back with me for a moment if you will?

[20:38] I know it's really warm in here and you might be struggling. So this will fan the pages of the Bible and that will help you just get a bit cooler. If we all do it, then it will cool it, place down a bit.

Isaiah chapter 14 and verses 12, it says how, speaking here of saying this is how, you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn, and you have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations, you said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven, I will raise my throne above the stars of God, I will sit and throne on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the

sacred mountain, I will ascend above the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the most high, but you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

This just glimpse into this spiritual warfare where Satan was not spared and where he was judged by God.

And that is followed by an earthly judgment in the flood where Genesis 6 tells us that the world was full of corruption and violence. It was just, it was self-destructive.

He was becoming suicidally evil and God judged that and saved only Noah and his family, who trusted in God and who believed God and who preached and pled with people to believe and trust in God.

[22 : 10] And then there is the picture of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18, 20, they were so grievous, they sinned so wickedly and so greatly, even though again Lot was then Lot himself was no paragon of virtue, but he himself trusted God and believed in God and sought others to do so, but he didn't.

And so this section speaks about a division. We don't like to talk about and think about division, but there is a division, isn't there between the unrighteous and the righteous here, clearly?

And the picture in the Old Testament is very much that they are given as a warning and as an example and as a declaration of God's perfect justice, perfect goodness and perfect hatred of evil. And they were people who heard the truth and there were people who didn't respond to that. But the trajectory of their lives was destructive and was unjust and was violent and was exploitative and would have led to that breakdown of society, which we see sometimes.

We're very comfortable here in the West and things are already civilised. At least there is a veneer of civility. I don't think it would take terribly much for that veneer of civility to go where circumstances to change, where we were absolutely made homeless or poverty stricken or terrorism and violence took over in our country.

[23 : 40] It would be interesting to see how quickly things would descend, but we recognise that there is a trajectory downwards so often.

There's a great word which I've forgotten, which explains that. It'll come back to me at some point. So we've got God's verdict here in history, but we've also got God's verdict and I'm broadening it a little bit here for a moment.

God's verdict in the Word in Romans 3, 23, because we can look back at this situation in history and say, oh yes, they're terrible, Sodom and Gomorrah. It's just a word for evil and no, well, it's the angels of course that they struck and it's very distant from us.

But in Romans 3, 23, God's judgment is placed on all of humanity where He says all of sin and for sure of the glory of God.

It's God's verdict in His Word that is kind of backing up all this Old Testament teaching and example and warning. That's where the rubber hits the road, but He says all have fallen short.

[24 : 48] The standard, the perfection of God, the justice of God is something none of us can reach because we've all rejected it. We've all rejected His Lordship and we all love things that He hates and we all have a different standard of goodness naturally in our lives until we come to see Him.

And the grace of God which I've finished with. But in some places that reality is very clear and very obvious for people. You go and live in Gaza today or in Syria or you try and be a Christian in Iraq today or examine the slavery that's happening in this world which is greater than it's ever been at any point in history.

Or consider the abuse or the exploitation or the greed or the violence behind closed doors even in our own sophisticated modern and very loving and beautiful society.

You listen to the verdict of the parents of Moe and Evie and Otis, Haslyn, whose children, whose family were lost in the Malaysian air-crash with their grandfather.

We live in a hell beyond hell. That's their experience. We can sit here comfortably and see what none of this applies to us.

[26 : 07] But the world that we can smell that's right beside us, that we are part of, is a world that brings us back and is on a cycle without God's grace and goodness, self-destruction, God under judgment, a world where we all face even in our own comforts, illness and death, a world where we will face God, a world where our standard of the best is not good enough for God.

Our standard of niceness leaves us from the judge guilty and condemned.

But praise be to God, that isn't the end of the story. The best bit, the most significant bit that we must come round to when we're looking at a passage like this is not only God's verdict in history and in the Word, but it's God's verdict on the cross.

Because on the cross we find it all making sense and it all coming together and it all revealing His love and His justice which kiss mutually in the cross.

So how can we be judged on that day of judgment? How can we be declared innocent? How can you and I face forgiveness and look for forgiveness and receive it? How can we face up to the hollow self-belief that never takes us beyond the grave by facing up to God, nail to a tree?

[27 : 41] We're dying in our place, the great judge of good, of evil and of justice looks at the people that He's made and love and says they can't put it right.

They are guilty before My perfect justice so I will come and I will die in their place. I will be the standard for them and I will take.

There's a great verse, 2nd Commence Val 21, God made him who had no sin to be sinned before us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Do we see the significance of that? The importance of that? The beauty of that? The great judge becomes the judged. The great sovereign God of the universe humbles himself and becomes flesh. This great Trinitarian God that is a reflection that we are made in His image takes that society of being in is ripped apart so that we can be saved, so that we can be rescued and He provides for the whole salvation.

[28 : 46] It's Him providing a righteousness that we can't provide ourselves. It's Him saying, yes, you're innocent because I'm looking at Jesus instead of looking at you because He's died in your place and He's taken the wrath of God and the just condemnation on us.

Of course it's a tough message but it's a tough message that when it's channeled through the cross is loving and is graceful and is glorious and is good because it's a free and full forgiveness for any who will come to Jesus Christ.

The standard before us, the eye of God is simply too great and it leaves us without hope and in over sales but it does point us to the greatest hope in the world, the Lord Jesus Christ and that remains significant for you and for me.

It never becomes irrelevant. We can't graduate beyond it because the cross is the answer when at least points us to the answer.

There's much that's mysterious still but it points us to the answer of the big questions about goodness and about evil and about justice which everyone is concerned about and it's a common point of contact with people that you meet on the street and people you know.

[30 : 15] They care about justice and they care about goodness and evil but often it doesn't point them to the truth of God's Word and to the significance of Jesus Christ and who He is.

His takes, has taken historically, has dealt with, has taken our guilt and our, the just condemnation against us and God's wrath against the self-destructive power of sin and rebellion and of death and He's vanquished it on the cross.

He's taken it, he's like that and I've used this also, he's like that great big strong boxer who takes the punch himself, who takes all the energy of that punch and internalizes it and he's the last man standing.

Still stands and takes it, takes death and takes a grave and takes God's wrath and takes it and He's still standing because He's resurrected and He's shown His power over the grave and it's astonishing is that the judge becomes the criminal.

The judge becomes the criminal. God goes into the dock in order to set us free and in order to be raised back into that place of just judgment and He does that because He loves us, greater love has no man in us, for God so loved the world that He gave His only, He got and Son.

[31 : 49] That is why false teaching is nailed in this passage, absolutely male because it denudes Jesus of who He is. It withdraws His power and His majesty and His glory and it makes Him nothing more than a superman figure that just as make believe and as Santa Claus and as malleable and twistable and chageable and that He didn't really die and He isn't coming back and He isn't important and you're all weak and impotent and pathetic to believe in Him.

That's why God is so strong in this early church to nail false teaching and why we must be strong in nailing false thinking and false teaching and remain true to God's word.

False teaching will always be very attractive. It will inevitably lead towards easy believism but it has nothing to offer your soul and nothing to offer your relationship with the living God and so we allow ourselves the standard of the light of God to expose our hearts because it points us towards grace and towards Jesus and towards forgiveness and towards empowerment and resource in one way or another and we allow ourselves to be able to do that.

So, we pray that God will help us to understand your word and even the difficult bits, the bits that seem to be unpalatable to us Lord, we pray that they would bring us round to understand and see and appreciate the character and the nature and the person of God and this reality of God being real and being unchanging, being sovereign and being this Creator, sovereign, sustainer, Savior and Judge.

Lord help us to live in the glorious freedom of Jesus Christ and in the life that He brings moving us from death to life so that even though we die yet shall we live with Him and death be defeated and resurrection be in our hope.

[34 : 07] Thank you for these things, may we take them and apply them to our day to day lives and living also for Jesus sake. Amen.