Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Mrs H and I are not experts about art, but sometimes when we are in the city or on holiday, we do like to visit art galleries. And maybe it’s because we are of the Gen X/Boomer generation, but we pretty much ignore the modern art sections of the gallery and head straight for the Old Masters sections. We like landscapes and portraits and still-lifes and historical scenes; what we call ‘classical art,’ art that captures the detail and colour and beauty of God’s amazing creation, as it is. What we don’t like are ‘paintings’ that have random splotches of colour or deliberately distorted images; what we call ‘chaos art.’ Now, I have no desire to offend those of you who have more appreciation for modern art than I do, but for the sake of the sermon, I want to use the categories of classical art and chaos art, with the implication that classical art is good and chaos art is not good.

And on that basis, chapter 1 of 2 Peter is classical art. At its centre if the magnificent portrait of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. And around that are images of God’s precious promises and the fruitful Christian life. It is life as it ought to be; life that is Christ exalting and God pleasing.

But chapter 2 is very different. It is as though we have walked into a completely different section of the gallery, because chapter 2 is chaos art; it is life as it is *not* supposed to be; life that is *anti*christ and *not* pleasing to God. The topic of the chapter is ‘False Prophets and Teachers.’ And the message of the first three verses is that there will be false teachers in every era of the church until Christ comes again, and that they will lead many astray. But with this next section of chapter 2, our tour of the chaos art section continues as Peter paints **three portraits of antichrist**. There is one of evil angels, one of the ancient world, and one of Sodom and Gomorrah. And these three portraits of antichrist are all dark and gloomy portraits of judgment and condemnation. But in these dark and gloomy portraits, there are also small, bright, colourful scenes of grace, as Peter describes the righteous few whom God rescued from the chaos of condemnation. And that is where we will find the gospel of salvation in Christ today.

And I just want to say here that I have borrowed this concept of contrasting art types from David Helm’s commentary on 2 Peter. I thought it was really helpful, so I decided to use and adapt it for this sermon.

And we are going to see that this passage speaks powerfully to the situation we find ourselves in today. We will see our world and a good chunk of the wider church described in Peter’s words. And to those who are elect of God, through faith in Christ, these words are meant as a much needed encouragement. But to those who are not truly converted, who are half-hearted about submitting to Christ, these words are a powerful warning about the reality of judgment.

1. So, let’s begin with the **three Portraits of the wicked condemned**, which we see in verses 4-6.
   1. And the first portrait is of the **evil angels**. It is described in verse 4, where we read, “*And 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*.”
      1. And there are two possibilities here:
         1. **Revelation 12:4** talks about the great red dragon *“[sweeping] down a third of the stars of heaven and cast[ing] them to earth*.” And many Bible scholars understand that to be a reference to the original rebellion of Satan and those angels that followed him, which took place sometime between creation week and the Fall. So, that is one possibility.
         2. The other possibility is a topic which is worthy of a sermon in its own right, but in 1 Peter **3:18-20**, there is a parallel passage to this one, where Peter speaks about “*spirits in prison*” and connects it with the time of Noah. And I believe that that is a reference to **a particular group of evil angels**. They are the ones who are described in Genesis 6 as the “*sons of God*” who had sexual relations with “*the daughters of man*.” So, these were evil angels who did not stay in the heavenly sphere but intruded in human life. And for this grossly immoral wickedness, they were “*committed to chains of gloomy darkness*.” **Jude 6-7** talks about “*the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, [these God] has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day*.” And I think it is that group of evil angels that are in view here. But many good Christians prefer the first possibility.
      2. The key point is that **God did not spare the evil angels** who rebelled against Him or intruded into human life as we described. They are already under judgment and an even worse judgment is to come.
      3. And congregation, this is **a most sobering warning**. Whether it was soon after their creation or a bit later in history, these angels had once been in the presence of God. So, let none of us fall into pride or arrogance, as though sin and false teaching could never get the better of us. Remember that quote from John Owen that I mentioned a few weeks ago: “Be killing sin or it will kill you.” And seek out and be devoted to the faithful preaching and teaching of God’s Word, so that you can easily recognize false teaching. For just as God’s judgment came to the evil angels, so it will come on false teachers and those who follow them.
   2. The second portrait is of **the ancient world**. It is described in verse 5, where we read, “*If 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*.”
      1. Just a few verses on from the **Genesis 6** reference to the angels and the daughters of man that I mentioned a moment ago, we read that “*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 … and the earth was filled with violence … for all flesh had corrupted their way on earth*.” And it was this widespread wickedness that led the Lord to judge the world by sending the global flood. He 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*.”
      2. Now, here is a little **math** for you. According to the US census bureau, and taking into account disease and famine and natural disaster, the world population doubles every 40 years or so. So, if we allow for a doubling of the world population every 150 years, which is a very conservative amount, could there be almost 8 billion people on earth now if we started with just two people around 6000 years ago? Well, if you start with 2, then in 150 years there would be 4, and after 300 years there would be 8. So, you can see that that is quite conservative. But it would only take 32 doublings, which is 4800 years, to get to 8.6 billion people. But we also have to reset the world population around 2500 BC because of the worldwide flood. For then, as our text states, the world population started again with only 8 people. But again, if we follow the same formula, with the population doubling every 150 years, today, around 4500 years after the flood, we would be at … how many, do you think? You guessed it – 8 billion people!
         1. And just in case you are wondering, if humanity was around for 50,000 years, which is far less than evolutionists claim, then we should be at a current world population of around 1 with 100 zeros behind it!
         2. But the reason for this math is that using conservative formulas, and remembering that the early generations of humans lived for up to 900 years old!, many studies have calculated that there could have been between 230 million and 1 billion people on the earth at the time of the flood. And God did not spare those millions or billion people, but judged them for their unbelief and wickedness. Those who thought they could ignore God and carry on eating and drinking and committing violence and immorality, without fear of punishment, all perished in a watery grave. That is the warning given here to false teachers and those who would follow them.

* 1. And we see something similar with the third portrait, which is of the cities of **Sodom and Gomorrah**. Verse 6 says, “*If 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*.”
     1. And we read about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis. Abraham’s nephew, Lot, was living there. And we read, “*Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD*.” And some time later, the Lord told Abraham that because of the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, He was going to destroy those cities. So, two angels went to Sodom and were going to sleep in the town square, but Lot told them that it was too dangerous, and he convinced them to sleep at his house. And we are told that the men of the city, young and old, surrounded Lot’s house and demanded that Lot bring the men out so that they could rape them. And the angels struck the men with blindness, so that they could not find their way into Lot’s house and then told Lot to gather his family and to leave because they were going to destroy those cities. And that is what happened; Lot and his wife and two daughters escaped, and the Lord rained down fire and sulphur, and the cities and inhabitants and crops in the field were all destroyed.
     2. Now, the particular sin identified in that account is the sin of homosexuality. But in **Ezekiel 16:49-50**, we read of Sodom and Gomorrah that they “*had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me*.” And that brings Peter’s warning of judgment really close to home, doesn’t it. For that is an exact description of the Western world today: Pride, excess of food, prosperous ease, does not aid the poor and needy, haughty, and full of homosexuality.
     3. Well, God sees this and **it will be judged**. And this might happen in the here and now. You know, if I had a dollar for every time I heard someone say, we must be living in the end times because things are so bad! I would be rich! But if you read church history, you will know that Christian have been saying this since soon after the Lord Jesus returned to heaven. And Peter’s point here is that God is not blind to wickedness. He has judged it in history past, and He will continue to judge it until Christ returns. Sin brings consequences. It is the plain message of Romans 1. But beyond this life is eternal hell. And wickedness will certainly be judged there. And if we wonder what hell will be like? We are told in verse 8 that it will be like the fire and sulphur that burned Sodom and Gomorrah, but it will never end; it is eternal fire. God will judge wickedness.
  2. So, having painted these three portraits of judgment, **verses 9-10a** say, “*the Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the Day of Judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority*.” In Peter’s day, there were false teachers who were teaching that Jesus was not going to come back and there was not going to be a Day of Judgment, and how you live does not matter. They called Peter and the other Apostles false apostles, and they lived sensual, immoral lives, and taught others to do the same. And they would have been saying, ‘Where in the world do people get the idea that God judges people?’ Well, with these three portraits, Peter has shown us that this is what Scripture *plainly* teaches: God does and will judge wickedness.
     1. So, this is a powerful warning to those who profess faith not to follow false teachers and fall away. He is saying, if you follow them, you will come under this same judgment.
     2. And having borrowed the two art rooms theme from David Helm’s commentary, now I borrow his comments on this verse. He said,

*What a powerful reminder for those of us who are trying to keep from falling. When we return to the appetites of this world, we are only demonstrating that we have no power over it. And when we begin to think that there are no consequences for our private behaviour, that God is love and only love, that nothing bad will ever happen to us, we are in danger not only of self-deception but of becoming the recipients of God's righteous wrath. Men, to you I speak most especially: when you live in unrestrained material ease and indulge every sexual freedom, you reduce your dignity to that of a moth drawn to the flame. And beneath the bright lights of the immoral city, God's fiery judgment will come once again.*

1. But it is not all doom and judgment. For as we noted earlier, in these portraits of judgment, there are some **small, bright, colourful scenes of grace**. And here we see that the Lord knows how to rescue the righteous.
   1. In verse 5, we read about Noah and the seven who accompanied him onto the ark. So, although millions or a billion were judged and drowned, there were 8 who were delivered or rescued or saved. And in verse 7, we read about Lot who was rescued from Sodom and Gomorrah. And Lot escaped with his wife and daughters. But do you boys and girls remember what happened to Lot’s wife? She looked back and was turned to a pillar of salt. So, it was really just three that were delivered or rescued or saved, then. And that’s not many people, is it. 235 million-1 billion dead in Noah’s day, and maybe tens or hundreds of thousands dead in Lot’s day, and only *11* were saved. But do you remember what Jesus said in **Matthew 7:13-14** about how many are truly saved? He said, “*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few*.”
      1. And so, it should not surprise us that today there seem to be so many more unbelievers than believers. And it should not surprise us that even among those who claim to be followers of Jesus, there seem to be so few who hold to the teachings of the Bible and try to live according to God’s commands.
      2. During the week, \_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_ visited an Anglican church in Auckland, as a possible wedding venue. And when they explained that both of them have fathers who are ministers, the minister of that church said that he has to do the formal wedding stuff, but we would be allowed to give the sermon. But we are not allowed to teach that wives must submit to their husbands, and we are not allowed in any way to condemn same-sex marriage. And he even blasphemed a couple of times while he was talking to them.
      3. And we had a recent visitor to church who had been a Christian for five years and who was attending a city church in Auckland. But through his own Bible study and reading, he has grown concerned with the liberal theology of his church. He said in the five years he had attended, not once had he heard a reading or a sermon from the Old Testament!
      4. Congregation, Peter did not write this letter because he had nothing better to do with his time. Jesus said that before He returns there will be many false teachers and *many* will be led astray. This is a much needed warning! There are false teachers and violent and immoral and unjust and cruel people all around us. But, just as He did with Noah and Lot and their families, God will preserve His people.
   2. But the glimpses of grace continue as we think about the righteousness of **Noah and Lot** for a moment. For Noah is described as a “*herald of righteousness*,” because he warned the people that the flood was coming and called on them to repent. And Lot is described as righteous, because, as verse 7 explains, he was “*greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (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).”* And I hope that you, also, hate wickedness and are troubled by evil. And I hope that you call on unbelievers to repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. But do you remember what Noah did after he came out of the ark? We are told that “*he drank of the wine and became drunk and lay naked in his tent*.” And this led his son into sin. And what did Lot say when the men of Sodom tried to get him to send out the men who were staying with him? Don’t do this wicked thing. Here, take my daughters instead! And then, when the men told him to flee because the city was going to be destroyed, we read that “Lot lingered.” He was not super keen to leave. And then He begged the men to let him live in a neighbouring city, when they told him to flee to the hills. And if we had continued on reading, we would have read that Lot fled that city and lived in a cave with his daughters, because he was too afraid to go near the cities again. And because his daughters feared that they might never get a husband living like this, they made Lot drink wine and they both slept with him while he was drunk, and they became pregnant. And this is *righteous* Noah and *righteous* Lot.
      1. So, if their rescue depended on their own righteousness, they would have died like everyone else. But the rescue of God’s elect depends not on themselves but on **the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to their account**. And that is the good news of the gospel! Jesus obeyed God perfectly. Jesus offered to God a perfect sacrifice for our sins. So, when we believe in Jesus, we receive His righteousness. And that means in terms of salvation, that God does not see the sin of Noah or the sin of Lot or the sin of you and me; He sees the righteousness of Jesus, His Son.
      2. And if it were up to you and me to make it to heaven under our own strength or efforts, we would be without hope. But what does **verse 9** say? “*He knows how to rescue the godly from trials*.” It is He who will help us hold firm to the teaching of the Bible, even when others around us turn away, and it is He who will bring us home!
      3. And that is why, when we stand before God on Judgment Day, and He asks us why He should let us in to heaven, the answer of a true believer will not have “I” in it, as in, because I believe… because I was baptized… because I went to church. Oh no. You will be looking at Jesus, and you will reply, Because He lived a righteous life and He died for my sins. Our salvation is all and entirely about the righteousness of Jesus, which we receive by faith!

Is this your hope? Do you look to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? I pray that you do. If you do not, please receive Him and believe in His name today.

And then, believer, looking to Jesus, “*the author and perfector of your faith*,” “*enter by the narrow gate,*” which is the way that is hard. In other words, “*Do not love the world or the things of the world*.” And apply yourself to the ordinary things that He uses to grow our faith, such as the preaching of the word, and sacraments, and public and private Bible study.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you have enjoyed your tour of the salvation art gallery. Some of what we have seen is jarring. But I hope and pray that each one of you is a small, bright, colourful scene of grace on the larger canvas of gloomy judgment. Amen.