

## **THE BLOT OF FALSE TEACHING & THE BEAUTY OF THE GOSPEL**

2 PETER 2:10b-22

Well, it was a crisp, clear afternoon in July 1879, when a group of 33 men set sail northward on the *USS Jeannette* out of San Francisco. The ship and its crew were officially known as the U.S. Arctic Expedition and their mission was one of the most foolish in the history of exploration.

The expedition's goal was to reach the geographic North Pole, but they intended to do that by sailing all the way there by way of the North Pacific, through the Bering Strait, and all the way Pole. Well, it doesn't take much thought to realize there's one thing that would get in the way of that plan - ICE.

The problem was that the entire expedition was based on theoretical maps of the northern seas from a German geographer named August Petermann. Petermann's idea was that there existed what he called a "thermometric gateway" through the ice of the arctic North. That once a ship passed through girdle of pack ice that surrounded the pole, they would arrive in the warm, ice-free waters of an open polar sea and be able to sail straight on to the pole.

As the ship got further and further north it slowly became obvious that the thermometric gateway they thought would be the road to glory, was actually a fantasy. And so only two months after leaving San Francisco the *Jeannette* and her crew found themselves firmly imprisoned in the ice at only the 72nd parallel, still 1000 miles from the North Pole. The polar world that their maps proposed, didn't actually exist.

They ended up stuck in the ice north of the Bering Strait for almost two years. Hampton Sides, in his book about the expedition writes that as the weeks passed with no change or shift in their ice-prison, the crew had to "shed their organizing ideas, in all their unfounded romance, and replace them with a reckoning of the way the Arctic truly is." In other words, they had to realize they'd been living in and pursuing a false narrative of reality.

Kind of like August Petermann's polar maps, as we go through life, we get sold all kinds of ideas that make a claim on what life's really all about, don't we? Every time we walk out the door, or turn on the TV or open up Facebook, we are inundated with proposals of what we should love and live for... Just walk through one of the malls in the area, or go on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or Pinterest and you are essentially reading a map that asserts the direction and destination of true happiness and fulfillment.

But the challenge for us as Christians is that the culture around us isn't the only purveyor of false maps, are they? This is Peter's point in the second chapter of this letter. These faulty maps, these false proposals of the way things are, also exist within the church in the form of what's called false doctrine.

Now doctrine can be a scary word for some of you, at its most basic level, doctrine tells a story: it tells a story of the way things are. It answers these fundamental questions we have about life. Who is God? What's he like? Who are we? What are we like? What are we here for? What's wrong with this world that we live? And How is it going to be made right?

And as Christians we believe that this story is told in its truest form on the pages of the Bible. This is why Peter says that we have the prophetic word more sure - this is the sure and certain word and that we need to submit to it, it doesn't submit to us. We don't stand above the Word, we allow the Word to stand above us and shape how we think and act.

And fundamentally the Bible tells a story that is centered on God, not on us. Gen. 1:1, the first sentence of the Bible, introduces us to the main character of the story. And it doesn't say, "In the beginning... man..."

So at its foundational level false teaching (whether its subtly wrapped up in the pretty pietistic packaging of Christian culture, or whether its blatantly paraded in the broader culture around us) is centered on an elevation of us and a devaluation of God. Let me say that again - fundamentally, when we talk about the root of false doctrine (and I'm going to use that category to define whatever is not the true story of the way things are) False doctrine is essentially a false narrative of life that makes me the author and main character of my story instead of God.

So church, because quite honestly this is the water we swim in most days, we can easily buy into these faulty notions about the purpose and goal of life, can't we? And so we unfurl our sails, set toward adventure and glory, governed by a false narrative of what life is all about. We navigate our world almost unaware that the story we're living by is disconnected from the one that God created us for. And often it's not til we're actually stuck or even shipwrecked that we wake up to the fact that we've put our trust and our hope in a false map.

Peter's goal here in the passage we read this morning is to open our eyes to this faulty maps before we end up stuck in the ice.

Now, let me just say that this text this morning, in fact most of 2 Peter 2, is a bit strange. This is a really hard text. Peter goes on this rant that at first glance seems as bad as the worst

Christian Facebook rants that you've read. And there are some weird things in here about angels, and this poetic and polemic language about these false teachers... It's difficult to understand.

Whenever we come to the Bible there is a distance between ourselves in 2016 and the culture and language of Scripture, but sometimes we feel that distance, that separation more acutely than others, and this is one of those times.

But what do we do with hard texts? We don't run away from them. We don't pretend like they're not there. This is God's Word to us - in his Sovereign grace and goodness God has included this Chapter in the canon of the New Testament for a reason - and what we want to do - even if there are things that are vague or obscure or hard to understand - is to get a handle on what God wants to do in us through this passage.

And what I believe he wants to do in us this morning is expose us to the seriousness, the ugliness, the vileness, the emptiness of false teachers and their false stories, so that we will see even more clearly the beauty that saturates and spills out of the true story of gospel.

My sister and her husband bought a house in Victoria last year, and its an older house that had gone through several renovations in its history, and in their basement they needed to replace some old plumbing. And they thought this was going to be just a quick, cheap fix, but as the plumber pulled back the sheetrock he saw some water damage. And as he slowly took off piece after piece of this clean, nicely painted, white wall, he discovered that behind it, mold and rot were everywhere.

And this is what Peter's trying to do for us. On the outside a lot of false narratives that press their influence on us, look attractive. They entice and allure us. But Peter's unmasking the rot underneath so that we'll be repulsed by it - and turn toward what is beautiful and life-giving.

Well that's a long introduction to not that long of a text, but I feel like it helps set up the heart of what Peter is getting at here, so let's dive into the text - and what I want us to do is just walk through this and see the ugliness that both leads to and comes out of false doctrine - and remember the category we're using to define false doctrine (whatever is not the true story of the way things are). OK? Let's begin reading together:

2 Peter 2:10-11

OK, I told you this passage was strange. Let me define for you what the problem is and then describe it a bit for you. The issue as it applies to us is that *false narratives essentially see no need for Jesus. (repeat)*

So what's going on here? Well, there are angels involved. And we have the false teachers. And we have this third category of being that Peter calls the *glorious ones*. And what we seem to have is a hierarchy of might and power from the false teachers to the glorious ones to the angels, and the false teachers, though they're below them, are blaspheming these glorious ones (which could mean mocking or disrespecting or treating lightly), while the angels, though they are greater than the glorious ones, refuse to treat them this way. But the elephant in the room is, who are these glorious ones?

Well Jude may be of help to us here - why don't you turn over with me to the book of Jude. There is a ton of crossover between Jude and 2 Peter, and most scholars believe that Peter drew on and used a lot of Jude's themes and wording in writing 2 Peter, and that's fine, we have categories for that in how the Bible is formed, but look at what Jude says, also speaking against false teachers... Jude 8-9: There it is, these also blaspheme the glorious ones...

It gets even weirder right? What's all this about the body of Moses? Well, Jude is referring to a piece of Jewish writing called the *Assumption of Moses* that his first century readers would have been familiar with, that tells this story of the archangel Michael arguing with the devil over the body of Moses, but, refusing to blaspheme or judge the devil in his own authority. So Jude is using these specifics of this story as the antithesis of what these false teachers are doing. Meaning that the parallel is that these 'glorious ones' are, like the devil, fallen angels. Demons.

And so here's Peter's point. To these false teachers, the reality of evil isn't really a big deal. It's not something they need much help dealing with. They are just fine by themselves. Peter's exhortation in his first letter to "be sober minded and watchful because your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion..." THAT... wasn't really on their radar.

Now I will grant you that there are some Christians out there who see a demon hiding behind every rock and every tree. But quite honestly, for a lot of us as reformed-leaning unapologetic advocates of the detailed sovereignty of God, we can sometimes forget the reality that we are at war - it's a war in which the outcome has been decided, but a war that still has casualties nonetheless. The reality is that evil is at work in a very personal way in this world, and it's working to influence us, and we need help.

When we talk about the events that are going on in this world - from Dallas to Nice to South Sudan - alongside our affirmation of the wonderfully assuring sovereignty and providence of God we need to have categories in our story for personal and systemic evil overseen by a real and powerful enemy.

And for these false teachers, because their story didn't include clear categories for evil and all the things that come from it: sin, injustice, and brokenness on every level of creation, because their main pursuit was their own comfort and prosperity, their story didn't include a category for need. Jesus could serve as teacher, encourager and life coach, but who needs him as Redeemer and Rescuer?

This is what Peter's talking about when he introduces these teachers in the first verse of Chapter 2: "even denying the Master who bought them." Though they claim the name Christian, they reject Christ as Redeemer and Lord.

And we can't ignore the risk this is for us, because this rejection is happening in communities all around us that have the name church outside their building. In his book *Christless Christianity*, Michael Horton highlights this issue for the church 21st century Western culture:

"Christ is [everywhere] in this [Christian] subculture, but more as an adjective (Christian), than as a proper name. While we swim in a sea of "Christian things, Christ is increasingly reduced to a mascot or symbol of a subculture and the industries that feed it. Just as you don't need Jesus Christ in order to have T-shirts and coffee mugs, it is unclear to me why he is necessary for most things I hear a lot of pastors and Christians talking about in church these days."

So let me ask you a question. Does your functional theology, your street-level, day-to-day beliefs, what comes out of you when you aren't prepared with the "right" answer - at that gut-level of believe, do you have categories for the reality of evil and sin and human brokenness and your desperate need for Jesus? Are you aware that even your next breath is dependent on his sustaining and upholding power in this world, and in your life personally.

It's at that point of need that God loves to enter our stories. Jesus is happy to stay far away from self-sufficient churches and self-confident Christians who don't think they need him. But God is nearer to you in your brokenness and need than he ever will be in your apparent wholeness and self-sufficiency. So Church - let's stay needy. God, let us not be lulled by false stories and forget our need for Jesus.

Laodicea (Rev. 3:17). "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

So that's first - *false narratives see no need for Jesus.*

2. False narratives keep us from becoming truly human.

Let's keep reading: v. 12:

"But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing..."

Do you see the serious treatment that Peter gives to these false stories? This matters. Over and over in this passage, Peter uses this raw, animal-like language to describe these false teachers. They are irrational animals, creatures of instinct... they indulge in sin wherever and whenever they feel the urge, they are like Balaam (a point we'll unpack in a moment), they are like dogs returning to their own vomit, and like a sow returning to the mire (v. 22).

Peter's point is that false stories animalize us. What do I mean by that? There are a couple of different things I mean. One is that false stories have a tendency to present humans as animals. Think of the widespread acceptance of the false story of naturalism and Darwinian evolution. It's a story that essentially justifies us living as animals, right? I mean we are governed primarily by instinct. So why do men commit adultery? Well, they have this innate desire, this instinctual urge, to spread their DNA to the largest population possible to ensure survival. So marriage and fidelity in the context of that story, are merely a fight against our *true* selves.

Now the story of the gospel tells us that in a very real way, sin does turn us into animals. To sin isn't to be more human, it's to be less human.

This is the irony expressed in the story of Balaam. If you're not familiar with it, let me recap it for you. The narrative is in Numbers 22-25 but let me summarize it for you. Israel is starting to move toward the Promised Land and along the way they are defeating these different kings and kingdoms opposed to God. And Balak, the King of Moab, becomes afraid of what Israel is going to do to them after seeing what he's done to the nations around him, and so he hires Balaam, this sort of freelance prophet/spiritual guru who hires his spiritual power out to the highest bidder.

And Balak hires Balaam to put a curse on Israel. But God, who of course is standing with his covenant people, sends his angel to get in Balaam's way. And the story is written in a way that really mocks Balaam, because his donkey can see what he can't. The donkey sees the angel of the Lord blocking their way along the road, and because of it she goes off the road and into a field, she runs Balaam up against a wall, and finally she lies down. And the story drips with

ironic mockery because in many ways it reverses the roles of Balaam and the donkey. Balaam becomes the irrational, stubborn beast, while it's the donkey that is most human.

So Balaam and the donkey show us that it's only when we properly see and respond to God that we start living out what it truly means to be human. Sin and blindness animalize us, and without something or someone showing up with the power to transform us, we are bound to live according to our sinful instincts. Now on our own those can be managed, and corralled, they can be domesticated, that's what law and order are meant to do, but they can never be eradicated.

And false stories that put man at the center of the storyline, and reject a need for Jesus don't have the power to transform us. They can't change us into what God made us to be. Even though they promise to make us fully realize our human potential, they keep us from becoming truly human, as God defines humanness - which is living as his image-bearers, reflecting his glory into a dark and broken world.

And I think if we look closely we'll still see these animalistic tendencies inside ourselves. We'll see the stubborn blindness that kept Balaam from seeing and responding in obedience to God. Do you find yourself still living by the irrational instincts of sin? Are you consistently returning to the vomit and the mire, are you struggling to work through the garbage of sin in your life?

The answer beloved, isn't in false stories of self-improvement, of being a better you, it isn't in 10 principles of being a better husband or father or employee, no matter how much Christian language is attached to it. The answer isn't in being true to yourself, because our truest self is only found as we live in submission to the true story of the ways things are - the reality that we are sin-sick beasts in need of the transforming power of Jesus' life, death and resurrection to return us to being truly human.

*So false narratives see no need for Jesus, they keep us from becoming truly human, and thirdly...*

3. False narratives never deliver on what they promise.

I know there are some details here that we're not touching on, but we don't have time to work through everything, but look down at v. 17:

"These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For speaking loud boasts of folly they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption."

Think through this poetic language with me. Peter says these false teachers are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. This is vivid imagery. Imagine yourself wandering through the wilderness, maybe hiking up around Snoqualmie or Mt. Rainier, and you forgot your water bottle. And after hiking for several hours and climbing elevation you are absolutely parched. Your tongue is sticking to the roof of your mouth, you feel like you've got cotton balls in there, and up ahead on the trail you see what looks like a rocky stream bed flowing under a bridge. Refreshment! But as you get closer, you don't hear a gurgling brook, you don't see a flowing stream of water, all that's there are dry rocks without even a trickle of water.

That is the nature of false stories of reality. They promise refreshment, they look like they will quench our deep thirst, but in fact they are dry and empty. They are mists driven by the storm. If you've ever lived in an arid desert, which I haven't, but I do know that the sign of storm clouds on the horizon in the dry season can be life-transforming. You are waiting for the storm to bring your ground and your crops what they need - a torrential downpour - and the storm blows right through with only a mist.

And then, Peter cuts the poetic language and says it plainly - they offer freedom, but they themselves are slaves.... What promises freedom actually puts us in bondage.

False stories that take Jesus out of the narrative, or relegate him to a role even as our co-star.. they just can't deliver the fulfillment and satisfaction and peace they promise.

Most of us have experienced the emptiness at the end of false stories. And yet, somehow, we still run after them.

And this is the heart of our sin problem. It's what Jeremiah is talking about in Jer. 2:13 "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

What Jeremiah is talking about is that instead of going to the source of living water - that's water that is running like a stream or a brook - it's water that's fresh and satisfying - instead of going there for refreshment and life, we dig a hole in the ground and we catch rain water. And as that water mixes with the dirt to make mud and is absorbed by the ground and doesn't even stay in the hole, we reach down and scoop up a handful and think it's going to satisfy us. But it's a fantasy.

Whether it's the story that says owning a house and two cars with two kids and a dog and a white picket fence will fulfill you, or the story that says your husband is a dirtbag so if you really value you, you should get together for coffee with that old high-school friend, the same deception is at work. But what those stories promise they can't deliver. They're a faulty map



because they don't line up with the reality of the way things are. They forget that there is only one source of living water, and his name is Jesus.

The gospel never fails to deliver on its promises. You see, here's the true story that we have to remind ourselves of over and over again.

*Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation.*

This is the story that Peter is trying to point us to throughout this letter. We're going to see it starting next week as he starts pointing forward toward that consummation. And it's the story of the gospel that produces life in us. There is a beauty produced by the gospel that stands in stark contrast to the ugliness, the vileness, the rot of sin and indulgence and brokenness produces by false narratives.

You see, look at the contrast that Peter makes. He calls these peddlers of false stories blots and blemishes here, but he uses that exact same language in Ch. 3. (3:14). As we grow in grace, in the true story of the gospel, there is a purity and beauty and peace that grows among us a God's people.

That is what Peter is highlighting in Chapter 1.

Psalm 1 and the life we want to see flourishing among us.

Re-calibrating to true gospel north. Gathering on Sundays. Scattering in our CGs. Habits of Grace. Being teachers of one another. Reminders of the true story.