

St Paul's Online

05/04/20

Josh: Hello everyone. Welcome to St Paul's Online. My name's Josh, I'm one of the student ministers here.

Zoe: And I'm Zoe and I'm married to Josh. We're so glad that you've joined us for church online this week. We want to say a particularly warm welcome to you if this is the first time you're joining us for church online. We hope that you've joined us on Zoom before and after this service - or that you will next week if it's not Sunday for you right now - so we can connect with you, welcome you into our family and share with you how God wants nothing more than for you to be a part of his family.

Josh: Now you might be feeling a whole bunch of things about church right now. You might be feeling really excited to meet together, to sit under God's word. Or you might just be hanging on by a thread, feeling like this is the last thing you want to do right now, but maybe you feel like you should, so you've logged in. I want to say that even though we're physically apart, isolated in our homes, that gathering as a church is one of the best things we can be doing right now. There's a whole bunch of reason for that, but let me give you three big reasons why it's so great that we're gathering at church.

See at church, we meet with God. We meet with his people. And we meet around his life-giving word. It's incredible. At church we meet God with his people, around his life-giving word. Let me read Psalm 95, there's a bit of a call to worship, and as I do that, keep an eye out for those three elements. Let me read Psalm 95:1-9

*"¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.*

*² Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.*

*³ For the LORD is the great God,
the great King above all gods.*

*⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.*

*⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.*

*⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;*

*⁷ for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.*

Today, if only you would hear his voice,

*⁸ "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness,*

*⁹ where your ancestors tested me;
they tried me, though they had seen what I did."*

Zoe: What a great picture: together, meeting with and praising God and hearing his voice. That's the core of what we're going to be doing together now. So as we begin, why don't you join me in prayer, that we would have God-focused hearts. Let's pray this together:

Merciful Lord, you alone can order our unruly wills and affections.

Teach us to love what you command, and to desire what you promise,

That, among the changes and chances of this world, our hearts may be surely fixed where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Josh: Amen. It's great that we can come before our God in prayer, isn't it? But of course, as soon as we think about meeting with the living God, drawing near to him... we instantly recognise that we're not worthy, are we? Our God is holy and we're not. He is perfectly righteous, and we are completely sinful to our core. So, it's right that as we meet together that we confess our sins to God. So, let's confess together with these words:

Merciful Father, we have strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the schemes and desires of our own hearts and have broken your holy laws. We have left undone what we ought to have done and we have done what we ought not to have done. Yet, good Lord, have mercy on us; restore those who are repentant, according to the promises declared to us through your Son Jesus Christ. Grant, merciful Father, for his sake, that from now on, we may live godly and obedient lives, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Friends, the great news of the gospel is that as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is god's love towards those who fear him. And that as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Zoe: Amen. Well let's all join and sing together now. And we really encourage you to sing out loud, even if you're in your lounge room and kitchen. And in anticipation of the new social-distancing laws that we are expecting to come in, our musicians have recorded the music in a different way this week. So we hope that you enjoy that, and let's praise our God who's won the victory for us in 'Be Though My Vision'.

Sam: G'day St Paul's. In these times of social-distancing, we've been wrestling with how to sing together. We want to keep lifting our voices and making a joyful noise to our God and our heavenly Father who loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. But we can't gather. It's actually getting harder and harder to get a band together in the same space. And so, what we have come up with is ways of recording ourselves in our own homes and then bringing that together to try and make a song - which is a little bit like what we're doing as a church at the moment. We're separate in our homes, but as we sing together about the great truths of Jesus, of what he's done for us, we join in one song, lifting our voices to the one God that we each love and worship. And so will you join with Melissa and Nick and Callum and Luke and Matt and all of St Paul's as we sing 'Be Thou my Vision'.

Song: 'Be Thou my Vision'

Josh: Well St Paul's, now we're going to do something that people throughout history have longed to do. We're going to hear the God of the universe speak to us in his word. It's such a privilege, isn't it. How about I pray and ask for God's help as we do that. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you desire to make yourself known and that you have made yourself known through your son and in your word. Help us now to listen well, to love what you have to say, and that we would be filled with hope and be transformed through your word and spirit. We ask this, that you might receive all glory. In Jesus name, amen.

Zoe: Amen. So now it's time to grab your Bible if you've got one, or you can click on the link in the description to be taken to the passage in Bible gateway. It might be a good idea to close the other tabs on your computer and to put your phone on *Do Not Disturb* so that you're not distracted during this time. I'll be reading from the NIV Translation, and you'll also find an outline for the sermon on the St Paul's Online link on our website. We will be reading from 2 Peter 2 and I'll give you a moment to find the passage. Please read along with me:

"¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶ if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— ⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. ¹⁰ This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; ¹¹ yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. ¹² But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish.

¹³ They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you. ¹⁴ With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! ¹⁵ They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. ¹⁶ But he was rebuked for his

wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

17 These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. 18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.” 20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 22 Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.””

Josh: Our acting senior minister, Dave Keun, is now going to preach for us from 2 Peter 2.

Sermon

Dave: G'day everyone, Dave here. Great to be with you, opening God's word. We're going to be in 2 Peter 2. If you want to grab an outline, you can find that on our website. Also, if you want to ask a question about anything that comes up, there's a number that you can text your questions to. We'd love to be able to interact with you and answer your questions as best as we can.

We're here in 2 Peter and, obviously, we know 2 Peter's written by Peter. I don't know whether you've ever read much or discovered much about who Peter is. Peter was one of the early disciples - followers of Jesus - and he's a passionate and fierce follower. He's great to look at in terms of the things that he did. He's the guy, when Jesus says to people 'Hey, I'm going to go and I'm going to die, I'm going to rise again in three days,' Peter's the guy who speaks up and says, 'No Jesus! You can't do that! That's not the sort of king we were expecting.' Peter is the sort of guy that puts his foot in his mouth, and Jesus often rebukes Peter. And here, Jesus says back to Peter 'You don't have in mind the things of God, but the things of man'. Peter's this guy who tries to walk on water but ends up fully-clothed in the lake. Peter's the guy, too, just before Jesus is about to die - the night before, as all the disciples are deserting and leaving Jesus behind - Peter's the guy that speaks up and says to Jesus 'Hey Jesus, I'm going to follow you till I die, I'm going to be the rock by your side throughout, no matter what happens to you,' and Jesus responds back to him and says 'Hey Peter, before this night is out - and it's already dark - you're going to deny me and disown me three times.' And then Jesus says in Luke 22:31-32, you can go and look it up, "*when you turn back, strengthen your brothers*". And as the story goes on Peter does exactly what Jesus said he was going to do. He's confronted by a slave-girl, denies knowing Jesus. And there's two other instances straight after that where Peter denies knowing Jesus. And the very last time it happens, Luke tells us that Jesus looked directly at Peter, and Peter went outside and wept. Peter's an interesting guy, isn't he? In those moments where he denies Jesus, it's so easy to sympathise with him and be with him there. Because, like Peter, it's easy to verbally say 'I want to follow you Jesus! No matter what, I want to be that rock,' but when the trial comes, it's harder to stand up and say 'I'm going to

follow you. Yep. I know Jesus, he's my king and my saviour.' You see, for that moment, when Peter denied Jesus, he was unstable, he lacked strength to stand up. But Jesus knew that he would turn back at one point, and his comment to Peter is there in Luke 22 where he says, "*strengthen your brothers*". And that's what the book of 2 Peter is all about – strengthening his brothers and sisters in the faith.

And last week we saw that when it came to God's promises and trusting in them, we needed to not doubt or forget. They're internal things that are threats to God's promises and trusting and strengthening our faith. And Peter turns this week and says there's external threats as well. And he says these external threats are going to be false teachers. And it says in 2 Peter 2:14 that they will *seduce* the unstable. Now that *seduce* word is interesting. It's a word that's used in the hunting and fishing world. Now I want to be upfront with you – I'm not a fisherman, I can't stand it, but if you do that's good. But what happens when you go fishing? You put some bait on the hook, you put the cast out and in it goes. There's innocent, pure fish just swimming around and they see what they think is food that's your bait and they go and bite it. But low and behold, when they bite it, it's not the food they thought it was, and they're snared in that hook. They reel it in, it ends up on my plate for dinner and it's great. But I don't know how you fisherman sleep at night, seducing the innocent fish like that! But all jokes aside, that's what's going on here. He says they will seduce the unstable. And so, what we need to do today, our goal around God's word, is to establish ourselves - to get stable, to get steady, to get sure - so that we're not seduced by the bait that's swimming by.

So, what we're going to do today is we're going to see the seductive teaching of the false teachers, then we're going to have a look and see what God says in response to that, and then what we need to do.

Let's firstly look at the seductive teaching of the false teachers. There's three things that 2 Peter 2 tells us about their methods and what they do. Have a look, 2 Peter 2:1:

"1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves."

The first thing we see that these false teachers preach and speak about is denying God. We see this in a couple of other places in 2 Peter 2. Jump over to verse 10, halfway through:

"Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; 11 yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. 12 But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand."

The first thing we see these false teachers doing is denying God, blaspheming his name, saying 'God doesn't exist... why are you bothering with this God?' And 2 Peter tells us that the false teachers are among the church. Friends, there are people out there amongst the wider church who deny some of the basic things about who God is - deny the trinitarian nature or deny the bodily resurrection. What drives these people? Well, they're driven by the crowd that is increasingly walking away from God. We know that in our society, that society as a whole has been walking away from God. And these false teachers and false preachers have a pulpit that follows the crowd. Follows the crowd as they try and get the acclamation of them, as

they try to please and appease them. But as they move their pulpit toward the crowd... they're moving away from God. And they're denying who God is. 2 Peter tells us they're from within the church. We know they exist outside the church as well - there's plenty of those who mock and accuse and say 'if you just want to follow that fairy tale, that magic fairy in the sky, that's up to you.' These false teachers, the first thing it tells us is they deny God.

The second piece of their attractive teaching is they encourage us in depraved conduct. Have a look at verse 2:

"2 Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute."

One of the scary things about this verse is that many will follow. We're not talking about a few people here who might be led astray. Peter says many people are going to be following these sorts of false teachers. And he says they will encourage you in depraved conduct. And the idea here is 'it doesn't really matter what you do, does it? As long as you're not hurting anybody.' Peter goes on to explain a little bit more and he does that in verse 13 of 2 Peter 2:

"Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you."

Friends, again we see that this is actually attractive teaching. They are telling you you can do whatever you want. There's no consequences for it. We're told here they do it in broad daylight. They're out there and they're proud of what they're doing. There's no sense of hiding it, they revel in it, they encourage you in your depraved conduct. 'There's no consequences, God's not there, he's certainly not coming back, therefore you can just do whatever you want.' And again, there's people among the wider church who are like this. People who reject the clear biblical ethic on sex and sexuality. We know they sit out there, outside the church, but they're also true within the church.

The third thing we see in this attractive, seductive teaching of the false teachers is they exploit and are experts in greed. Have a look at 2 Peter 2:3:

"3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories."

That is literally made-up stories. They are going to try and exploit you, try and take advantage of you, pull on your heart strings to say 'what you really want is money and wealth.' He goes on later in 2 Peter 2:14:

"14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!"

This idea of being experts in greed is about being trained in greed. They've gone to the gymnasium of greed, the biceps of business is what they're ultimately on about. Unfortunately, too many of us know, within the broader church sense, that there are ministries out there that seem to be driven by greed and money and wealth. And exploit you and the 'security' that money brings, to say 'that's what you need to pursue' or 'you need to give it to me and I will make the best use of it.' They are exploiting, they're experts, they've gone to that gymnasium of greed. And Peter says here that they are *an accursed brood* – that's strong language. He says these people are cursed by God. You see, what these three things teach us in denying God, in encouraging depraved conduct and exploiters and experts in greed – is they're playing on desires that we have. My life would be easier if God wasn't there, if he

were just a delusion. Life would be better if I could just do what I want. 'That's the path to freedom,' they say. But Peter speaks here, and he says 'That's not the path to freedom! It's the path to slavery! That's what you've been saved from!' It's like he says in verse 22: *"A dog returns to its vomit"* or *"A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud."* Peter says 'You don't need to go that way! These are false teachers.

What's God's take on all this. Well friends, don't be fooled that God want judge. We see that here in 2 Peter God will discern and destroy false teachers and their followers. God will judge. There's people out there who go 'God is just a God of love and therefore judging is not part of who he is.' But that's not true. To love someone and to not act... that's not loving. They're not opposite ends, they're part of who God is. And you and I believe this as Christians. We say in the [Apostles'] Creed that God will come again to judge the living and the dead. But it's more than what we say in the creed. The Bible is full of stories of God coming in, discerning a situation and bringing judgement. And Peter gives us three examples.

The first example he gives us is of autonomous angels. You see there in verse 4. He says:

"4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment"

Peter here is referring back to an incident in Genesis 6, where he talks about the sons of God – they did depraved things with women of the time. So if God hasn't spared angels but has brought judgment on them, that judgment's coming. He will discern and he will destroy.

The second example that he gives is of ancient world apostasy, that is walking away from God. And here he's reflecting on Noah. Verse 5:

"5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others"

Peter here is reflecting on the story of Noah. You remember the story of Noah? God looked at his world and saw the sinful nature of it and said, 'I'm going to destroy it and start again.' And you can imagine Noah in that space saying 'Yeah, I'm on God's side, building an arc in the middle of the desert.' And the mocking and the scorn and the laughter – 'Why are you building that silly arc in the middle of the desert, Noah? There's no need to do that.' But God had pronounced judgment and Noah had trusted him. And we're told here that, not only will God discern and destroy in this situation, but that God will protect Noah. Because Noah hasn't gone out with the tide. He has stood still and been stable and hasn't been seduced by the world around him. God will discern, God will destroy.

The third example we get is in, what I call the ashes of ease. The ashes that come with Sodom and Gomorrah. Have a look, verse 6:

"if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly"

He says 'Here's the pattern, here's the example, here's the model of what God will do in the future. Look back to what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah.' Sodom and Gomorrah were evil cities with depraved conduct that happened within them, of people who went 'Yeah let's do that, let's forget God, let's do whatever we want, let's be driven by our desires.' Peter says God will come and discern and destroy the

ungodly. Look at what's happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. But again, like he protected Noah, he says he will rescue through that judgment. He goes on in verse 7:

“and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)”

We are told that Lot is rescued. He is rescued from that depraved city and he's rescued from the judgment that God brings. Again and again we see with Noah and with Lot that these people stood against the tide. They stood against the depraved conduct around them. It shows us that God's not into the popular opinion of the day, otherwise it would have been reversed – who was saved and who was judged. The strong message here is: God will judge.

There's two conclusions that Peter brings us too. Have a look at verse 9:

“9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials”

Now all the way through we've heard about Noah as the preacher of righteousness, Lot as a man who stood against the depraved conduct, troubled in his righteousness soul. And here we're told he's going to rescue the godly. But here's the thing about Noah and Lot... they weren't perfect. You go and read the stories in Genesis about Noah and about Lot – there's some pretty bad stuff they do. They weren't perfect, yet what they did was: they were stable as the tide went out and as the fire came down. And God said he will rescue, and he will protect because they trusted God's word.

The second thing we see in the conclusion here is:

“and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.”

We are told here that God will judge. And he will bring them to judgment. Friends, this is something that you and I want. We want the wrongs and the evils of this world put right. And God says he is going to do it. But remember, as I said, even Noah and Lot weren't perfect, yet they trusted. They stood and were stable and weren't seduced by the world around them and therefore God rescued and protected. Friends, if this is what's coming for us, what do we need to do? What's our response?

The first response is that we need to listen to the warning. We need to heed what is said here very, very carefully. When Peter says there's false teachers out there that are going to seduce the unstable, we need to listen to that. We need to listen to the judgment that is coming. Peter's told us, God will judge. He will return. You can't just do what you want. You can't just be an exploiter and an expert in greed and be driven by those things and deny God and think you'll get away with it. We need to listen to that warning. The second thing we need to do is to take some action. The action we need to take is to be steady. To be sure. To be established. You see this all through the letter, it's why in 2 Peter 1:12: *you are firmly established in the truth*. He says the false teachers will seduce the unstable. He says it again in 3:16: *which ignorant and unstable people distort*. To be firm and established and secure, we need to be deep in God's word. Not just in God's word, but deep like a tree that's planted deep in the soil. So that when the trials and when the tribulations and when the false teachers come and they try to seduce us and take us away, we're not moved. But friends, there's one more thing we need to learn. Like Peter, I want to be that rock that says to Jesus 'I'm going to be with you till the end.' And I'm sure, for

those who follow Jesus that's what we want, and it's very easy to say. But friends, I know that I'm not the rock. I know there's times where I'm weak and I want to be seduced and I'm attracted to go a different way. Which is why the last thing we need to remember is that Christ, that Jesus is the only true and sure and steady person. And that even if I trip and stumble, Christ has still got me. Jesus has still got me. He's the one who is the rock and what I need is to have child-like trust in him. When the world all around me seems to be seduced and walking away, I can just say 'I trust Jesus.'

Friends, what have we seen?

We've seen that it's easy to be unstable. And we've seen that the false teachers seduce the unstable people. We've also seen that God will discern and destroy false teachers and their followers. And therefore, we need to be sure and steady. But we know that it's sure and steady in Jesus who's the rock.

Friends, God bless.

Song

Prayer

Josh: Got some family news things to let you know about. The first thing is our online Connect Card. If you go to our online church website and click on the Online Connect Card button, you'll be able to let us know that you were here. If you are a regular, we would love that you were here so that we can keep track of you and keep seeing how you're going. If you are a new person, we would love to get your information and if you'd like to find out more about church, more about Jesus we would love to hear from you and be in touch with you. It's also a place where you can let us know what we can be praying for you so write down your prayer points, any comments, we would love to hear from you.

Zoe: We'd also love to say a huge thank you to all of those who provided equipment for us that we were looking for and needed so that we can continue to run church online here at St Paul's. We got it all sorted within 24 hours so a huge thank you to everyone who provided us that equipment.

Josh: One thing that we really want to do here at St Paul's is we want to care for people really well. You would have received an email this week with a video to give you some of the information about our Care Ministry that we're going to be rolling out. We're going to keep giving you details on that as they come, but the first thing is, please watch the video from your inbox giving you details on that.

Zoe: We also want to encourage you in your spiritual lives while we're doing church online at the moment, so what we're going to be doing is starting to put up some 2 minute devotional videos on Facebook over the coming weeks. So if you'd like to search for us on Facebook: St Paul's Anglican. Like our page or subscribe to notifications and you'll be able to see those devotionals pop-up each day in your Facebook feed.

I hope you've been encouraged as we met God, with his people, around his life-giving word.

Josh: Let me pray for us as we finish.

Lord God, we rejoice in your greatness and power, your patience and love, your mercy and justice. Enable us by your spirit to honour you in our thoughts, words, and actions, and to serve you in every part of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Well go and make disciples. Jesus will be with you.