

“PORTRAITS OF FAILING.”

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Scripture Texts: II Peter 2.4-10

Introduction.

As adults we all know that there are certain painful things in life that are good for us. There are surgeries that are painful but necessary for our good. We have all tasted medicine that is awful, but we endure it because it is good for us.

These words like many others in Scripture are strong medicine and it doesn't taste very good. This is not a happy passage, not one fun to read or preach for that matter.

These are strong words, hard words, difficult things to say. We are not used to people speaking in hard ways. We live in a time that has experienced the feminization of discourse, a time that is afraid to offend, afraid to come off harsh or insensitive or intolerant.

But as I have said before, Peter, is a good pastor who cares about the sheep in his church so he writes to warn believers of the dangers of false teachers who deny Jesus both in their doctrine and in their actions, lifestyles that are filled with immorality and following after the passions of the flesh.

The first three verses of chapter 2 which we looked at two weeks ago give the main idea behind the rest of chapters 2 and 3. There are false teachers who have crept into the church, as there always have been and always will be. They are promoting two things, sensuality and defiling lusts of passion, and destructive heresies that deny the truth and despise authority, especially the authority of God's Word.

Peter ends that summary by saying, “their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

The reason he says that is because one of the most common traits of false teachers and those who have given themselves over to sin and evil is that they live as if there is no judgment, no time of accounting, no consequences to their way of life.

This is our world. It doesn't believe God judges sin or holds us accountable. There is no final, fearful punishment. God is only a loving God, not a God of wrath or judgment and He would never send anyone to hell.

This reminds me of the famous definition of liberalism:

"A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through a Christ without a cross." (H. Richard Niebuhr's description of Protestant liberalism).

But the godly can fall into a similar trap or begin to despair over God's lack of justice or care or concern. Psalm 73 is a very clear example of this error of thinking.

So Peter reminds them of how false such thinking is. To do that he gives three examples from the OT of how God did visit judgment and punishment on the wicked and two examples of how God saved the righteous, rescued the godly. Peter backs up his statement in verse 3 with proof.

These are portraits or snapshots from the OT picture album of those who failed to finish well and those who did.

Let's start with the three negative examples.

I have a saying that isn't very nice but actually applies well to this text.

Nobody is useless, they can always serve as a bad example.

Angels, 4.

"If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment."

In some ways, this may be the scariest portrait of all of them. It is staggering to consider that angels who lived in the presence of God and knew Him most intimately and worshipped Him, could fall into sin and fall from heaven to hell.

The angels are the most glorious and most powerful of all God's creation, yet all their power couldn't save them from God's judgment when they sinned against Him. He cast them out into hell.

The question is who are these angels and what did they do? On just a simple, quick reading of this text I have always assumed these were the pre-history angels who fell with Satan.

But almost no modern scholars or commentators hold that understanding for several reasons. They say Peter is referring to Genesis 6 when the Sons of God (angels) came to earth in human form to take the daughters of men as their wives and have children. Motivated by lust they crossed species lines.

First, the Bible says very little about what happened before creation.

Second, the reason scholars think Peter is referring to Genesis 6 is he is addressing sexual sin and all three of his examples relate to the sensual desires.

Third, this was a wide spread view Jews held. I Enoch 6-7 understood Gen 6 as angels with women. Peter and his readers would have known and held this position.

Fourth, Peter and Jude both are drawing from the same understanding, and Jude is very clear. Jude referenced I Enoch which gives this view in detail.

Jude 1:6-7 And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— 7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, *which likewise* indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Peter is working chronologically through Genesis and starts with this example of sexual sin, angels leaving their place and becoming men to fulfill their lust for women. Sons of God co-habiting with human daughters.

They have fallen into defiling passions and they have despised the authority of God.

So God has punished them by putting them in Tartarus, a place of bondage, before the final place of punishment. Their worse end is still coming.

The Flood and Noah, 5.

If the lesson of the angels is not enough, then how about one more down to earth. Look what God did to all the ungodly people on earth when they completely rebelled against God and abandoned themselves to wickedness and evil all the time.

Genesis 6:5-8 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Genesis 6:11-13 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

The people were living self-absorbed, pleasure seeking lives, lives filled with immorality, and violence and wickedness. They were living in apostacy, meaning they had completely abandoned any faith or sense of moral living. Their motto was eat, drink and be merry.

There has never been a judgment on the earth like the flood. God only did this once and won't do anything like it again until the end. If God punished the entire world, how will he not punish the ungodly.

Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot, 6-8.

If the case of the angels and of the flood doesn't get through, then there is one more. This one is especially appropriate and focused since the false teachers are promoting sensuality and indulging in defiling passions.

If they won't heed the warnings of the angels and the people in the days of Noah, won't they at least wake up when they hear what happened to a people who were doing the very thing the false teachers are doing and encouraging.

It is a straight forward story of God's clear and decisive and sudden judgment on a wickedly sensuous people (from Genesis 18:16 – 19:29).

Ezekiel 16:50 They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.

They were self-indulgent, without self-restraint, and as it that case with sin like this, it is never satisfied, it always wants more. Self-indulgence and self-gratification leads to immorality and sin, and this invites the judgment of God.

We are deceived if we think there will be no consequences to immoral behavior.

Two positive examples.

But there is a glimmer of hope and of God's grace. He who searches all hearts will not overlook one righteous soul.

God in His wrath burns the dross and preserves and protects and refines the elect. God watches the furnace, the heat, the process, what burns and what doesn't.

Peter wants to be clear that just as God has, is and will punish the ungodly, He is equally capable of rescuing the godly in the midst of judgment, whether is it 8 people out of a flood or 4 people out of a den of iniquity.

Noah and Lot are both called righteous. But we know that they were both sinners with serious flaws. They weren't rescued because they were righteous, or any inherent goodness in them. But their hearts were inclined toward God and not toward the wickedness around them. They trusted God for their salvation and obeyed what God told them to do.

There is a discernable difference between Noah and Lot and the situation out of which God rescued them. We are told specifically that Lot's soul was tormented by the lawless deed he saw and heard.

Peter wants the faithful to know that God knows how to rescue the godly even as He punishes the wicked. What God did back then he can do now and again.

Application, the godly and ungodly, 9-10a.

God is not silent, God is not absent, God is not winking at sin. God is not unjust. God is righteous and a God of justice and He cannot let sin go unpunished.

God is in fact judging sinners now as in the case of the angels held in gloomy captivity, and He will judge the unrighteous.

The Bible consistently speaks of a coming day of the Lord, a day of judgment when the righteous will receive their eternal reward and the unrighteous will receive their eternal condemnation.

II Thessalonians 1:6-10 God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Are we struck at all by what Peter says about Lot's soul?

“for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard.”

How many Christians today would use those words to describe their own soul in our culture? How many of us view the news, see what's going on in Hollywood, see that is on TV, hear about all the sexual immorality and violence and wickedness and react with distress and torment, anguish, godly sorrow and remorse?

Are our righteous souls in torment by the lawless, unrighteous deed? Do we hate it, are we saddened?

How do we think and talk and joke and go along with sexual immorality, homosexuality? Are our souls stirred up over sin, over unholy living, over offense against God? Are we at peace with sin in the world? Are we even shocked with sin?

How many of see and hear things on TV or in movies today that a decade ago we would not have tolerated? As the sex and violence and vulgarity and innuendo slow increase we get immune and just keep watching. Are we entertained by sin that once we would have turned off. Is sin and perversion now normal?

Have we lost any sense of the holy, righteous standards of our holy, righteous God? As we draw closer and closer to God we will have a stronger aversion and sensitivity to sin, we will love what God loves and hate what God hates.

If we care too little about God, we will care little about sin and evil and wickedness. If we care too little about the lost world we live in, we will care little about the sin around us.

Lot was distressed by the sin around him.

Our best defense against sin is to continue to be shocked by it, to be stunned, to hate it.

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien, [appearance]

As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;

Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,

We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

- Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man." 18th century British poet.

As our world abandons Christian morals and ethics, Biblical standards of conduct, how should we respond? Do we just throw our hands up? Do we just give in to the coming tide of immorality so we don't appear too intolerant?

We can love God and seek to live by His ways and seek to lead our family in paths of righteousness, but avoid the world, not engage the world and therefore not care about the world.

But we are called to engage, to care, to be salt and light, and that means we will find ourselves in a place to be distressed by the sin we encounter.

We can be courageous because God knows how to save and deliver and rescue.

God's gift of sexual intimacy is preserved and protected within the bounds of committed marriage between one man and one woman. This is good, everything else is evil and will face the wrath and judgment of God unless sincerely and earnestly repented of.

Everything is at stake, eternity is at stake, heaven and hell are at stake. Blessings and curses, life and death. Choose life.

II Peter 1:10-11 if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for recording these warnings in Scripture. We want to finish well but we are weak and foolish, easing taking Satan's bait and falling into the traps of temptation. Open our eyes to these warnings so that we don't do what they did, their sin is in us. Enable us to resist and flee. Rescue us, redeem us, protect us for the sake of your glory and our eternal good. In the name of Jesus, Amen.