

## Waterless Springs!

2 Peter 2:17-22

Series: *Growing in the Knowledge of God – 2 Peter*

**Introduction:** Please take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of 2 Peter – 2 Peter chapter 2.

Paul Harvey, the famed radio personality of yesteryear, tells the story of how an Eskimo hunts and kills a wolf. The Eskimo takes a sharp knife and coats the blade with animal blood and lets it freeze. When that layer is frozen he covers it again with another layer and another, and another after that, until the blade is completely concealed in animal blood. Then the hunter takes the knife and buries it in the ground with the blade sticking up. After a while a wolf picks up the scent of blood and finds the knife and begins to lick. His animal instincts are aroused by the taste of blood and so he licks more and more – faster and harder.

Amidst the wolf's feeding frenzy it fails to notice the eventual sting of the sharp blade cutting its own tongue. The wolf is soon consuming its own warm blood, and it has no idea. The wolf simply craves more and more of the taste of blood, and eventually it falls over in the snow – dead from the wounds to its tongue. Its unbridled lusts became its own demise.

What an apt picture of the false teachers that Peter is exposing here in chapter 2! As a caring and zealous shepherd of God's flock, Peter has carefully laid bare these false teachers. He wants the church of every age to know that false teachers will creep into the church in every age. And this morning we come to the conclusion of this grim expose in verses 17-22. Before we get there, let me briefly remind you of what we have learned already in this chapter. We were given a brief sketch of these false teachers in verses 1-3 and this sketch is being colored in with more grim details in verses 10-22. These false teachers are deceptive and sneaky. They are arrogant and driven by the lusts of their flesh. They are destructive to the church as they pick and choose what parts of the Scriptures they believe and teach so as to twist everything to their own advantage. They will always be wildly popular and have a large following as they tickle the itching ears of those who want to follow Christ on their own terms. They are driven by their greed and they exploit the church with false words. They are so arrogant that they don't even blush to blaspheme what the holy angels have refused to pronounce a curse on. They are so bold in their fleshly reveling that they pursue the desires of the flesh even under the light of the Gospel and in the assembly of the church. Their eyes are filled with adultery as they are always on the hunt for weak women who can be enticed into their sinful lair. They are dissatisfied with their current level of sinful enjoyment. They are always hungry for more sin. Their muscles of lust are buff in the tank-top of greed. And they follow in the mold of the iconic false prophet –

Balaam of Numbers 22 fame. He loved what he could gain from deceptive wrongdoing and this lust put him out of his right mind. That is the story of these false teachers who have infiltrated the church in every age.

It is not a pretty picture. And it is so prevalent in the church today. These false teachers have made great in-roads into the professing church all around the world. Where God is building His Church you can be sure that Satan is hard at work to counterfeit it. And so, like a faithful shepherd should be, Peter is righteously angry and defensive. He is using the rod of the pen to defend the necks of the sheep. He sees the danger of the wolves prowling and he is not about to go take a nap. And so, in this last section of the chapter we are given several word pictures which help us understand the nature and methods and eventual outcome of these false teachers in the church. Which means that we as the people of God should lean into this text with ears perked, ready to receive God's clear instruction about these false teachers. Not wanting to be led astray we want to know what to be looking for, and what to be on guard about. Verse 17 says this . . .

As Peter closes out his expose on these false teachers in the church, he gives us 5 metaphors, or word pictures, to help us see their true colors. He tells us that they are waterless springs and wind-driven mists in verses 17-18. And that they are freedom-preaching slaves in verses 19-21. And they are vomit-eating dogs and mud-wallowing pigs in verse 22. Each word picture adds another dimension to our understanding of these false teachers.

#### **I. Waterless Springs & Wind-Driven Mists – vs. 17-18**

- a. In verse 17 we are told that these false teachers are waterless springs and wind-driven mists. The point of these word-pictures is to show you how deceptively worthless these false teachers are for the church. They are like a spring of water that promises to satisfy the thirst of the traveler, but then proves to have run out of water. And this would be an epic disappointment in the arid region of Israel where water is at a premium. Imagine a traveler on a long journey by foot and seeing a sign leading them to a promised spring where they can refresh their water supply. But upon arrival they a dry river bed and an empty hole in the ground – a waterless spring! A worthless deception!
- b. Verse 17 also describes them as wind-driven mists. These are waterless clouds that get pushed along by violent winds from a distant storm. In an arid land which needs all the rain it can get to grow its crops, any hint of a pending rainfall raises their hopes. But sometimes these hopes are short-lived as these mist-filled clouds roll overhead and soon depart without a single drop falling. Another worthless deception.
- c. That is what these false teachers are like. They have offers and promises of life-giving truth, but they are completely empty. These waterless springs are the New Testament equivalent to the broken cisterns of Jeremiah's day. He describes the

people of Israel in Jeremiah 2 as having abandoned the life-giving satisfaction of worshipping the one true God, and have hewn out their own cisterns which are broken and cannot hold water. These false prophets are like that. They promote themselves as life-giving, when in reality they are life-draining. And this is true because they are void of the Holy Spirit of God within them. Do you remember the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4? He told her that if she drank of the living water that she would have a spring welling up inside of her and she would never thirst again. Then in John 7 Jesus stands up at the Feast of Booths and declares that all who thirst should come to him and if they believe in him they will have rivers of living water flowing out their heart. And then the text explains that Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit of God who was to be given to those who would trust in Jesus Christ. So, these life-giving waters which are a spring of living water inside the heart of the believer is the Holy Spirit who gives us constant spiritual life and strength and vitality.

- d. And that is what these false teachers are missing. They stand in front of the people of God and presume to speak on behalf of God. They should be an oasis in the midst of a spiritually dry land where the people of God come to drink in the life-giving truth of God. But these false teachers are but a mirage of spiritual life. They are absent of the Holy Spirit and are waterless springs and wind-driven mists.
- e. Verse 18 describes their tactics which entice people's attention. We already know that these tactics are driven by their own greed. They want money and attention and fame and power and sexual favors. They are in it for themselves and they will use whatever words necessary to lure others away. They speak loud boasts of folly, and they entice by sensual passions of the flesh. These loud boasts are bombastic and pompous declarations about their own greatness. They are like spiritual puffer fish who bloat themselves to impress and intimidate. They decry their naysayers and advance their own fame by foolishly boasting of all the people they have supposedly helped. They use donor's money to buy mass quantities of their own books so that their books get onto the New York Times Bestseller list so that more people will buy their books. They are pompously boastful and self-centered.
- f. And they entice the weak and newly converted with promises of sensual passions of the flesh. Since they themselves are driven by the sensual passions of the flesh, they certainly know how to instruct others in the same. They have refined the craft of speaking with Biblical language to justify the pleasing of their own fleshly desires. They speak of grace in such a way as to amplify God's salvation while making provision for the flesh to continue in ungodly practices. They know how to take the attributes of God and use them in such a way as to paint a picture of God that fits their sexual desires and their lust for money and power and fame. Remember, they are well-trained by greed. It has become their personal trainer in

the gym of their heart. They know how to teach people to feel like they are at peace with God while also being at peace with their rebellion against God and His clear ways.

- g. As just one example of this consider how the professing church in America has handled the sexual revolution of the last 40 years in our country. As our culture has set aside any inhibition and has completely rejected God's clear design and plan, the church has seen one false teacher after another stand up and use false words to entice by sensual passions of the flesh. These false teachers have learned that it is now more popular to be pro-liberty in this conversation about people's sexual practices than it is to be pro-Bible. So they have claimed to have a spiritual awakening on this subject as they have seen how the church has so long oppressed those who are living in sexual sin. These false teachers preach that God is love and not judgment and that God accepts all no matter what they practice in their own private lives. They preach a God of love and grace that is absent of the reason why we need to be loved and shown grace. And this version of the Gospel is drawing the crowds in our country – even on this very morning in our own town.
- h. And Peter says that they are preying upon the weak – the recently converted. He describes them as those who are just barely escaping from those who live in error, at the end of verse 18. I believe Peter is describing those who have recently expressed faith in Christ. They are young and immature in the faith. They aren't grounded in solid doctrine yet. They are the plants which sprout in the soils of Mark 4. They make a profession of faith, and for some of them it is genuine and will last. For others, the weeds of life and persecution because of the Word will rise in their lives and they will return to the corruption of sinfulness they had left.
- i. This is the crowd that these false teachers set their traps for. They promise life-giving water, but they are just a mirage in the desert. And those most prone to be lured into their deceptive ways and destroyed are the youngest in the faith.
- j. Notice that Peter can't go too long without reminding us of the condemnation of these false teachers. He tells us again in verse 17 that the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. And you can see why. Their deceptive, arrogant, lust-driven, greedy, self-promoting, God-denying ways deserve the deepest and darkest part of God's eternal judgment. These false teachers are worthless, except as the dry sticks you gather to burn in the fire.

## II. Freedom-Preaching Slaves – vs. 19-21

- a. Then in verses 19-21 Peter paints the picture of these false teachers as being freedom-preaching slaves. He says in verse 19 that they promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. So, they are offering people freedom from the guilt of sin and from the Law of God, but they themselves are enslaved to their own corruption. And this is an ironic picture isn't it? It's like going to a barber whose own hair is

scraggly and uncut. Or like going to a restaurant that doesn't have any food. Or like listening to a financial guru who is himself in millions of dollars of debt and has just declared bankruptcy. Or like electing a politician who promises to clean up the greed in Washington who was spurred along by their own greed for power.

- b. How exactly can a slave set you free when they can't even free themselves? Peter exposes their deceptive message here. They use the language of freedom. They know how to talk in Scriptural ways. But they are themselves enslaved to their own corruption of sin. Therefore, their promise of freedom cannot be true freedom if they themselves are entangled in corruption. Notice how Peter works backwards here in verse 19 to employ this impeccable logic. They promise freedom, but they are themselves slaves of corruption. We know they are slaves to corruption because whatever masters you is that to which you are enslaved. Therefore, they cannot lead people to true freedom when they themselves are enslaved. This is what sin always does when we give ourselves to it – it enslaves us. Augustine, one of the staunchest defenders of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone was radically saved from a lifelong mastery by sin. He said this about himself in his Confessions:
  - i. “My will was perverse and lust had grown from it; and when I gave in to lust, habit was born; and when I did not resist the habit it became a necessity. These were the links which together formed what I have called my chain, and it held me fast in the duress of servitude.” -St. Augustine (354-430)
- c. This is what sin does to those who give themselves to it. And that is what Peter says these false teachers have done. They have given themselves over to their greedy lusts and those sinful lusts now master them. He describes this descent from the knowledge of the Lord back into being entangled and overcome by sin once again. So, what is going on here in verses 20-21? Is Peter describing someone who was genuinely saved, but who didn't persevere in obedience so they lost their salvation? Well, we know from other very clear texts of Scripture that our salvation is completely dependent upon our Lord, both in its ability to save us and in its ability to keep us saved for all of eternity. Once we are truly born again we cannot again be dead in our trespasses and sins. And that is not what Peter is saying here either. He is describing these false teachers who have been exposed to the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They have received that knowledge in their minds and at least for a time they have used the truths of the gospel to make themselves better people. They have, for a time, escaped from the defilements of the world. But they did not stay there. So, Peter describes them as being entangled in these defilements again and being overcome once again by their own sinful corruption. To be entangled is to be intertwined with something or to be so interconnected that you cannot escape. It is the word used in the

Gospels to describe what the soldiers did as they weaved together strands of thorns to make a crown of thorns to place on Jesus' head. This is what these false teachers have done with sin. They escaped for a time, at least the outward expressions of their corruption, but then they found themselves enmeshed with it all once again. And they are overcome and enslaved once again. Verse 21 goes on to describe this spiritual apostasy by saying that they knew the way of righteousness but then they turned back from the holy commandment. The word for turned back is the word that Luke uses in his Gospel narrative to describe physically leaving one place and then turning around and going back to that same place. That is what these false teachers have done. They, for a time, left the corruptions of sin, but now they have gone back to that same place of enslavement to sin.

- d. Peter says, it would have been better for them to have never known the way of righteousness. It would have been better to never have received the holy commandment delivered to them from the apostles. Why does he call the Gospel the way of righteousness and the holy commandment? Is this some anti-gospel or legalistic infiltration into Peter's letter which is seeking to make the Gospel about obedience rather than about faith? Is Peter saying that it is our ongoing righteousness which secures our eternal salvation from sin?
- e. No, he is speaking of the Gospel's effect when it is truly received by faith. When we are truly justified before God through faith in Christ, then we are compelled and trained and shaped by that saving grace to obey Jesus Christ. Didn't Jesus himself say, you will prove to be my disciples by obeying me? What is going on with these false teachers is that they were proving by their ungodly lives that they were not truly rescued from their sins. Their pride and lust and greed and deceptive doctrines were all proof that they were not of Christ's fold. They were proving that the Gospel was their cover for ungodliness rather than their cure from it!
- f. And once again, Peter is so angry about their denial of the Lord and about the deceptive destruction they are doing to the church that he can never be far from their destruction. His righteous anger wants everyone to know that though they are succeeding now, it would have been better for them to have never known the truth of the Gospel at all. In other words, their judgment from God will be worse because of this apostasy. Their ignorance of the Gospel was a better condition than their deceptive twisting of the Gospel to satisfy their own fleshly lusts. Ignorance is better than rebellious lawlessness. God's judgment is not as severe.
- g. So, Peter has given us the grim details about these false teachers by telling us they are like waterless springs and wind-driven mists, and that they are freedom-preaching slaves. In other words, they are beyond worthless – they are totally reckless and destructive to themselves and to those they lead.

### III. Vomit-Eating Dogs & Mud-Wallowing Pigs – vs. 22

- a. And then in verse 22 he gives us two more pictures which can be combined together. He tells us that these false teachers are the case that proves these proverbial statements true. The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire. In other words, these false prophets are like vomit-eating dogs and like mud-wallowing pigs. And this is in no way a compliment!
- b. The dog was not a treasured commodity in the First Century Roman world, and particularly not so among the Jewish people. They did not respect and cherish them, they did not let them into their homes, and they did not feed them or give them haircuts or take them to the vet. Rather, these dogs roamed the streets and ate the scraps. And when they vomited their non-existent owners did not clean up after them. Rather, they would often return to that vomit and lap it back up. Why do they do this you say? Well, because that is their instinct as a dog. It's just part of what dogs do. And no matter how refined you make a dog – if you put bows in its hair or let it sleep on your bed – its nature will never truly change. It will always be a dog. And if it vomits, it will be prone to return to it. And by return to it, the proverb does not simply mean to return to it to sniff it, but rather the dog returns to lap it back up. Because apparently if once was good then twice must be better in the dog's mind! These false teachers are like this vomit-eating dog Peter says.
- c. They are also like the mud-wallowing sow. This female pig might wash herself and get rid of the filth on her body, but not too long after and she will be back wallowing in the muck and mire that got her dirty in the first place. Again, you can make a pig as prim and proper as you fancy, but the pig will never change its nature. It will always be a pig and pigs were made for wallowing in the mud. And these false teachers are just like these mud-wallowing pigs.
- d. So, what's the point Peter? Well, think about what has happened with each of these animals. The dog had internal filth because of something it ate. And so it expelled that filth. And the pig had filth on the outside because of its mud-wallowing and so it washed itself off. But they both returned to the filth. That is what these apostate teachers do as well – they return to their own filth. They were not ever really changed in their nature, but they were temporarily reformed. These false teachers had undergone a religious experience. They had a Jesus moment and they claimed to be born again. And their life was minimally altered for a brief time so as to give the impression of some sort of change. But now, they have gone back to their filth. And in a worse way. Now they are using the cloak of their salvation to hide the darkness of their depravity. They are baptizing their sinful practices in the language of religion and claiming to be right with God.
- e. Turn with me to Matthew 23, Matthew 23. I have described 2 Peter 2 as a dark and gloomy chapter exposing the error of the false teachers. Well, it mirrors the words of Jesus in Matthew 23 in so many ways. In that chapter Jesus is

pronouncing a series of chastising woes upon the scribes and the Pharisees. These men were the most respected and honored religious leaders of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. They were massively popular. Young Jewish boys grew up wanting to be a Scribe or a Pharisee. And here Jesus exposes their wicked ways and shows how their religion is reformation without regeneration, and it is a damning religion. Look in particular at Matthew 23:27-28.

- f. These scribes and Pharisees are the iconic hypocrites. They looked so good outwardly. They were so pious and religious sounding. They used a lot of God-talk. They advertised their own righteousness. They made sure people were watching whenever they did something good. And Jesus said that they were like whitewashed tombs that look good on the inside, but have nothing but corruption and lawlessness on the inside. That is the mold these false teachers are stamped into. They have enough outward change to be acceptable to the people of God, but they are inwardly unchanged. They have never actually never been regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God. Their internal filth is the same as it has always been.
- g. Listen to how Titus 3 describes one who has been regenerated:
  - i. <sup>3</sup> For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup> The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. (Tit. 3:3-8 ESV)
- h. True regeneration brings true and lasting life and godliness to the soul. Corruption and ungodliness are progressively left behind and the saved sinner now walks in the way of righteousness in obedience to his or her new Lord.

Conclusion: So, as we close this morning, I want you to look at 3:1-2 which we will deal with in more depth next week. What has been the point of this whole dark and grim expose of the false teachers in chapter 2? Well, Peter tells us in these verses. *Read 3:1-2.*

He has written all of this to stir us up by way of reminder so that we might give ourselves all the more to the prediction of the holy prophets and the commandment of Jesus given to us through the Apostles. In other words, Peter is calling us back to the Scriptures. He is seeking, under the direction of the Spirit of God to call us to double down on our current effort with the Word so that we might never be led astray.

Let me finish with some words of warning about how to spot a false teacher, and in particular how to sniff them out in light of what we have seen in this text. Run from a teacher or preacher if:

- They speak of the grace of God only in terms of how it saves and never of how it sanctifies.
- They speak of freedom in Christ to be what God made you to be, but never speak of sin that must be repented of in order to be conformed to Christ.
- They preach a gospel that frees your flesh to get what it really wants while making it feel like it is right and good, and that God actually wants you to have it.
- Their teaching avoids calling out sexual sin and rather talks in dismissive ways about those who condemn others personal lives.
- They promote their own wealth as evidence of God's blessing for those who follow him.
- They claim that if you don't have enough faith then you will not know the material blessing of God like they do.
- They speak way too openly about sexually charged realities and express details that need to stay private – like the pastor who setup shop on the top of the church building with a bed and spent several days up there with his wife – supposedly as a way to talk about intimate subjects that the church needs to hear. Beloved – run from such a teacher!
- They are bold, willful, and arrogant and make everyone know of their own greatness.

Our time is gone, but beloved, be on guard. Guard your heart, for from it flow the springs of life. Seek after the Shepherd by listening to and following faithful under-shepherds. May God protect this, His church! Let's pray.