March 3/4, 2018

Exposing the Madness

Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

2 Peter 2:10b-16

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It's become trendy today for some people to have a life coach, which raises a few questions for me. If I was to choose someone to be my life coach, what would I look for? I think probably before I was too interested in what someone would have to say, I would like to first confirm that this person is actually living the life that I long for. If my life coach is dysfunctional and has no real skill in living, to then choose to follow this person, according to Peter, would be sheer madness. That's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Peter, Chapter 2. Peter's been reminding us of the importance of considering your source of truth. Of course Peter has advocated that our truth comes from the authoritative, reliable, inspired Word of God. There is this sobering reminder, if that's not our source of truth, then it's pretty much just someone's opinion. He has a concern, now, with the false teachers and their ability to influence the people in the churches that he's writing to. Two weeks ago we kind of wrapped it up in chapter 2 verse 10 with the description that they **indulge the flesh** and they **despise authority**. I suggested that's a very good description of many in our culture today.

We had, I think, a really good example of that over the last week. Most of you know Friday was the funeral service for Billy Graham. Billy Graham was not a perfect man, but really quite a remarkable life—a life lived in obedience to his call to preach the gospel. I think for the most part the coverage in the media has been favorable, but as often happens, it also brought out the hate-mongers—people who just utterly hated Billy Graham and his message. You say, "Well, what did they hate about him?" Well it's simple. They *indulge the flesh and despise authority.* In other words, they are people that want to live as they please and they are offended, they are angered that someone would have the audacity to suggest it's possible that some behavior is sinful and offensive before a holy God. Those are the false teachers of our culture. Peter goes on to describe them with attitudes and characteristics in chapter 2. It's a bit of a grocery list, which always makes it difficult to preach, but we'll just kind of manage our way through one at a time. They are:

> **Daring, self-willed**...(Daring means *bold* but I think maybe better *defiant*; they're just defiant. “I'm going to live the way I want to live, and nobody's going to tell me otherwise.” The idea of self-willed is that same idea. It's *arrogance*; it's a determination to live their life the way they choose to live.) ...**they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord**. (*NASB, 2 Peter 2:10b-11)

That’s a little bit of a confusing verse. There's some discussion as to the specifics of it. What exactly were the false teachers doing or saying? But the basic idea is it's a reference to demonic spirits, and these false teachers revile them. It could mean anything from laughing at them, mocking them, to dabbling in these spiritual powers. So these false teachers mock, laugh at, dabble in powers they know nothing of. What Peter tells us is: even the angels, meaning the good angels, who are far more mighty and powerful than us, would never do something so utterly dangerous and reckless. It's just a reminder: as God is marginalized, the powers of darkness have more freedom.

I would kind of picture it as the demonic powers in the world are like a sleeping tiger. Anyone with the slightest degree of common sense would stay away from the sleeping tiger—just leave him alone! But these false teachers are so clueless; they're so arrogant; they're so reckless that they've taken a stick and they're poking the man-eating tiger and Peter's warning is, "This tiger is going to wake up." There is such a thing as evil in the world. Even the good angels who are more powerful and mighty than us would never be so reckless as to do something like that.

Over the last couple of weeks, since the tragic shooting in the Florida school, there's been lots of discussion about gun control. That's fine; that's a good discussion. There's also lots of discussion about mental illness. That's fine; that's a needed discussion. But there's been almost no discussion about the real problem. We simply, as a culture, will not say it, so I am going to say it: Evil is real and it is powerful! We as a culture are minimalizing, marginalizing God, and as we do that, we are laughing at, we are mocking, and we are dabbling in the forces of evil. We are poking a sleeping tiger and Peter's warning is this tiger is going to wake up, and unless something changes, you have only seen the tip of the iceberg of the evil that is possible in our country! I would suggest to you, at the end of the day, the answer to this problem is not gun control; it is not mental health. The ultimate solution to this problem and what we need as a nation is revival. (Applause) And until we come back to an understanding of God and who He is, we are going to unleash this tiger and there is going to be evil beyond anything we've seen so far. That's what Peter is warning us about—the false teachers do not understand this! Verse 12:

> **But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,**

What Peter is saying is these false teachers are acting like animals that operate out of instinct. Animals do not operate according to a moral code. They don't think and reason. They operate according to instinct, and the world of an animal is: "Kill or be killed". It is the survival of the jungle. We've been enjoying in our house the *Planet Earth,* a *Blue Planet* series on BBC—absolutely fabulous! Nature is beautiful; it's wondrous; it's mysterious; but it is also excessively violent. One of the things that is abundantly clear every time we watch one of those episodes is you could reduce nature down to: "Kill or be killed". Life for animals is about survival—one more day—"Kill or be killed." That's kind of the flow of the instinct of an animal as they exist. What Peter is saying is that we as people, made in the image of God, can do better. We can think; we can reason; we can conform our behavior to an agreed upon moral code that allows us to experience a level of life together in community that is distinct from the law of the jungle that defines nature. But when the false teachers are operating purely on the base of instinct, it will create a "Kill or be killed" culture. It is the path of destruction. There, ultimately, are no winners in that system.

We live in a culture that I would suggest to you has actually made a virtue of selfishness and self-absorption. Now it's disguised; it's kind of communicated in clever language, but at the end of the day, what we as a culture believe most is that you need to be true to yourself. You need to not compromise; you need to be who you authentically are, which are words that, in our culture mean, "If it feels good, do it!" "If that's who you are, go for it!" In the words of Peter, it's *indulging the flesh* and to deny the flesh is compromise. If this selfish, self-absorption, "Do as you please," "If it feels good, do it," concept is a virtue, then what is the great sin of our day? The great sin of our day is to deny the flesh what it wants, and to actually conform your behavior to some sort of external, moral standard of behavior is the great compromise. But stop and think about this: If everyone in the culture is considering this indulge the flesh, selfish, self-absorption, "If it feels good, do it,"

virtue, what kind of a culture does that create? It creates the law of the jungle—"Kill or be killed!" Everyone's trying to use everyone else for their own personal gain. In such a culture, everyone ultimately loses! That is the teaching of the false teacher—to operate that way! He says, verse 13:

> **...suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong**. (In other words, the payoff for that belief system is suffering the consequences...is devastation.)
> **They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime**.

Basically they celebrate their sin in the daylight. By and large, sin brings shame; it brings guilt, and because of that people tend to sneak around and hide it in the darkness, both literally and figuratively. But the false teachers actually **revel**; it means they celebrate their sin in the daylight. Another way of saying it would be they're *shameless.* They advertise their destructive, sinful behavior. "Indulge the flesh! Be true to yourself!" The great sin is to deny your flesh what it wants. So they promote their message in the daylight.

> **They are stains and blemishes,** (Vs. 13b)

Basically think about you and your integrity as wearing a white outfit. So you have your white shirt and white pants on but you get too close to these false teachers and pretty soon you're being affected by the spatter of their evil! Now you have grease stains and oil stains that are really hard to come out. Imagine this morning: we're all white, top to bottom, but over the months we start to notice some people are coming back with more and more **stains**, more and more **blemishes**. What happens? These false teachers, by virtue of their teaching and behavior, begin to spatter you with **blemishes and stains** that chip away at your integrity a little at a time.

> **...reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you,** (Vs. 13c)

The **deceptions** could be translated their *hypocrisies*. They revel, again, they celebrate their ability to be so deceptive in order to lead people astray. The idea of the **carousing** most scholars think is a reference to what were called the *love feasts* in the churches of the first century. A first century love feast was a first century section party—basically a potluck. It was an opportunity to gather together and to enjoy some time together. So these false teachers are coming to the love feast and they're pretending to be part of the family, but their intent is to deceive and lead people astray. They actually celebrate their own hypocrisy.

Now I'm going to suggest to you today that we, as a culture, are okay with hypocrisy. I don't know how else to explain it. The level of hypocrisy in our country—in our politicians, in our leaders, in our preachers, in our athletes, in the media—is through the roof! And for the most part, there is no uproar. So I can only conclude: apparently we're fine with it. Now I know what some of you are thinking. Some of you who are Republicans are thinking, "I know exactly what you're saying. It's those Democrats." *(laughter)* And those of you are that are Democrats are thinking, "I know exactly what you're saying. It's those Republicans." Well, let me give you a newsflash: It's everywhere...it's everywhere! It's in the media, in churches, in our politicians, in our leaders, in our athletes—it is everywhere! But here's something to think about. If you are deeply offended by the hypocrisy of someone on the other side, but are willing to just kind of turn the other way with the hypocrisy among the people that are pushing an agenda you agree with, that in itself is hypocrisy! We as the people of God need to be the people of truth. Either hypocrisy is right or it's wrong, wherever it's found. These false teachers thrive on their ability to deceive with their hypocrisy. That's part of what makes them so dangerous. It says in verse 14:

...having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin,

Literally the Greek here is *eyes full of adulterous women.* It's the idea that if the virtue is to indulge the flesh, then everyone is an object to be used for my own pleasure. Therefore, they're constantly looking at the women as objects to be used for their own personal pleasure. Stop and think about it. What kind of a culture do we create when we've made selfish, self-indulgent behavior a virtue? All of the people on the receiving end of that are going to get wounded; they're going to get used, get hurt, and destroyed! What kind of a culture is that?

Over the last six months there's been a lot of attention on sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, sexual harassment; it's been a big point of discussion. But one of the things that is very frustrating is now all of a sudden you have people in these industries—in Hollywood, in the media, in networks—all these industries are suddenly outraged, but the truth of the matter is this has been going on for decades, and they all knew it was going on! And it was okay with them until it was suddenly exposed, and now they are outraged! Come on! Some of us have been outraged for decades and we have said so. But now suddenly that it's exposed, now we're outraged? This raises a couple of interesting questions to me. First of all, if relativism is true—if there is no absolute moral standard—what is the basis of the outrage? If we're going to live consistent with relativism, we would have to say, "If the perp thinks that's okay, then it's okay!" Who are we as a culture to say it's not okay? Yet what we're seeing across the land are people that are utterly outraged at this behavior. So what is that? I would suggest to you it's a reflection of what is true—that as people made in the image of God, deep in our souls we do know there is such a thing as right and wrong, and we know that is wrong, and it comes out in moments like that—where people say it is wrong, and rightfully so! It is.

But here's another thought about this. What is actually happening that's creating this outrage? I would suggest to you that we all have to live in the culture we've created, and now we're living in it and we don't like it! So suddenly it's like, "We don't like this; we don't want this; we want a different world! Whether you're talking about the violence, about the racial tension, about this sexual abuse, we've created a culture we have to live in, and now that we're living in it, we're saying, "Wait a minute, we don't like it!" There *is* a better way, but the better way has to be travelling the path of light as defined by God's Word, not by the false teachers.

...having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, (Vs. 14b)

That word **enticing** is a word that was used to describe *baiting a hook*, like when you're fishing or baiting a trap. It's basically the idea that they are intentionally deceiving and trapping **unstable souls**. So who are the *unstable souls*? The *unstable souls* are those who thought following the false teachers as a life coach would make them happy, would bring them pleasure and safety and security and peace. But instead, it's deeply unfulfilling. It's heart-breaking, devastating, hurtful—and what happens is then the search becomes more desperate. "This isn't working! What else can I try?" And the more we're disappointed, the more it fails. The more it's unraveling, the more desperate we become and we get to the point where we'll listen to anybody; we'll believe anything; we're willing to try anything. That's the *unstable soul*. So they're putting the bait on the hook or the trap and saying, "You know, how about trying this? How about trying that?" And people are very easy to deceive when they get desperate and cannot find what they're looking for.

...having a heart trained in greed, (Vs. 14c)

That word **trained** is the Greek word from which we get the English word *gymnasium*. They go to the **greed** gym and they work out. They're not just greedy; they're *trained in their greed*. They've figured out how to perfect their greed. I mentioned two weeks ago, greed in the Bible is not just money. It's money, it's position, it's power, it's control. Greed is the idea that if the virtue is my own self-indulgence, if the virtue is indulging the flesh, then everyone else is an object to be used or abused in order to satisfy my longings. What is the greed? The greed is the desire to use you, abuse you, control you, do whatever is necessary in order to advance my cause, in order to satisfy the longing within me. They have trained in it, become really good and effective at that. So he ends that by saying they are

> **...accursed children**; (14d)

We would use the language they are *children of the curse*. In other words, they are subject to the judgment of God which he talked about earlier in the chapter. The last description, verse 15:

> **...forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but he received a rebuke for his own transgression; *for* a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet**. (Vs. 15-16)

If you're not familiar with this story, it's in Numbers, chapters 22, 23, and 24: I'll give you the short version:

Balaam was a prophet. When he spoke blessing, the people were blessed. When he spoke cursing, the people were cursed. So the King of Moab fears that the Israelites are becoming too big and powerful, so he seeks to hire Balaam to curse Israel. So they negotiate and Balaam says, "You know, if you're willing to pay me enough, I'll do it." So they work out the deal. But God shows up and says to Balaam, "No, don't even think about it!" So Balaam says to Balak the King of the Moabites, "You know, God showed up and said, 'No, I can't do it.'" So the King of the Moabites comes back and says, "You know, let's add some gold; let's add some silver: what else do you need?" He upped the ante and Balaam says, "Alright, I'll do it." So Balaam gets on his donkey. He is headed to the place where he will stand and curse the nation of Israel, but suddenly the donkey stops and the text tells us that the donkey can see in the trail the Angel of the Lord, which most scholars believe that to be the pre-incarnate Christ, meaning Jesus in the Old Testament. So Jesus in the Old Testament is standing there stopping Balaam. The donkey sees Him but Balaam does not, so the donkey stops. This makes Balaam angry, so he's whacking the donkey. The donkey then lies down. He's like, "I am not moving!" *(laughter)* And then God speaks through the donkey. (Now this is kind of the Bryan version) but the donkey turns to Balaam and says, "Are you mad? Can you not see that the trail is blocked by the Angel of the Lord? I am not taking one more step in that direction." Peter is referring to that story and saying, "You know, even a dumb donkey, (You can mutter under your breath your terminology *(laughter*) can figure out that this is the wrong path." To willfully choose to go against God is sheer madness.

Every single one of us has dozens of voices coming at us every single day—voices through people around us, through the media, through the internet, through movies, through Hollywood, through the media—dozens and dozens of voices every day. And they're all seeking to tell you how to live. They all want to be your life coach. All of us need to think long and hard about: who are we going to allow to be our life coaches and to teach us how to live life? What is the source of those words? What is the source of that advice? To listen and follow someone such as the people described by

Peter would be absolute sheer madness! Why would anyone do that? We as the people of God are not left in the darkness. We have been given a roadmap—a light in the darkness—the authoritative, reliable, inspired Word of God that is there to direct us down the path of life—that we might experience the life that our souls long for!

Our Father, we are just thankful that we've not been left in the darkness. We have been given a roadmap. We've been given a light to follow. God, this is a confusing culture. The voices are persistent and they are loud and they are many. God, may we not be confused and distracted by those who will ultimately destroy us, but may we chose the words of life. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. What would you look for in a life coach? Why?

2. Who are the false teachers of our culture and how do they "teach" their students?

Bible Study

1. Read II Peter 2:10-16. Go through Peter's description of the false teachers and list out all the attitude and characteristics. How would each of these attitudes and characteristics manifest themselves in our culture today? Who are these people today?

2. Compare Jude 8-13. What does Jude add to the description of these false teachers?

3. The Balaam story is found in Numbers 22-24. Review the story. Why does Peter refer to Balaam's behavior as madness?

4. Why would it be sheer madness to invite one of these false teachers to be our life coach?

Application

1. Who would be the false teachers in our culture today most likely to influence your life?

2. How can you stand on truth and reject the lies of the false teacher? What are some very practical strategies?

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