

Sermon Brief

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October 23, 2022

Text: 2 Peter 2:17-22

Title: “Empty Wells”

Subject: False teachers offer more than they deliver, which is nothing.

Complement: False teachers are depraved and enslaved to sin - proving the error of their way.

Textual Idea: False teachers offer more than they deliver, which is nothing, which is proved by their depravity and enslavement to sin.

Sermon Idea: Avoid teaching that offers heaven but delivers hell.

Interrogative: What empty well are you drawing from?

Key Points:

1. The false teachers offer much and deliver nothing. (vv.17-19)
2. People who turn away from following Jesus embrace their former corruption. (vv.20--22)

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that the false teachers offer more than they deliver, which, is nothing, and that their debased way of life is enslaving and ultimately leads to eternal destruction.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) know and hold on to the essentials of the faith, (2) identify and avoid “cheap grace,” (3) confess any known sin or blockages in their heart.

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

“Empty Wells”

2 Peter 2:17-22

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Anyone like **(LCD) kayaking**? I do! Two and ½ years ago, we bought into a Kickstarter project for a new kind of kayak. Developed by the guy who created the kayak as we know it, he was now trying to develop one that would be (1) easy to transport, (2) simple to use, and (3) could double as a paddleboard. And he supposedly did. Sounded great! Now since it was a Kickstarter project, we paid upfront for two paddlers...and then the notices started coming: “delays,” “supply chain problems,” “backups,” etc... Our delivery date kept getting pushed back and back until finally, two years later, we received the first one...and it came with a broken hinge! We had to wait a few more weeks for a new hinge and then we had to repair it ourselves! On top of that, we don’t even like it! We feel that it’s a lousy kayak, isn’t easy to transport, and at least for me, is not easy to use! And just when it can’t get worse, a few weeks later, we got another email: the company folded...we lost our money, and we never even got the second paddler! When it comes to this kayak, it offered us heaven but gave us earth. When it comes to the false teachers in 2 Peter, they offered people heaven but gave them hell. The lesson: **(LCD) Things don’t always deliver what they say they will!** Be careful what you buy into!

We’re in a sermon series on **(LCD) 2 Peter** in which we’re considering the apostle Peter’s warning against false teachers. Last week, Peter began a tirade against them. Today, we’ll look at the second part of his denunciation. Again, this is brutal, but when life is on the line, especially eternal life, drastic measures are sometimes necessary. 2 Peter 2:17, *“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 Savior 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.”*

Peter picks up his polemic against the false teachers in his day by comparing them to two images: “springs without water” and “mists driven by a storm.” These were impactful metaphors in the dry desert world of the Near East. Finding water in a well, or receiving rain, was a matter of life and death to these people. So you can imagine the disappointment of **(LCD) seeing a body of water** in the desert only to find that it’s a mirage, an empty well, or, as the second image displays, only a cloudy mist instead of a soaking rain. Kind of like my kayaks, these images promise what they can’t deliver – promising great things but delivering nothing. Actually, for the false teachers, it leads to “blackest darkness” for them who deceive weary travelers...a metaphor of hell. They promise heaven but deliver hell...literally.

Remember that this entire letter is a prophetic word against the false teachers but also a warning to believers – watch out for the mirage of false teaching! Avoid empty wells that promise life but deliver death! And that leads me to our question this morning, **(LCD) What empty well are you drawing from?** What do I mean by an empty well? The first thing that comes to my mind is a prophecy by Jeremiah the prophet to a disobedient Israel, **(LCD) “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”** According to the prophet, the Lord and the Lord alone is the “spring of living water.” But instead we go digging up our own cisterns, broken ones that can’t hold the water of our joy, our peace, our life. Talk to me: what are some of these **(LCD) broken cisterns, empty wells?**

Yes, all these are good examples of things that we seek to find our life’s joy and purpose in. But at the end of the day, none of them, even good things like family and work, none were created to bear the weight of our joy. Only God can bear the weight of our joy. Finding our life in anything else, good or bad, results in disillusionment and disappointment. Only God can truly deliver what He promises: eternal life and joy. Make Him your “living well.” I’ll be giving everyone an opportunity at the end of the morning to come up here to the altar in order to confess your empty wells. Let the Holy Spirit examine you as we go through this passage this morning.

Verse 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.”* The Greek behind “empty, boastful words” literally means, “swollen words.” In other words, they use academic and philosophical brilliance to dazzle their audience. This is nothing new. In the early church, there was a bishop named Irenaeus who spent much of his ministry confronting dazzling false teaching. At one point, he wrote a five volume classic called, “Against Heresies.” Listen to what he says about them, **(LCD) “Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced more true than the truth itself.”**

Nothing new under the sun, is there? There are some awfully good bloggers out there who can make death sound like life! That was true of these false teachers. What was particularly appealing to their message? It *“appealed to the lustful desires of the flesh.”* Same’s true today. Give me a teaching that justifies my feelings, my “natural” desires, and I’m there! Most likely, these teachers were warping the gospel of grace like Paul’s teaching was twisted, **(LCD) “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”** Paul is saying that if we’re truly saved, that means we’re given a new nature – the Spirit of God comes into our hearts and gives us a new heart and a new mind that wants to please God. Continuing to live a life of unrepentant sin, indulging in sinful passions, after coming to Christ is incompatible with this new nature.

Yet this is precisely what false teachers offer, verse 19, *“They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.”* They offer freedom but deliver bondage. How do we know? Look at their own lives – full of depravity that they can’t stop...slaves to what masters them. False teachers say, “Be free! Express yourself! Be all that you’re meant to be. Self-actualize! Find your authentic self regardless of the cost to your family and friends.” That’s not what the gospel says, **(LCD) “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”** The gospel doesn’t free us to serve ourselves; it frees us to serve God and others. We freed FROM ourselves, not TO ourselves!

(LCD) Here's a summary comparison:

	False Freedom	True Freedom
Definition	Unbridled self-expression	Spirit-led self-control
Motto	“If it feels right, do it!”	“If it is right, do it!”
Focus	Self	Others
Reflects	Human sinful nature	God’s perfect image
Speech	Amoral; unapologetically crude	Eph. 4 – seek to build others up
Modesty	Repressive of self-expression	1 Tim. 2 – put focus on God
Identity	Found within self	Found within Jesus

True freedom sees self-control as freeing, not restrictive. It enables us to express ourselves in a God-honoring way that serves other. I’m not free to do that when enslaved to my sinful nature. Unbridled self-expression serves and glorifies me. It’s no surprise that our culture encourages false freedom, but false teachers then and now do too. For example, I’ve shared about **(LCD) Rosaria Butterfield**, before. She has an incredible testimony in this book about being truly freed by Christ from a false identity grounded in self. Listen to this (it’s a little long so stay with me,) *“If this were 1999—the year that I was converted to Christ and walked away from the woman and lesbian community I loved—instead of 2016, Jen Hatmaker's words about the holiness of LGBT relationships would have flooded into my world like a balm of Gilead ... [I would have thought], Yes, I can have Jesus and my girlfriend. Yes, I can flourish both in my tenured academic discipline (queer theory) and in my church ... Maybe I wouldn't need to lose everything to have Jesus...*

Today, I hear Jen's words ... and a thin trickle of sweat creeps down my back. If I were still in the thick of the battle over the indwelling sin of lesbian desire, Jen's words would have put a millstone around my neck. To be clear, I was not converted out of homosexuality. I was converted out of unbelief. I didn't swap out a lifestyle. I died to a life I loved. Conversion to Christ made me face the question squarely: did my lesbianism reflect who I am (which is what I believed in 1999), or did my lesbianism distort who I am through the fall of Adam? I learned through conversion that when something feels right and good and real and necessary—but stands against God's Word—this reveals the particular way Adam's sin marks my life. Our sin natures deceive us. Sin's deception isn't just "out there"; it's also deep in the caverns of our hearts.”

True freedom isn't found, as Progressive Christians like Jen Hatmaker say, inside of us, by conforming to our inner urges. No, true freedom is found by conforming to something outside of us, God and His Word. So let me ask you again, **(LCD) what empty well are you drawing from?** Where are you looking for freedom? Inside yourself like the culture and Progressive Christianity say? Or to the Living Well of Jesus?

Verse 20, *"If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior 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."* There is a TON of controversy about these verses. The question is twofold: first, who are they referring to, and, secondly, is this teaching that someone can know Jesus, be saved, and then lose their salvation?

Let's start with the first question. There are **(LCD) two possibilities** of who these verses are talking about. First, it could be the new ones who are being deceived: these verses would then be a warning to them of the serious consequences of following this path. Secondly, it could also refer to the false teachers: these verses would be a final denunciation of them. Now the vast majority of commentators think it is referring to the false teachers since this entire chapter is focused on them. However, unlike usual, I disagree. My opinion is that it is talking about the ones mentioned in verse 18, the false teachers were enticing *"people who are just escaping from those who live in error."* The verb tense is present tense here. They are "in process of escaping" from error. In other words, I think he may be talking about seekers, people actively considering following Jesus, not actual believers. For instance, notice that verse 20 says, "if they have escaped..." This is the same word used to describe the seekers in verse 18, "escaping." I'll come back to why that's important in a minute.

The really concerning thing in this passage is that it seems to be talking about actual believers. They "know" our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is the word, **(LCD) "epignosis,"** which in the Bible and here in 2 Peter numerous times in chapter 1, always refers to a deep, intimate, personal relationship with Jesus. This is not just head knowledge. This is personal knowing. Verse 20 seems to say that if someone comes to Jesus, knows Him, and then gets entangled in and overcome by sin, they're in worst shape afterwards than beforehand.

If that were true, then, verse 21, it would have been better to have not known, "epignosis" again, the "way of righteousness," true faith in Christ, then to have known it and rejected the "sacred command" or "holy commandment" passed on to them. This is referring to the gospel of Christ. The truth about Jesus being the one and only Savior of the world. If someone were to go back to paganism and idolatry, living for lust after having received Christ, verse 22, they're like disgusting dogs who return to their vomit, presumably to sniff and/or eat it, and like unclean pigs that dive back in the mud after being washed clean. This is not good!

So can we lose our salvation? There are different opinions on this based on different theologies. Some think you can lose your salvation and so they read these verses this way. Honestly, that is the plainest way to read it. Some think you can't lose your salvation, like me and Rich, and, well, we're a little uncomfortable here...unless. Unless this is talking about "seekers," and not actual believers. Remember I said that verse 18 says that these ones were, "just escaping," Present tense - in the midst of moving into faith in Christ. They're not there yet. They're considering what Peter is saying and what the false teachers are saying and leaning toward Peter's argument but they're still in play. If that is the case, then verses 20-22 is merely saying that if they end up choosing the pure gospel and then go back to paganism, IF they do that, not THAT they have, then they're just showing their true nature – like dogs and pigs, they go back to what they truly are. In other words, they are never converted and given a new nature. They reflect their old nature that still dominates them as one commentator says, **(LCD) "...portrays the person who has a religious 'profession' or outward change without a regenerating inner change that affects his nature. Such a person soon reverts to his true nature."**

Now you need to know that this is MY idea! My best opinion. No commentators even suggested this interpretation so I'm a bit on thin ice here. But honestly, no commentator, on either side of the "losing your salvation" debate gave a good interpretation of these verses. The most literal interpretation would be that you can lose your salvation but that flies in the face of the overall message of the Bible and the gospel: that we're saved by God from beginning to end. For instance, as Peter himself said in his first letter, **(LCD) "This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."** Salvation is by God from beginning to end. You are secure in Christ! In light of that, the only thing that makes sense to me is that these are seekers, not actual believers, who have not received a new nature from Christ yet.

And that begs the question: have you? Let me ask you again this morning: **(LCD) what empty well are you drawing from?** There are so many empty wells. Where are you looking for life, joy, purpose? I received permission to show a clip from **(LCD) The Chosen**. I encourage you to download the App for it. It is a successful Kickstarter, as opposed to my kayaks! In this clip, Jesus comes to a well and essentially asks the same question to a weary woman. Watch it and think about, what empty well am I drawing from? **(VIDEO)**

(LCD) Come to the living well! Are you done looking for life within yourself or in the world or in whatever other thing that offers what it can't deliver? Jesus is the real deal. He offers eternal life NOW to all who trust in Him. Come to Him! And for those of you who have trusted in Him, let me ask you, are you experiencing His living water in you? If not, perhaps you've allowed the living well of Jesus to get stopped up by **(LCD) boulders** like bitterness, unforgiveness, unconfessed sin, worldliness, idolatry, lust, anger, pride, etc... The altar is open to you to. Come to the Living Well if you never have. If you have, confess any boulders blocking it up. Don't wait. Come and live!