Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Sooner or later, every school student asks their teacher, Why do I need to know this? Whether it is algebra or economics or history, all of us have probably asked or wondered, Why do I need to know this? or How will this ever help me in real life? And answers that basically add up to ‘Stop asking silly questions and do what I tell you…’ are not very satisfying or motivating. What is motivating is seeing how what is studied has a real-world application. And if the topic being studied effects the student in a *personal* way, then the student has even greater reason to learn and understand what is being taught.

Well, that is the situation before us with chapter 2. At the heart of chapter 1 is a reminder about the glory of Christ that was revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration. And wrapped around that account is a reminder about the “*precious and very great promises*” to believers that are ours in Christ. And we are told that our faith must continue to grow, and that we must follow the teaching of the Apostles about Jesus that we have in Scriptures. And just in case any of us are now wondering ‘Why do I need to know this?’ we get chapter 2. For in chapter 2, Peter explains *why* a godly life and maintaining the truth of Jesus’ Second Coming is so important. And the why is false teachers and their devastating impact. And Peter will explain the condemnation that will come upon false teachers, he will provide several examples of ungodliness from Old Testament times, he will pile up descriptions of the evil activity of false teachers, he will call them all sorts of disparaging names, and he will warn his readers about the terrible harm that false teachers cause.

Now, this is usually the place in the sermon where I spell out the relevance of this passage for us today. But we will see that already in the first point of the sermon, which is where we consider the **inevitable reality** of false teachers. And the relevance of this passage for today continues with the second point, which is the **terrible corollary** of false teachers. And then we will finish with some words of encouragement, as we finish the **unavoidable penalty** for false teachers.

1. So, let’s dive straight into our first point, which is the **Inevitable Reality** of False Teachers. And we see this laid out in verse 1: “*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you*.”
	1. And Peter’s basic point here is that just as there were false prophets in every era Old Testament times, so there will be false teachers in every era of God’s New Testament people.
		1. And there were many false prophets in Old Testament times.
			1. You can read about them in Samuel and Kings and Chronicles.
			2. It is why such a strong rebuke was delivered in our earlier reading from **Ezekiel 13**. Ezekiel described false prophets as those “*who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!*” They just made up what they prophesied, which is why Ezekiel accused them of uttering falsehoods and lies. And they were motivated by greed and a lust for power. You see, back then, people would pay prophets to prophesy. And kings also wanted prophets who would tell them what the kings liked to hear and be rewarded.
			3. And there are similar rebukes in other Old Testament books.
			4. And Moses warned the people of Israel that there would be false prophets. Way back in **Deuteronomy 18**, Moses prophesied of a Great prophet who would come in the future, by which he meant the Lord Jesus. But he also said that there would be many false prophets, and he explained how false prophets could be recognized.
		2. Well, not long before Peter wrote these words, Jesus, the Great prophet whom Moses had spoken about, had come. And we spoke about Jesus as our chief prophet and teacher last Sunday afternoon. It is He who perfectly reveals to us who God is, and God’s will concerning our salvation and how we should live. And we have this in the Bible. But in Matthew 24, Jesus spoke about the time between His first and second Coming. He said, “*Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray*.” And that warning of Jesus is what Peter has in mind with the rest of verse 1, when he says that “*there will be false teachers among you*.”
			1. Now, notice that that phrase, together with the rest of verses 1-3, is in the **future** **tense**. “Will.” And Peter did this because even though false teachers were already active in his time, as we have already heard, there will be false teachers in *every* era of the church before Christ returns. So, Peter’s words were intended as much for you and me as they were for his original readers.
			2. But notice also that Peter used the term “*false teachers*” here. And this is likely because he knew that the time of prophets and prophecy was almost over.
				1. Brothers and sisters, can you imagine not having the New Testament? Well, for a short time, the New Testament church existed without the New Testament. And so, prophets were needed to declare the word of the Lord to His people. They told them what Old Testament things had been fulfilled in Christ. They told them how Christ and the Holy Spirit fitted in to the idea of one God. They told them what was right and wrong for Christians in relationships and ethics, etc.

It is why in **1 Corinthians 14** Paul said that the gift of prophecy was far more to be desired than the gift of tongues, because those who could declare the Word of the Lord built up the whole church.

And in **Ephesians 4**, Paul listed those whom the Lord Jesus gifted to the church. He said, “*He gave apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers*.” And those first two, apostles and prophets, were for that time, the time when the New Testament church did not have the New Testament. But since then, because we have the complete Bible, what He gives the church are “*pastors and teachers*.” And this is why we are given qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but not qualifications for a prophet. It is because that office was soon to pass away.

* + - * 1. And this means that the moment you hear someone claiming to be a prophet today, run away! For that *office* has ceased. It is true, as we heard last Sunday afternoon, that **every believer is a small p prophet**. When we open our Bibles and teach biblical truth to one another, or when we tell unbelievers the good news of salvation in Jesus, we are functioning as small p prophets. But the office of capital P Prophet ceased once the New Testament was complete.
1. But the major point here is that we should expect false teachers. And we will return to the implications of this reality soon, but it will help us, in the second place, to consider the **Terrible Corollary** of False Teachers. And corollary means results or consequences or effects. For example, we could say that the rising price of petrol is a corollary of the War in Ukraine. And the terrible corollary of the activity of false teachers is explained in verse 2: “*And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed*.”
	1. Now, we will get to what Peter means, shortly, but again, *that* this happens should not surprise us. We referred to the words of Jesus from Matthew 24 earlier: “*Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray*.” So, just as we can expect there to be false prophets, so we can expect many to fall for what they say.
	2. And also, before we see what Peter means, he speaks about the false teachers in verse 1 as “*denying the Master who bought them*.” And that raises a question that we really ought to consider. You see, the doctrine of Limited Atonement teaches that Christ died only for His elect. And the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints teaches that Christ will preserve all His elect ones in faith. But it sounds like Peter is saying that these false teachers had been bought by Christ but were now denying him. So, could it be, in light of this verse, that Limited Atonement and the Perseverance of the Saints are *not* correct?
		1. Well, one very important rule of Bible interpretation that I have shared with you before is: **Let the plain interpret the less plain**.
			1. In **John 6:39**, Jesus said, “*And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day*.” In **John 10:28**, He said, “*I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*.” And **Romans 8:39** says that nothing “*will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*.” So, these plain passages make it clear that a child of God *cannot* fall out of salvation.
			2. So, what is Peter saying? He is saying that these false prophets did not know Jesus as Saviour *and Lord*. You see, to know Jesus, truly, is to know Him as Saviour *and Lord*. He said, “*If you love me, you will obey my commandments*.” So, although the false prophets claimed to be bought by the blood of Jesus, their refusal to obey His commandments and the false doctrines that they taught revealed that they were not true believers. And in this way, they denied the Master who bought them. So, this phrase is not a proof text against Limited Atonement or Perseverance of the Saints.
	3. So, now we are ready to think about the how and why of this terrible corollary.
		1. Andasto **how** false teachers work, verse 1 tells us that they “*will secretly bring in destructive heresies*” and at the beginning of verse 3, that *“in their greed they will exploit you with false words.”*
			1. The word **heresy** means wrong doctrine. And the wrong doctrine in view in 2 Peter, as we have already noted, was the denial of the return of Jesus. The false teachers were teaching that the Apostles had invented the return of Jesus; that it was a cleverly devised myth designed to influence how Christian lived. But according to the false teachers, Jesus was not going to return; there was not going to be a final judgment. So, as those who were saved by grace alone, how you lived did not matter; you were free to live how you pleased. And the example they set was one of sexual immorality and gluttony and idleness and in-submission. Peter describes it as “*their sensuality*” in verse 2, and later in verse 18 he refers to “*the sensual passions of the flesh*.”
			2. And notice the word “***secretly***.” These false prophets were cunning weasels! Jude talks about them “*creeping in unnoticed*.” Paul says, in **Galatians 2:4**, “*Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in- who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus*.” And in **2 Corinthians 11:13**, he said of them, “*For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ*.” So, they arrived and gave the impression of being really devoted. They even claimed to be apostles. And soon they were volunteering to lead the Bible studies and worship services, perhaps having been voted in as elders, even. And then they began criticizing the apostles and what they taught, and teaching instead their own, false doctrines.
		2. And **why** did many follow them? It is because what they taught appealed to the base and sinful desires that exist in all of us.
			1. I mean, why strive for sexual purity and moderation and being hard-working and submissive to authorities when the teachers of the church did not do it and they taught that God was not bothered by it, one way or the other? And if your conscience was troubling you about the things you were doing, well, you could slip them a couple a hundred bucks and they would give you a personal, tailor-made prophecy to make you feel better! And in this way, many followed “*their sensuality*.”
			2. And sadly, church history is littered with many accounts of similar occurrences.
	4. But the terrible corollary of false teachers is not just that many follow their sensuality, but also, as Peter continues, that “*because of them* ***the way of truth will be blasphemed***.”
		1. Back in **1 Peter 2:12**, Peter said, “*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that … they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation*.” And you might remember from when we looked at 1 Peter that the Christians of that time were committing arson and assassinations, and convincing slaves and wives to leave their masters and husbands. And this bad behaviour gave Christianity a bad reputation.
		2. And this is what happens when false teachers convince Christians that how they live does not matter. The type of lawlessness that follows reflects very badly on the gospel.
		3. And we see it today with TV evangelists living in mansions, and driving a fleet of supercars, and divorcing their wives to marry their secretary. And when unbelievers see this, they want nothing to do with Christianity.
	5. So, what does all this mean for us today? Well, we have already said that there will be false teachers in every era of the church. In **2 Timothy 4:3-4**, Paul said, “*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths*.” So, plainly and simply, we too must expect and be on the look out for false teachers.
		1. And to think that this could not happen to us/to me would be to make a big mistake. For if that were the case then these warnings in the Bible would be meaningless.
	6. So, how do we recognize and resist false teachers?
		1. Well, we do so by being like the **Bereans**. In Acts 17:10-11, Paul and Silas preached to the Bereans. And we are told that “*they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so*.” So, they didn’t just sit there and lap it up coz it was Paul and Silas; no, they had their Bibles out and they checked to see that what Paul and Silas taught matched up with what they read in their Bibles. And you must do the same with whomever preaches from this pulpit, and the sermons you listen to or watch at home. Does this accord with the teaching of the Bible?
		2. And in terms of that warning from Paul to Timothy about false teachers that I mentioned a moment ago, Paul said to Timothy, “*But as for you,* c*ontinue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*.” And he told Timothy, as a minister, to preach and preach and preach. He said, “*Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers*.”
			1. I am sure you have heard this before, but bank tellers are taught to recognize **counterfeit** or fake dollar bills, not by studying the fake stuff but by handling lots of real money. Because if you know what real money feels like, you instantly recognize the fake. And similarly, if you know sound doctrine, you will recognize false doctrine.
			2. And all this, congregation, is why we encourage attendance, if that is physically possible, at both Sunday services and at least one regular Bible study. The best way to receive sound doctrine is with our brothers and sisters.
			3. But this is also why, if you are listening to a sermon or you are at a Bible study, and the Bible stays closed, that’s not good. For it is when we walk out of church or a Bible study and have heard the Word of the Lord that we have something solid and trustworthy for faith and life.
			4. And this is also why, whether it be in sermons or Bible studies, while there is value in *occasionally* studying a certain topic, like hospitality or evangelism or parenting, our regular diet should be the study of the Bible.
			5. But having said, that, RCNZ churches are required to do what we call confessional preaching in one of our services each Sunday. And we do this from scripture, but this practice forces us, in the best sense of the word, to consider sound doctrine in a regular and systematic way.
		3. Now, I hasten to add that all of this requires **prayer**. Doing all this will only be beneficial if it is empowered by and accompanied by the inward work of the Holy Spirit. Back in chapter 1:8, Peter spoke about “*being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” So, we must never be satisfied with formal or empty doctrine; it must always be Christ-glorifying and Christ-exalting. It must lead us to a thankful obedience. And we must ask the Spirit of Christ to help us to recognize false teaching, for the sake of His honour and our good.
2. But thirdly and finally and briefly, and by way of encouragement, notice also the **Unavoidable Penalty** for False Teachers that is laid at the end of verse 1 and the beginning of verse 3: “… *bringing upon themselves swift destruction*,” and “*Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep*.”

* 1. We have heard that there will be false teachers “*who will lead many astray*.” And we have heard that in the last times people “*will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions*.” And we will have more to say about this in the coming weeks, but Christ will not allow His church to be destroyed by false teachers. Despite the serious warnings that you have heard and need to hear, do not for a moment think that all this is inevitable and cannot be resisted.
		1. And this is not because of you or me or the requirement that we have confessional preaching, etc. It is **because of Christ**. When Peter confessed faith in Jesus as the Christ, Jesus said of this confession, “*on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*.” So, Christ is greater than all the efforts of false teachers put together.
			1. The Book of Revelation reveals the strategies and tricks of the devil and those who follow him, which they use to try and destroy the church. But the main message of Revelation is? Jesus is going to win!
			2. And even at the end, before the return of Christ, when tribulation is at its most intense, Jesus promised in **Matthew 24:22**, “*For the sake of the elect those days will be cut short*.” And we also have His promise, which we heard earlier, that not even tribulation “*will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*.”
			3. Brothers and Sisters, Christ loves His church. He is watching over her. And while false teachers may be used of Him, for a short time, to purify the church, we have this promise that their destruction will be swift and then they will receive their condemnation.

So, we have been introduced to the WHY of Peter’s letter. We need this letter because there will be false teachers in every era of the church. But Christ is the head of the church and the Shepherd of His people. May He give us a love for sound doctrine, and may that love deepen and grow by His word and Spirit. Amen.