

Marks & Markings

2 Peter 2:9-22

October 17, 2021

CALL TO WORSHIP | Proverbs 16:1-25

- **16** Mortals make elaborate plans, but God has the last word.
- ² Humans are satisfied with whatever looks good; God probes for what *is* good.
- ³ Put God in charge of your work, then what you've planned will take place.
- ⁴God made everything with a place and purpose; even the wicked are included—but for *judgment*.
- ⁵ God can't stomach arrogance or pretense; believe me, he'll put those braggarts in their place.
- ⁶ Guilt is banished through love and truth; Fear-of-God deflects evil.
- ⁷When God approves of your life, even your enemies will end up shaking your hand.
- ⁸ Far better is a little in the righteous way than vast revenues without justice.
- ⁹ We plan the way we want to live, but only God makes us able to live it.
- ¹⁰ A good leader motivates, doesn't mislead, doesn't exploit.
- ¹¹ God cares about honesty in the workplace; your business is his business.
- ¹² Good leaders abhor wrongdoing of all kinds; sound leadership is established by right relating to God and others.
- ¹³ Good leaders cultivate honest speech; they love advisors who tell them the truth.
- ¹⁴An intemperate leader wreaks havoc in lives; you're smart to stay clear of someone like that.
- ¹⁵ Good-tempered leaders invigorate lives; they're like spring rain and sunshine.
- ¹⁶ Get wisdom—it's worth more than money; choose insight over income every time.
- ¹⁷The road of right living (the way of righteousness) bypasses evil; watch your step and save your life.
- ¹⁸ First pride, then the crash—the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.
- ¹⁹ It's better to live humbly among the poor in spirit than to live it up among the proud.
- ²⁰ It pays to take life seriously; things work out when you trust in God.
- ²¹ A wise person gets known for insight; gracious words add to one's reputation.
- ²² True insight is a spring of fresh water, while fools sweat it out the hard way.
- ²³They make a lot of sense, these wise folks; whenever they speak, their reputation increases.
- ²⁴ Gracious speech is like clover honey—good taste to the soul, quick energy for the body.
- ²⁵There's a way that looks harmless enough; look again—it is the ways of death.

PRE-SERMON READING | 2 Peter 2:9-13a

...the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and temptations, and to keep the unrighteous under restraint and chastisement until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of polluting desires and despise authority.

Audacious and arrogant, they are not afraid to slander the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not bring insulting judgment against them before the Lord. But these like brute beasts without reason, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, insulting what they do not comprehend, in their destruction they too will be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing.

SERMON|

2 Peter chapter 2 is an uncomfortable chapter and certainly not many people's favorite! In fact, the famed preacher and theologian, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones once said, "Anyone who enjoys reading a chapter like this must surely be abnormal." 1

To the good doctor's point, 2 Peter chapter two is rather hash. Full of abrasive, accusatory, and condemning language. Language that makes us squeamish, shocking our modern sensibilities. It would have had a similar effect on its first readers too!

You see, Peter, in line with the exilic prophets of old, pulls no punches. It is like he really wants his faith family to see behind the curtain, to see with unveiled eyes, what will keep them from experiencing the fullness of all they have obtained—been gifted—in Jesus (1:1). Like Isaiah and Jeremiah before him, Peter writes with pastoral passion, employing all the polemical and rhetorical strength he can muster so that his "beloved…are not carried away lawless error and lose their own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Master and Savior Jesus Christ." (3:17-18a)

What we saw <u>last week</u>, is that the greatest obstacle to the fruitfulness and effectiveness of knowledge of our Master Jesus Christ (1:8), of our faith, is the coming of "false teachers" from within the community of Jesus followers.

"...there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive schools of thought, even denying the Master who bought them...because of them the way of truth will be slandered."

(2 Peter 2:1-2)

Those who will "feast with you" (2:13), who will share life with us as we follow Jesus together, and whose schools of thought look harmless enough. Yet, what lies under their seemingly right ways are "the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25), for they are unsubmissive to the Master who purchased them for freedom, and therefore make untrue and ridiculous the way of truth, the way of Jesus.

Peter's first letter focused on the difficulties of living for Jesus in a society that had little space and respect for the way that is Jesus. Then like now, his faith family worked and married, went to school, and made friends in a place that had plenty of room for the acceptable teachings of Jesus, as well as any variety of religions. Likewise, they had no issue with making politics and economics religious conversations. But Jesus himself, and the way of Jesus, was a bit out of place.

¹ Martin Lloyd-Jones, Expository Sermons on 2 Peter, 134.

So, Peter encouraged this same faith family to hold fast to their identity as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession...proclaim[ing] the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). He steadied them in whose and who they are, encouraging them that steadfastness amid the external obstacles of faith came through modeling the posture of Jesus—service, sacrifice, and submission. He encouraged them in the sure blessedness of life in Jesus, as salt and light with Jesus. A life of multiplying favor and peace, even amid the apparent difficulties and constraints of living in an unfriendly-to-faith-in-Jesus environment.

Peter knows that the way of Jesus is an odd fit for any culture, and we need encouragement to persevere, stay soberminded, and practice self-control amid the waves of daily life, for our sake and our neighbors. But in the letter before his departure, Peter's focus is not expected difficulties outside of the faith family, but rather, the insidious obstacle from within the community of faith: *those who lead with the words of Jesus, but not in the way of Jesus.* They get the terms correct but miss the heart of Jesus, and thus their manner of relating to God and others is all out of place.

Chapter two is a polemic, a strong written attack on someones and somethings that will surely cause many in Peter's faith family to fall, stumbling into misery (1:10). On par with polemics in the ancient world, Peter's accusations made in 2:1-3 "need to be seen less as actual statements of what the author's opponents did or said than as projections of what their errors lead to." Specifically, a way of life with God and others that misses out on the heart of God, that is ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Master and Savior Jesus.

"...many will follow their sensuality...and in their greed, they will make merchandise out of you with **forgeries, false models** sculpted out of words."

(2 Peter 2:2-3)

Peter's indictment of "their sensuality," that wanton, unprovoked violence coupled with brutish sexuality (the sensational combination of murder and adultery) associated with "their greed," the coveteousness of neighbor (that desire to steal and bear false witness so that you can have what is someone else's) is a standard charge in both our Scriptures and throughout antiquity brought forth to show the pollution of person/groups way of life. These "false teachers" were not teaching that such things were accepted, nor probably even practicing these discrepancies overtly. Yet, what lay under their teaching was a heart that still longed for something less (or more) than what God had gifted and called them. They were not satisfied with Jesus.

Now, I don't want to distract us too much from our text today, but I think you'd get a lot out of Peter's second letter if you read these three chapters side-by-side with the three chapters of Jesus' sermon on the mount in <u>Matthew 5-7</u>. Doing so would let you re-enter second Peter afresh, now that we're nearly two months into it. And, I think you'd discover a lot of parallels.

For instance, you'd notice how Jesus uncovers the heart of the law and those who got the letter right but missed it by pointing out the murderousness of hatred, the adultery of lust, the excusing of various divisions, the arrogance of self-centered ambitions, and the destruction of one-sided love. Or, how he points out the unfortunate irony of following leaders who settle for less than God desires in the practice of righteousness and who are themselves under the slavishness of the pursuit of money. Turning his attention to the product of following such leaders, Jesus points out hypocrisy and destruction of judgmentalism, and the animal likeness of those caught in it, the narrowness of his way compared to the broad path of destruction, the inevitability of wolves in sheep clothing, God's faithful response, and the consequences of a foolish foundation. You would also recognize that Jesus is talking to good religious Jews, Pharisees, and religious leaders when he offers similar encouragements and unclothing rebukes as Peter. Jesus was not speaking to

² Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, TAYB, 192.

people whose licentiousness, arrogance, and the like are so evident. And perhaps, that might allow us to wonder if there are any similarities in our letter and our context?

We might could say that this letter is Peter's sermon on the mount in Greek verbiage and context. At least the exercise in reading them side-by-side will be helpful, I believe.

Now, back to our text. What makes this obstacle of fruitful and effective faith in Jesus so devasting is how it can quietly work itself into the community of faith with relative ease. If the teachers were in the moment living wanton and greedy lives—openly without restraint, it would have been easy for Peter's faith family to see the discrepancies. But again, Peter is testifying to what will be produced, not necessarily a literal description of what is being done. The schools of thought and modeling of these false teachers will be subtle, stealthy, and so "many will follow their...forgeries," their fictitious pictures/models crafted out of words, of what life with God entails.

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence..."

(2 Peter 1:3)

A way proclaimed and practiced driven not by joyous submission to the "glory and excellence" of Jesus to which they have been called, a life modeled after his life and motivations. Rather, a way of relating to God and others, to work and society, the earth and heaven, driven by that same old corruption that has cycled through culture after culture, generation after generation: *polluting desire and despising authority*.

"those who indulge in the lust of polluting desires and despise authority."

(2 Peter 2:10a)

Good thing for us, Peter said in verses 4-10a, that God has known from the foundations of the world "how to rescue the godly from trials of faith (temptations), and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment" (2:9).

God is faithfully active in guarding and rescuing those souls who are tormented by "the way of the world," even if they find themselves right in the middle of the worst of the world like Lot (2:7-8). God knows how to bring about peace amid the chaos of life in this world—that's what chapter one was reminding us!

The "how" is Jesus, in case you missed it!

"His divine power has granted to us...his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may...escape the corruption that is in the world because of desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith..."

(2 Peter 1:3-5)

Jesus' person, promises, and power allow us to "escape the corruption in the world because of desire," and so we "make every effort to supplement our faith with..." those qualities which ensure we get the most out of life in/with/for Jesus.

_

³ Ibid., 193.

And God's faithfulness to humanity is not merely in preserving and rescuing but in keeping the cycle of polluting desire and rebellion self-consuming— "in their destruction they too will be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing." (2:12b-13a) God always rescuing and keeping; this is the world in which we live and work and play and struggle and pray. A world in which God is freeing from the trials of faith and temptations of the ways of death. The world in which He is keeping sin and evil in their cycle of self-destruction. The world in which he is patiently and effectively working (in, through, and for his creations) so that none should perish, but all should reach repentance.

"The Lord is now slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness, but is patient on your account, not wishing (desiring) that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

(2 Peter 3:9)

So, if you look at where we've come so far in this "most terrible and terrifying" chapter is:

2:1-3 | Uncover the obstacle to the fruitfulness of faith in everyday life

2:4-10a | Ground our hope in God's faithfulness to rescue and keep

And today, we'll see:

2:10b-16 | The marks of foolishness

2:17-22 | The harm (markings) of following fools

Peter moves from God working historically and contemporarily in human existence (2:4-10a) back to the particularities of those who inevitably arise among us, leading with the words of Jesus, but not in the way of Jesus. Let's pick up in the second half of verse 10 and look at what marks the way of foolishness.

"Audacious and arrogant, they are not afraid to slander the glorious ones..."

(2 Peter 2:10b)

What we see as the first mark of these false teachers, these forgers of a model of life with God, is that they are "Audacious and arrogant" (2:10b). No surprise there, right! Of course, they'd have to be naively confident to promote a way of life with God and others that was something different (even if only slightly) from the way of Jesus. To speak on God's behalf, even if errantly, requires some self-confidence, even if it is hollow. But notice that **they are not generally audacious and arrogant, but specifically so** in that "they are not afraid to slander the glorious ones" (2:10b).

Now here is the rub. Modern scholarship tends to lean towards these "glorious ones" being angelic beings; after all, angels are the contrasting example in the next verse. Those holding this view say that Peter references arrogance towards evil angelic beings, demons, and even Satan. These false teachers, then, are haughty towards spiritual beings more powerful than themselves and thus show their naivety. While this sounds reasonable enough, the issue is not power—the teachers' power versus the angels' power. The problem is a heart of slander/insult/blasphemy.

.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, 134.

What our early faith family up through the reformation and until more recent times have contended is that the "glorious ones" are those who have been "called to Jesus own glory and excellence" (1:3). That is you and me.

"God's divine power has granted to us all that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of **Jesus who** *called us to his own* glory and excellence..."

(2 Peter 1:3)

This view aligns with the way scripture has talked about God's people (Psalm 8 in particular) and helps us see that these false models have a heart of judgementalism, a critical heart, especially towards those within the community of faith.

MARKS OF THE WAY OF FOOLISHNESS

1.A critical heart towards the community of faith

The outworking of their baseless pride on the body of Christ makes sense since these are teachers of God's way. They have audacity and arrogance to be "the" authority on God, how he will act, what he wants, etc. Even angels—good or evil—wouldn't dare to bring insulting judgments on God's children before him! But these leaders will!

Having a log in their own eye, they're consumed with the speck in yours. And, instead of knocking, asking, seeking the Father on behalf of you, or even better, encouraging you to do the same, they pronounce verdict on things in which they are ignorant. And in so doing, demonstrate that they are not acting out of wisdom but the brute instinct of animals raised to be eaten, not creatures crafted to exercise dominion.

These false models cause destruction within the community of faith—many of us have experienced this truth, and forgive us, Lord, for when we've contributed to it. And the irony of what they are after, self-flourishing through control of others, will be their very downfall. In their destroying of others, they will experience their own destruction. They lack knowledge of who God really is (of who Jesus really is!) and thus speak and act out of animalistic instinct, not a humble, poor in spiritedness, not out of mercy and meekness or with the mourning of their and others sin before the Father and his chosen.

Just think what the church could be if we believed that judgmentalism, especially towards those within the faith community, was actually foolishness. I wonder how different our reputation would be to our neighbors?

The first mark is a heart of arrogance towards those within the faith family, a critical heart towards the community of faith. The second is "hearts trained in covetousness" (2:14).

MARKS OF THE WAY OF FOOLISHNESS

- 1.A critical heart towards the community of faith
- 2.A heart trained in covetousness

Let's read the rest of verse thirteen, as well as fourteen.

"They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes (pollution), reveling in their deceptions (in their squandering of resources and energy, i.e., you), while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!

(2 Peter 2:13b-14)

Their pleasure, delight, is not the flourishing of others who are in God and who/what God has made/called them to be; instead, their happiness is in squandering energy and resources (people) for their own place at the table—as they feast with you. Their eyes (the window to the soul) are full of lust, always longing for more, for what is not theirs, for they are not satisfied with what is. They have not learned to be content, the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need (Phil. 4:12).

Because they see people for what they can be used for, not who they are in God, they entice **unsteady souls—souls unsure of who they are and who God has made them to be.**

These false models know how to use people to get what they want because, rather than supplanting their faith, they have hearts trained in greed—literally coveteousness. What they desire is not God's desire (for themselves or others) but their own. They lack self-control, and coupled with a lack of knowledge of who God truly is; they have abandoned the straight and narrow for the broad road.

Peter sums up these marks as foolishness. In verses fifteen and sixteen, he says they have forsaken (taken a completely different route than) the right way, the way of Jesus. Instead, they are following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from using his position/influence to fulfill his own desires.

Balaam's story is found in <u>Numbers 22</u>, as well as a combination of Talmudic and Deuterocanoncial sources. A critical element about Balaam is that **he was indeed a prophet who really could hear the words of the LORD, and whose own words** *could* **be the words of God. He was no pretender in regards to his God-giftedness. Yet, his master was his stomach, his longing for the honor and resources achievable through using his gifts, not so much honoring the desire of the One who gave them to him.**

The ability or gifting of the teacher does not matter. No matter if the words they hear are the words of God or if the words they say are the words of God if their heart is after anything but Jesus, the life their teaching will model for us is a foolish forgery—as Balaam's story attests.

One day, while riding his donkey on the road to use his influence and giftings in a manner contrary to the way of the LORD, an angel of destruction stood before Balaam, but he couldn't see the angel. Yet, the donkey did see the angel and threw Balaam, thus saving his life. But Balaam was angry for being disgraced by his donkey and so went to beat him. The donkey then spoke, rebuking Balaam for his anger towards his act of kindness and his blindness. Of course, unlike the good leader in Proverbs 16, Balaam had no room in his heart for advisors who told him the truth. And so he rebuked the donkey for criticizing him! Ironically, Balaam proved himself more foolish (mad!) than the brute beast, which he assumed served him.

So, false teachers are audacious and arrogant towards those in the family of faith. They are comparing, contrasting, setting themselves up as judges, but not because they have stayed with Jesus through his trials of faith and thus seen how to live like Jesus (Luke 22:28-30), but because it benefited them to do so. They are never satisfied with what they have been given in Jesus. They are always after more. I'll let you fill in the blank of what more they are after because it is certainly not more of the Lord—they are not like John the baptizer who could say, "I must decrease so that he might increase..." (John 3:30).

And so we see the marks of foolishness: a critical and greedy heart. And we might think that is enough, but Peter didn't. He is not satisfied uncovering their nature; he wants to remind us of **our responsibility** by pointing out what happens to the house built on sand.

Let's read verses seventeen to twenty-one together.

"These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. 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 [the false teachers] promise [the unsteady souls] freedom, but the false teachers themselves are slaves to corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that, he is enslaved. For if, after the barely escaping have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Master and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

For it would have been better for them never to have know the way of righteousness [the way of Jesus] than after knowing to turn back from the holy rule of life delivered to them."

(2 Peter 2:17-21)

As he has said throughout, the false teachers will get what's coming to them. They will experience the judgment which they so quickly and arrogantly render. They'll wind up in the same space as the angels who sinned in a similar manner (2:4). They'll get what they want from faith and miss out on what God, who gives in secret, desires for them. In the end, they prove that they indeed cannot serve two masters but are overcome by their polluted desires and despising of authority, and thus enslaved to that which brings corruption into the world (1:3, 9, 2:19).

They proclaim freedom in Jesus, spouting what sounds like wisdom, but their way of relating to God and others does not lead to flourishing; it lacks the depth and quenching consistency of the spring that will not run dry and the mercy that rains down on both sinners and saints.

Their paralleled but powerless words are incredibly enticing for those who are **immature in their faith** (because they have not supplemented their faith), those unsteady souls who are barely escaping from those who live in error. **Those lacking maturity/fruitfulness in their identity, calling in Jesus, these are the many that follow forgeries of the way (2:2).**

Now, verses twenty to twenty-two are chapter one, verses eight to eleven in reverse (a negative to the positive).

Let's reread those verses for familiarity: 1:8-11

...make every effort to supplement, that is, to bring to complete experience, your faith with excellence...knowledge...meekness...steadfastness...godliness [justice]...familial affection, and...with love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Master Jesus Christ. For whoever does not have these qualities at hand, ready to make use of them, is so shortsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins through immersion in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit life.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more diligent to confirm the reliability of your calling and election, the certainty of the invitation extended in delight, not obligation, for if you practice these qualities—making do with what is at your disposal, *you will never stumble into misery*.

With things thus settled, there will be supplemented, that is to say, *richly provided for you*, the complete experience of the eternal, unique in quality and breadth of time, kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Holiness, this being set apart, to live in the eternal (unique in quality and time) kingdom of our Master and Savior Jesus, which is richly provided for us (supplemented) by the one who bought us (2:1)—is what we have been called to, created to participate in as partakers of the divine nature. Through Jesus, we have escaped what keeps us from being/living/doing what God desires for us—which is life full and forever (Jn. 12:44-50). We know this, but when we follow forgeries of the way, rather than the way himself, we find ourselves like Lot, all tangled up once again in the same old corruption which has cycled through culture after culture, generation after generation: polluting desire and despising authority (2:10a).

But now, rather than merely being subject to the self-destruction of such desire and arrogance, we are tormented because we know there is something else, something different.

THE HARM (Markings) OF FOLLOWING FOOLS

- ·Ineffective & unfruitful faith
- ·Misery in faith

We get that following a way other than the way of truth that is Jesus would lead to a powerless faith, a faith that *doesn't* experience everything needed for life and godliness. But more than that, when following fools within the faith, we find that faith is a misery, or at least we fall, *stumble into the misery of faith* (1:10). Faith, rather than freeing us to flourish in Jesus, freeing us to love selflessly, live without comparing and contrasting, sharing burdens as we carry our loads as the Spirit leads—faith once again entangled in the old corruption, becomes weighty, oppressive, a vicious cycle of trying harder, giving up more, and experiencing only momentary relief before trying harder once again.

So blind, nearsighted are we, focused on the forgeries, that we forget all that has already and will forever be done for us. That God has been and will be with us and for us and so we go at relating to him and others in ways that lead to experiencing our faith as miserable.

Surely life would be easier if we'd never known the way of righteousness—our souls would not be tormented, distressed at the tearing within and without that comes from assuming we are free but in reality finding ourselves entangled (Heb. 12:1-3). Entangled because we followed forgers, false models crafted from Godly words that seemed so good or right, but in reality, denied (were not satisfied with) our Master and his "holy rule delivered to" us (2:21).⁵

A rule to abide in his love and word through obedience loving one another (<u>John 15:1-17</u>)—a way of living in which we make every effort to supplement, bring to maturity all that we have been gifted in Jesus. Our responsibility is to supplement our faith. We don't have to stay in the cycle of sin before Jesus or return to it again in Jesus. We are free! But we have to make every effort to bring into vivid depth and color the life we have in Jesus. Otherwise, we are unsteadied, stumbling along blind and miserable because we have forgotten that we are cleansed of our former sins, are escaping what corrupts, and given everything we need for life now and to its fullest potential.

⁵ Although entole may mean commandment, here it seems to be taken in a more collective sense as 'the rule' of the group...the usage here suggests that Christ has given a 'new law' for his disciples... (Neyrey, 224).

To help us picture the markings of following fools, of not taking our responsibility to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (delight!)" (Phil. 2:12-13), Peter leaves us with a final, grotesque image in verse twenty-two.

"What the true proverb says has happened to [those who follow fools]: 'The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

(2 Peter 2:22)

Jesus told us not to try and give dogs what is holy and throw swines pearls in his commentary on correcting those who follow this forgery of the way. Trying to advise the false teachers will get you trampled underfoot (Matt. 7:6), beat like Balaam's donkey. Here, Peter says the harm of following foolishness is that we end up like the dogs and swine who, in our ignorance and animalism, settle for the filth when we already been given something better. In so doing, our knowledge of Jesus is neither effective nor fruitful in this life or life forever.

How miserable indeed. But not inevitable. For, paraphrasing Proverbs 16:5-7, while God will surley put those foolish braggarts in their place, guilt is banished through his love and truth, the One who is love and truth; fear-of-God deflects evil. And when God approves of your life, when he calls you to his glory and excellence, and you are living into the fullness of what he has given you; then even the fools will end up shaking your hand.

Let's pray.

BENEDICTION

But you, friends, are well-warned. Be on guard lest you lose your footing and get swept off your feet by these lawless and loose-talking teachers. Grow in the grace and understanding of our Master and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Glory to the Master, now and forever! Yes and amen!

(2 Peter 3:17-18)