

Credentials of True Teachers and Teachings 2 Peter 3

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, as we dig into the last chapter of 2 Peter this morning, I want us to recall how we've been framing what the Apostle Peter has been teaching us about fake good news in terms of identifying counterfeit money.

And as I've mentioned before, I think the example of counterfeit money is very appropriate for us because of the Blessing Project that we're working on, and how we're blessing people by giving them \$100 cash in Jesus name. And if we discovered that the money we have been giving out to bless people was counterfeit... we know that it would be no blessing at all, and we'd feel terrible about it.

In the same way brothers and sisters, we don't want to find out that the teachings and beliefs, about scripture, salvation and the savior, that we are passing on to other people in order to bless them are actually fake good news. And when eternal destiny is at stake, the consequences of that fake good news would be rather catastrophic – certainly not a blessing, and I

for one would feel more than terrible to have that sitting on my conscience.

So, this counterfeit money example helps emphasize how important it is for us to discern false teaching so we can ensure that we are passing on true teaching.

But this morning it also connects us to the purpose of Peter's letters which he states in vs. 1. He says *"this is now my second letter to you and I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking."*

So – if you haven't already got your bible out to follow along in the 3rd chapter of 2 Peter, please do that now, as we learn how to avoid false teachers and false teaching by way of recognizing the credentials of true teachers and true teaching through *"wholesome thinking"*.

Now one of the ways to identify counterfeit currency is to examine the money under good lighting. That will help you notice any tiny details or irregularities that would indicate it's

a fake – and conversely if it is genuine, you can be confident in stating that it's the real deal because you've examined it under circumstances that would expose any flaws.

And its this kind of rigorous, transparent, detailed examination that Peter wants to motivate and inspire us to pursue with this letter.

Now the NIV translates this activity as "*wholesome thinking*" – but that isn't a great English translation. It makes it sound like Peter's concern has more to do with keeping our minds out of the gutter by thinking about wholesome things, like puppy dogs, home-cooked meatloaf, or beautiful flowers, or doing charity to help the less fortunate.

But the Greek words that Peter wants to inspire us to pursue are "*Ilíkrenes dianoia*." And if I was to translate those literally it would read; a mind that is pure, as it is unfolded and examined under the sunlight.'

And the reason why Peter wants to motivate us to have a mind like this, or to inspire us to think or reason out our thoughts in this kind of way is because it is the opposite of how false teachers think.

Their minds are not pure – their thinking, their reasoning, their logic is twisted and it subtly leads to a hidden agenda, and we won't necessarily see it unless it is unfolded and examined out under the sunlight, which is of course the light of scripture. So our minds need to know how to do this – and the easiest way for that to occur is if this is how our minds function.

And so in vs. 2 Peter urges us to **recall**, which is a task of our minds and thinking, "*the words spoken by the Holy prophets (the OT) and the command given by our Lord and Saviour THROUGH your apostles (the NT)*"

We must realize that what Peter wants our minds to recall in this verse are the scriptures as we now have them in the Old and New Testaments, this is what must inform our thinking

and shape our mind if it is to be *“pure as unfolded and examined under the sunlight.”*

And developing our minds in this way is so important because its not a matter of IF but When we are going to encounter false teachers and false teaching.

That’s why Peter turns up the volume a bit at the start of vs. 3 with his *“above all!!!”* He really wants us to understand that false teachers within the church are inevitable. They will come scoffing and following their own evil desires. (*which we learned from ch 2 is the desire to be free from Jesus’ Lordship*)

Now we often expect scoffing and mocking and ridicule to come from outside the church – from atheists, agnostics, non-believers, false religions and so on... right?

But the scoffers that Peter is speaking about here, as he has been throughout this letter, are those – who appear to have started out as honest-to-goodness Christian teachers within

the church, but who are now scoffing and mocking and ridiculing their own faith and its teachings.

And Peter gives an example of how this happens in vs. 4 These scoffers are subtle, they don’t start off all up in your face with their ridicule. Instead they start by having “conversations” about difficult issues and they pose legitimate questions. Because there’s nothing wrong with asking questions is there? We’re just discussing the issue here aren’t we? Do you know what I mean?

And the difficult issue with the big question in Peter’s day was *“why hasn’t Jesus returned yet?”*

But can you hear the subtle mockery in the way they pose the question? *“Where is this “return” he promised us?”* This is not an honest question seeking answers, it’s a set-up for the false teacher to introduce heresy, their one side application of a truth to advance their agenda, to cause doubts in the hearts of their listeners and distrust in what our Lord has promised,

because they themselves no longer believe the teachings of the apostles on this issue to be true.

They consider them to be foolish, silly, quaint, out of touch with the times, unenlightened – so they mock, they scoff, they laugh at how foolish those who believe such things are.

“Jesus coming back in person to judge the living and the dead – oh please!” And out of this mocking mindset they offer their own reasoning and explanation – their heresy. So they answer: *“Things are continuing to go on as they always have – like they have from the beginning of... creation”*

Brothers and sisters its important to note how they include a theological term, a biblical term in a vague sort of way as they seek to undermine true apostolic teaching, it’s a way of twisting the truth while at the same time giving them a veneer of Christian credibility.

In this case they draw upon the OT term of creation because they can use it to oppose and contradict and undermine what the Apostles taught about Christ’s return bringing a judgment

that would mean destruction for anyone found outside of Christ.

So instead they preach Creation – not destruction. God created all this; He keeps it all going right? Why would God want to send destruction on what He’s made? Do you see how this works? Very similar to how false teachers will make reference to love these days right?

And if you aren’t familiar with scripture – if you can’t recall the words of the Holy Prophets and the command given by our Lord through our Apostle – well you’ll fall for this because it sounds kind of Christian. But its fake good news. It’s false teaching.

Ok – you see how this works from the counterfeit side, how they try to slip things past you in the murky light of undefined terms which they’ve stolen from the bible. But let’s see what happens when we examine their reasoning out in the open, under the clarifying light of specific scriptures!

Which not only has the benefit of exposing whatever is counterfeit – it will also provide us with biblical truth that answers the legitimate questions we have about the difficult issues in the Christian faith.

So Peter proceeds to examine and address the question of “*what happened to Jesus’ return*” in vs. 5-9. by recalling some specific words of the Holy Prophets, the Old Testament.

First Peter corrects the misuse of the term “creation” indicting the false teachers for “forgetting” what scripture actually teaches about the specifics of creation.

In particular he highlights how in Genesis the Spirit of God was hovering over the water, and how God separated the waters above and the waters below and set the dry land apart from the waters when he says “*the earth was formed out of water and by water.*” (vs. 5)

And He focuses on this water because it allows him to easily jump from creation to the flood where God brings judgment

upon the ancient world with something that is part of... creation.

So Peter shows that creation has the potential for destruction, that God’s judgment in the flood is directly connected to a reversal of his actions in creation. Thus the theme of creation can’t be used to deny the reality that God’s judgment will bring about destruction and thus Peter counters and corrects the twisting and distortion of creation by the false teachers.

And then Peter is able to use his reference to the flood – and its connection to God’s covenant promise to preserve the earth and sustain it - summer and winter, seedtime and harvest will always continue etc.. and assert that this dependable continuation of the seasons and life going on as it always has, does not mean that God will spare the world from judgment (*and we still have people using the covenant symbol of the rainbow to say that today*) but rather this continuation means that God is reserving the world and the ungodly for a judgment of fire.

But what about the delay in Christ's return?

Well Peter tells us in vs. 8 not to forget, like the false teachers do, what it says in Psalm 90:4 *"that with the Lord a day is like a thousand years"* In other words what is immanent to the Lord may be long coming for us, but this does not mean it has been cancelled. Its just a different sense of time.

And if we are noticing that the Lord seems to be slow in his return – it should give us pause to do something that we find in Psalm 90:12 where the Holy Prophet Moses writes *"teach us to.. number our days, so that we may gain a heart of wisdom!"*

And reaching back into the example of the flood once again, Peter draws on God's promise to preserve the earth and humanity in spite of the sinfulness of humanity (Gen 8:21-22) and His purpose for of doing so is to give his plan of salvation time and space in human history to come to fruition in Jesus Christ – and Peter applies that same dynamic to the delay in

the return of Christ and says this is God being patient and giving you time to repent so you do not perish.

But just in case we think that means we've got time to live as we like, ignoring Christ as our Lord and following our own evil desires, and then repenting just before Christ returns so that we're covered, Peter reminds us of what Jesus himself said in Matt 24:43 – *"the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night!"* It will be unannounced and unexpected.

In fact, if you were to go and read the whole chapter of Matt 24 – you'd find the verses just prior to Jesus' reference to a thief in the night are about how the judgement of the flood in the days of Noah was unexpected as well.

So that is why then in vs. 11 and 14 Peter exhorts us to use the knowledge and understanding that we receive from the scriptures which answer the question regarding Jesus' return, this *"wholesome thinking"* ought to lead us to *"wholesome living."*

I suspect that this connection between how we ought to think that leads to how we should live... is why the NIV chose to translate "*Ilíkrenes dianoia*" as wholesome living.

We can certainly see how living holy and godly lives, and making every effort to be found spotless and blameless and at peace with Christ is wholesome.

But, it is also a life that is pure, as when unfolded and examined under the sunlight.

Peter is encouraging us to live lives that are open and transparent and shaped by the light scripture – because that is the best way to prepare ourselves for the kind of judgement that is coming at the return of Christ.

The judgement that came upon the ancient world in the days of Noah was a de-creation. The waters that God separated to provide space for the creation of human life were unseparated, it was a judgement of reversing creation. So,

when God promises never to judge the earth with a flood again – it's a promise not to never de-create.

Instead what God will do is reserve the earth for a judgement of fire, as Peter notes in vs. 7, 12 but this is a judgement of re-creating, something new will come out of it – as God has promised in the past through the prophets, especially in Isaiah... there will be a new heaven and a new earth – purified from the sin and evil and the curse that this world is currently affected by, as Peter says it will be a creation where righteousness dwells.

Now – false teachers and false teaching aside for a moment – the prospect of facing a fiery judgement for any of us is truly terrifying.

And our natural inclination is to despair because if we are honest, we know that our lives are not holy and godly – enough... that we are not spotless and blameless and fully at peace with Christ – in spite of our efforts – so it is very difficult

for us to “*look forward to the day of God*” as Peter says we should in vs. 12.

But there is real good news for us in this chapter brothers and sisters. Just as we learned last week that “*the Lord knows how to rescue the godly*” (2 Peter 2:9) Peter blesses us with some more assurance in vs. 15. He says “*Bear in mind- another thinking activity... Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation*”

Because brothers and sisters our judgment has already started and will continue until it is completed at Christ’ return. Our lives and our minds are already being opened up and unfolded out in the light of the son and whatever the Lord finds that is false and counterfeit and fake He is working to renew and redeem.

The judgement by fire ought not to worry us brothers and sisters because we are in Christ and the fire will only burn away the impurities – and we are done with those anyways right?

We know that the Lord has poured out his Holy Spirit upon us and we have been given a new nature. That’s our baptism.

So what is revealed in the judgement will be our new nature, the new creation – refined by the fire not destroyed, as our Apostle Paul says “*if anyone is in Christ – they are a new creation!*” (2 Cor 5:17) And I think its appropriate to make reference to something Paul has written about this because that’s what Peter does as well.

And let us also recall the words of our Lord Jesus given to us by OUR apostle John in his gospel where Jesus says “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*” (John 15:5)

This brothers and sisters is what we must make every effort to do – remain IN Christ. Because then truly we will be blameless and spotless and we will be at peace, there will be no worry or fear about when our Lord returns – for we are already IN Him, we are in peace.

And in fact, there is a better rendering of the Greek in vs. 14 that would reflect this – It’s choppy in the English but more accurate to run the translation as *“be diligent, spotless and blameless, to be found by Him (at his return) in peace.”*

So when you mess up – go to Christ... when you are afraid of judgment – go to Christ... when you succeed in obedience – give thanks to Christ... when you receive blessing – praise Christ... when we must endure trials and suffering – turn to Christ... When you need provision – ask Christ... When you are planning your life – consult Christ. When you read scripture – obey Christ...

Christ is savior and Lord – be diligent to stay IN Christ, and the rest will take care of itself.

You see brothers and sisters, if we think that **we** have to make ourselves blameless and spotless and ensure that we are at peace with Christ – that’s a precarious position. You will either fall into despair because your efforts fail, or you will fall into self-righteousness because your efforts are succeeding.

But the good news is that Peter says in vs. 17 we are in a secure position. We are IN Christ.

False teachers and false teachings will try to lead us out of that secure position – and so if you’ve been listening to or reading or watching anything lately that is encouraging you to do anything but stay IN Christ... that we can’t really trust the answers that scripture gives us on the difficult issues of the faith, on the challenges of how to live faithfully in spite of our culture, about how God has one design for human sexuality...

well – brothers and sisters its good news that our Lord’s patience means salvation. There is time to return to Him.

Stop listening, reading, watching or “having conversations” with that material or those people who would try to slip you fake good news and get back into that secure position IN Christ.

Engage in “wholesome thinking” and **recall** the words of scripture – the OT and the NT, maybe that mean you have to

do a whole lot more reading – but you know what? You’ve got time – Christ hasn’t returned yet.

So read the words of scripture and **do not forget** what they say, and when you are convicted by what you read brothers and sisters, when you are tempted to ignore what you read, or distort it or twist it – like Peter says people do with Paul’s writings –

Take those temptations, those desires and lay them out, unfold them before the Lord in the light of His mercy and grace, as many times as you need to do this.

Bearing in mind our Lord is patient with you... and He desires that you come to repentance.

So if we do these things brothers and sisters – making the most of the time we have until our Lord returns, we will – as Peter encourages us – *“grow in the grace and the knowledge of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ”*

This is genuine good news brothers and sisters, and we can be sure of it. We’ve examined in the good and true light of scripture and so we can confidently pass it on to others – to bless them.

So they too might find a secure position IN Christ... and be able to look forward to the day when He returns – and the fires of judgment will refine us, perfect us, recreate us and usher in the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness – not false teaching... but righteousness dwells.

And where all honor and glory will be given to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ both now and forevermore.

Come Lord Jesus!!! Come quickly and come soon and bring your judgment. Amen.