

2 Peter 2:1-10 (ESV) ¹But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. ⁴For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell^f and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; ⁵if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked ⁸(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); ⁹then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, ¹⁰and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Once a month on Tuesday morning at 10:00 am the tornado siren is tested. The weather can be absolutely perfect, not a cloud a cloud in the sky, and there that siren goes off. I am not being critical of the test. If the time came and there was a real tornado, that siren can and will literally save lives. So, go ahead, test it so we can be sure it will work when we actually need it.

Our study of 2nd Peter will soon come to an end. This sermon will not come to an end soon, but our study of 2nd Peter certainly will. I have the sense that Peter is writing or speaking as fast as he can knowing that at any moment his life will be taken from him.

In chapter 1 of first Peter, we find Peter's writing of an actual ladder. The first step of the ladder begins here, and the last step is in heaven. Now in the 2nd chapter Peter speaks of another ladder. Only this ladder does not lead to heaven; this ladder descends to hell, the ultimate judgment of God. Peter gives to us the very steps into unbelief and I do not want anyone here to take one step on the ladder that leads to damnation. I will only spend one sermon on this entire chapter. The tornado siren can be heard loud and clear. Peter is warning

us of things to come. He was warning his readers of the judgment of God the false teachers will incur.

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NLT) ¹But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. ²Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. ³In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed. In Peter's time it is Tuesday morning at 10:00 am and he is sounding off the tornado alarm. We can hear the words over the speaker. "Warning, Warning, false teachers have arrived. Take cover and stay out of their wake." It is likely that Peter personally knew some of the false teachers of his time. But Peter is acting here as a prophet, foretelling us what is to come before Jesus comes again. The false teachers were around at the time of Peter and will be especially good at it right before Jesus comes again.

Please hear this tornado warning from Paul. **1 Timothy 4:1-2 (NLT)** ¹Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons. ²These people are hypocrites and liars, and their consciences are dead." It seems to me that we are living in an hour where lies are taken as truth, and truth is seen as a lie. That which is decent, right, and holy has been profaned, soiled by the ways of this world. Far too many leaders in this country are turning against the police; almost all police are a force for good. They serve and protect. They deserve our support. To defund the police or to blame the police for people's poor behavior is absurd. Yes, very few police have erred and done things that ought not to be done but to defund them is to ask only for more trouble. O Lord, please protect our policemen and women from the sick thinking of this country.

Friends, before I move further into this passage I want to make these comments. We are living in exceptionally difficult times. I was not alive during World War II, but I know that was a time of great testing for our nation as so many went off to war. Unchurched people went to church. Non-praying people began to pray. The future of the entire world was at stake.

Yes, we are facing so many difficult circumstances today. Watching the news can be hazardous to your health. We as Christians always have good news. Jesus is alive, Alleluia. Jesus is still on the throne. God is moving history toward God's end. Nothing happening today surprises God at all. He saw it all coming even before He created the world. God is not up in heaven having a panic attack and God does not wish us to be having panic attacks either. I do think God is allowing all of these atrocities today for His purposes. I do not know what they are, but I will make a few guesses.

1. We need God in our lives more than ever. Without God we have no foundation, no supernatural help given by the Holy Spirit. God is our rock. Yes, we need God in our lives more than ever because the circumstances are not going to get better for quite some time. With our eyes on God we can live above our circumstances and not become defeated by them.

2. We need to eat God's diet of His Word in order to stay spiritually healthy. Now is not the time to let our Bibles get all dusty. God has the very word you need to thrive in this time of tribulation. Personally, I do not do Bible reading any longer for my devotions. I listen to the Bible in dramatized form. I have an app on my phone. There is a different person for every voice. The Bible is coming to me in a new way, through my ears and not my eyes. I feel as if I am there witnessing what was being written. This has greatly improved my devotional life. Tough times demands a tough faith and faith comes from hearing, the hearing of the Word of Christ.

3. We are living in a time of great spiritual oppression. Some of you feel this deeper than others because you have the spiritual gift of discernment, the ability to detect right from wrong,

good from evil in an almost intuitive way. When people are lying, you can tell. When people are speaking truth, you can tell. The spiritual oppression Christians are sensing all over the United States is impacting people's sleeping patterns. It feels as if you have heavy weights on your shoulders that you cannot see but you feel. Spiritual oppression is when the demonic realm does everything it can to discourage you from believing in Jesus Christ, to discourage you from living for Jesus, to discourage you from worshipping with God's people, and to discourage you from loving one another. The enemy wants to divide us and make us turn against each other. To wear masks or not to wear masks. Look how the enemy is using that issue.

4. God can use this time to help our Christian friendships become deeper than ever. In these last several weeks I have received phone calls from all over the country, Christian friends I have had since junior high. God is using the hardships of our time to bring us closer together in Christian love. There is a community leader who does not attend this church but that I pray with regularly. He is as non-emotional as I am emotional. I visited him last week and the first thing he said to me was this, "I need you more than ever." What he meant by that was prayer support and friendship.

5. What I am learning these days may surprise you. One of the greatest gifts we can give each other is to listen to one another. God is telling me to speak less and listen more. We all have a need to get thoughts, feelings, and emotions off of our chests that we have never thought before, felt before, or emoted before. It is okay to admit that we truly need each other. A parishioner stopped by this week and I looked at him straight in the eyes and said, "Your life is exceedingly important to me. I have a great love for you and your family." Men, it is okay to say we love each other. That takes guts to say. With all the hate out there, Christian love is the antidote, the vaccine that can keep us spiritually healthy.

Peter is warning us in this chapter about false teachers and the judgement they are under. He is letting us know that as God judged the world at the time of Noah, as God judged

Sodom and Gomorrah, as God has a special prison for fallen angels, the judgment of God for false teachers is sure to come.

False teachers are full of blasphemy, taking that which is holy in God's word and turning it into lies, myths, legends or worse. They make their living destroying the Scriptures and the weak faith of their listeners. They teach in seminaries and other institutions of learning. I have sat under false teachers. Their teaching sounds so profound, like they know more than the rest of us, but it is all hot air, waterless springs. Peter says, "For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved" (2 Peter 2:17).

Peter gives to us this word of hope in this chapter filled with serious warnings.

2 Peter 2:9 (NLT) "So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment." God spared Noah and his family from judgement. God spared Lot and his daughters from judgement. God knows who His righteous are and He knows who the wicked are.

Friends, there has never been a more important time than now to walk closely with God, to walk humbly with God, to love the Lord our God with our entire heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love one another as Jesus loves us. We do this with Gods divine power that lives inside of us, namely the Holy Spirit. Amen and Amen.