

Sermon Brief

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Text: 2 Peter 2:10-16

Title: “The Way of Balaam”

Subject: False teachers are corrupt and worthy of judgment.

Complement: False teachers are arrogant toward authority, insatiably sensuous, and greedy.

Textual Idea: False teachers are worthy of judgment because they are arrogant toward authority, insatiably sensuous, and greedy.

Sermon Idea: False teachers are crooked in their mouths and eyes.

Interrogative: Which way will you choose?

Key Points:

1. Mouth: False teachers despise and arrogantly slander authority. (vv.10-12)
2. Eyes: False teachers openly and insatiably pursue sensuality and greed. (vv.13-16)

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that God’s judgment on these false teachers is right because of their debased way of life and arrogant slander of others.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) strengthen their theology, (2) confess any unhealthy addictions, (3) evaluate your values in light of the ways of the world and the kingdom.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need for avoiding walking the way of false teaching.

“The Way of Balaam”

2 Peter 2:10-16

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I was reading a review of a book that is popular right now. It is a book that advocates for the Church to meet Millennials, those born between 1980-2000, where they are or else, we're going to lose them. Where are they? According to the author of this book, they're on an **(LCD) open road hitchhiking** along with other seekers trying to find happiness. And if we want to pick them up, we have to offer an open dialogue on truth, not a set of established truths to believe. An open dialogue on truth means we're truth-seekers along with them, having our doctrines held out with an open hand, not religious 'know-it-all's' with closed fists. They don't go for left-brain, rational thinking that lands on absolutes. They want right-brain, imaginative feelings that lets people discover truth on their own.

All that kind of sounds good...but consider one's reviewer's critique of this approach, **(LCD) “An open mind is a good thing, as is an open mouth, but as Chesterton pointed out, the point of both is to close on something solid. The purpose of seeking truth is to find it. The point of the pilgrimage is that we are actually going somewhere. And contrary to Seel's vision of the Christian out on the open road just hitchhiking alongside other seekers, each on an individual quest for happiness, Jesus's parables lay out two paths—and they diverge. Yes, we're pilgrims on the road, but the road either leads to everlasting happiness or eternal destruction.”**

What this reviewer is referring to is Jesus' famous challenge in the Sermon on the Mount, **(LCD) “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”** Not all roads lead to eternal life. It matters which road, which set of beliefs, you follow. In the ancient world, the word for “way,” referred to a set of beliefs that you ascribed to and that dictated how you lived. We all subscribe to some system of belief whether it is well-articulated or not. And which set of beliefs, which way you choose. matters...a lot! All roads DO NOT lead to the same end. So let me ask you, **(LCD) which way are you following?** Jesus says there is a right way and a wrong way. Which will you choose? What beliefs are guiding your life decisions and where are they leading? Turn with me to 2 Peter 2, verses 10-16.

We're in a sermon series on **(LCD) 2 Peter** in which we're considering the apostle Peter's great warning against being influenced by false teachers. Last week, we looked at verses 4-9 which used **(LCD) three Old Testament stories** to illustrate that these false teachers will eventually be judged. In our verses this morning, we're told why they're worthy of this terrible judgment. 2 Peter 2:10, *“This (eternal judgment) 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, reveling 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.”

Peter starts off by saying that the false teachers err in two areas: they follow the corrupt desire of the flesh, literally, “the lust of pollution,” most likely sexual immorality, and they despise authority, literally, “despise lordship or dominion,” most likely referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, instead of exalting and submitting to Jesus, they exalt and submit to their own inner feelings and desires; or as one commentator put it, they are corrupt in their mouths and their eyes, in what they say and what they see.

First, he describes the corruption of their mouths in their despising of 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.*” They are “bold and arrogant,” meaning headstrong, convinced their right, they’re not afraid, the word in the Greek here is “tremo” from which we get “tremble;” they don’t tremble when they heap abuse, revile, demean, celestial beings. No reverence for that which they should reverence. What should they reverence? My translation of the Bible reads, **(LCD) “celestial beings.”** **Other translations read, “angelic majesties,” “glorious ones,” etc...**

What is Peter referring to? We don’t know for sure. The Greek is simply one word, “doxai,” meaning “glories.” Among scholars, there are three, common suggestions: some say it refers to humans in positions of high authority, especially church leaders like Peter and the other apostles. Others think it refers to good angelic beings and others to evil angelic beings. The majority believe it refers to evil angels in light of what we find in a parallel passage in the book of Jude, **(LCD) “But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, “The Lord rebuke you!””** This passage relates a story found in a Jewish book called the Assumption of Moses which contains Jewish tradition. The important thing to take away is that a good celestial being, Michael, did not slander a bad celestial being, the devil, but let the Lord do that.

What Peter and Jude are both pointing out, in my opinion, is that good angels, even though they’re stronger and more powerful than the false teachers, don’t even dream about bringing judgment on evil celestial beings before the Lord. Yet the false teachers are doing precisely that, verse 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.*” He’s pointing out how arrogant they are. They’re judging about heavenly things that they have no business judging. In doing this,

they're no better than animals, just acting in their own instincts than in true spiritual wisdom. They'll be judged and receive what they deserve for all the harm they've done.

Now we don't know the exact things they were saying about these celestial beings, but regardless, they weren't showing any kind of respect for these evil angels. But wait a minute. Respect for evil angels? Really? Why? Don't they deserve judgment? On what basis should they be respected? Remember I told you that in verse 10, the "celestial beings" are most likely evil angels and that the Greek is the word "glories." These evil angels are called "glorious ones." Why? My opinion is that they can be called "glorious" simply because, even in their depravity, they still bear the impress of their glorious maker – Almighty God.

Take a look at these **(LCD) kid's drawings**. Cute for sure, but honestly, not ready to be displayed at the Atheneum! Strictly speaking, they're terrible...although my wife will tell you I couldn't do much better! But talk to me: if this were your child's drawing and they showed it to you, what would you say? "Oh honey! That's beautiful! So good! Great job!" Now, come on...you're lying out of your teeth!! Why?! Because you're commenting not on the aesthetic of the drawing but on the preciousness of the one who drew it. In other words, **(LCD) value is in the artist, not the art**. Celestial beings, both good and evil, are made by God and deserve proper respect. The same is true for humans. We are all, good and bad, made in the image of God and that makes everyone of us glorious. To be sure, that image has been marred by sin, but it hasn't been completely erased. Humans, though fallen, still have, as Solomon put it, "eternity in their hearts."

This has huge implications for how we deal with people and even supernatural beings. In the book of Acts, there is a weird episode of these guys called the Sons of Sceva who try to exorcise demons but apart from God's power. They are trampled!! They had no respect for, didn't take seriously, spiritual beings. The same with people made in God's image. Everyone is worthy of respect simply because they're made in God's image. We're told to bless those who curse us. When we join in the cursing, even if it's for the right cause, we're no better than these false teachers, acting like brute beasts, reacting in our flesh. Listen, the people who oppose are teaching about Jesus aren't our enemies, the ENEMY is our enemy! Non-believers are his captives and they need to be rescued, not judged!

So Peter says that they're mouths are full of arrogant slander. Next, Peter talks about what they're eyes are full of; middle of verse 13, "*Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you.*" The word for "pleasure" here is **(LCD) "hedone"** which means "state or condition of experiencing pleasure, delight, enjoyment, pleasantness." By the time the New Testament was written, this word was exclusively associated with "sensual joy, sexual pleasure." It is the word from which we derive "hedonism," "the pursuit and love of pleasure." In the Bible, this word is used in relation to **(LCD) three images: conflict, slavery and thorns**. The unbridled pursuit of pleasure creates conflict because our desires don't always match; it creates slavery because the pursuit of pleasure becomes an addiction we can't control; and it's thorny because it leads us away from God.

This describes the false teachers. They “*caroused,*” a word meaning wild partying, *overindulging in food and wine, “in broad daylight.”* Even Greeks and Romans thought it was immoral to overindulge during the day when one should be working. Yet these ones do this in the name of Jesus! He says that they act this way “*while they feast with you.*” In Jude, it’s mentioned that they overindulge AT the church’s love feasts. This is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11. Deceptively, they weren’t at these feasts to honor the Lord, which was the point of them, but to gorge their mouths...and their eyes.

Verse 14, “*With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!*” Not only are their mouths full of slander but their eyes are full of adultery! Every woman they see is an object of sex for them, and they never stop sinning, they’re never satiated. This is a description of sex addiction, and it is rampant in both the culture and the church. Many men have eyes full of adultery...even married Christian men, and for that matter, women too! As a result, porn usage is a huge problem in the church; but mentioned less frequently is the most common way Christians tend to deal with it...which is also not good.

A mostly, though not totally, helpful book I read on this is called “The Great Sex Rescue.” It talks about common problems with how sex is handled in the church. For example, look at this point, (LCD) **“You can’t defeat porn by simply having a husband transfer his lust and objectification to a ‘safe’ source – his wife. You defeat porn by rejecting the kingdom of darkness view of sex, that it is only about taking and using someone to meet your needs and adopting a kingdom of heaven view of sex: that it’s about a mutual, passionate knowing and sacrificial serving. God never meant for women to be men’s sexual methadone.”** Amen. This is spot on correct, and we men need to repent of objectifying not only random women, but even our Christian sisters and our wives. Lord God, help us to see women as humans made in Your image, not as sexual objects. Amen.

Unfortunately, these false teachers somehow justified sexual addiction with their teaching and they seduced the unstable, those who weren’t well taught. I think about the young masseuses who were told by Ravi Zacharias, a revered Bible scholar, that they were serving God by indulging his sexual needs. He seduced the unstable, the naïve, those who are not well-taught biblically. Why would they question Ravi, a renowned Bible teacher! God have mercy! Not only that, but they are experts, literally, trained, in greed – money and sex – nothing new under the sun! They are an “accursed brood,” worthy of being cursed by God. Phew!

Peter then summarizes their corruption by comparing them to a familiar Old Testament character, verse 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.*” Balaam was a false prophet who was hired by a pagan king to curse Israel, God’s people. It’s a long story but the gist is that he accepts the bribe and, on his way, to go curse them, (LCD) **God sends an angel** with a sword to cut him down. His donkey, however, supernaturally sees the angel and tries to stop but

Balaam, who can't see the angel, beats the donkey three times. Finally, the donkey speaks to him, and, afterwards, the angel says this, **(LCD) "The angel of the Lord asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me."** This is the way of Balaam – a reckless, self-driven, money-loving, authority-despising way. Later, Balaam entices the Israelites to sin sexually with pagan women which brings judgment on Israel. The way of Balaam is one of unbridled sensuality and despising of authorities...just like in verse 10.

Notice verse 15 speaks of a "straight way." As I said earlier, in the ancient world, the word for "way," referred to a set of beliefs that you ascribed to and that dictated how you lived. The early Christians were called followers of "the Way," the straight way. The prophets enjoined the people to choose the straight way, like Jeremiah, **(LCD) "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'" The straight way is the ancient way, the faith as it has been passed down through the centuries. The deposit of truth as Paul calls it. But so many, like these false teachers, "wander off to follow the way of Balaam."** The word for **(LCD) "wander off" means "to be misled (deceived); to be or become misled from a proper belief or course of action."** So many are being misled...like that open road hitchhiking I talked about at the beginning. Sounds so good, isn't it good to have an open mind, open hand with my interpretations? Yes...on secondary matters, no, on essential ones. So let me ask you again, **(LCD) which way are you following?** Jesus says there is a right way and a wrong way. All roads do not lead to the same end. Which will you choose?

Back in the '90s, I met a pastor in Hartford. I noticed that in his lobby, he advocated all kinds of religions. When I asked him about it, he said that all roads lead to God. He compared it to multiple blind people touching an elephant. They'd all describe it differently depending on which part they touched, but in the end, even with different descriptions, they're all still talking about the same being. I understood his point, but I then asked him if he ever preached on John 14 where Jesus said, **(LCD) "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."** He said that he loved John 14 and had preached it many times... but he would always skip this verse because it could be misunderstood! I remember feeling a sense of horror. "O God, may I NEVER be so arrogant as to edit Your Word!" This man was a nice man, but he was not a faithful teacher of God's Word. He was misleading people down the wrong path.

So **(LCD) which way are you going to follow?** Matthew quotes Isaiah the prophet in his gospel, **(LCD) "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!'"** Will you follow the ancient path? The path that says Jesus is the only way home to the Father. Or will you go the path of human feelings and desires? Which will it be?

Let me close by showing you some statements of comparison that came to me one night as I lay in bed. They describe the two ways, two different worldviews. Which of these describes your attitude best?

**(LCD) The measure of success in the world is fulfillment.
The measure of success in the kingdom is faithfulness.**

**(LCD) The preferred state in the world is happiness in present circumstances.
The preferred state in the kingdom is joy in eternal security.**

**(LCD) The highest goal in the world is finding one's "authentic self."
The highest goal in the kingdom is losing oneself in order to gain Christ.**

Choose the way of Jesus, the way of the kingdom, and you'll be eternally grateful.