

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

2 Peter 02:15-19

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue to read 2 Peter 02:15-19.

Peter almost used a whole chapter of scripture to portray the image of false teachers. The main elements in this portrait are: first, indulgence in the desires of the flesh; second, disobedience to authority; third, using slander to sow discord between saints and servants; fourth, they are like irrational animals; fifth, they speak evil of things they do not understand; sixth, they practice unrighteousness and revel in it; seventh, they love to indulge in revelry in the daytime; eighth, they revel in their deceit while mingling with the saints; ninth, they themselves commit sin and entice others to sin; tenth, they are accustomed to greed and are accursed children. Peter eloquently lists the ten sins they commonly commit. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, and perhaps these characteristics of false teachers are not easily remembered. If saints have a picture in their minds, they will not easily forget.

Next, Peter uses an Old Testament figure, Balaam, as a representative of false prophets, and false prophets serve as a lesson for the false teachers in the New Testament. Peter uses Balaam as a warning for the saints.

Verse 15: "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;"

"They" here undoubtedly refers to the false teachers who have forsaken the right path. This right path is the ordained path of God, the path of truth. They have deviated from the right path. And what is the result? They follow the path of Balaam, the son of Beor. Peter goes on to explain that Balaam was a prophet who

loved the wages of unrighteousness. How did Balaam love the wages of unrighteousness? We must first understand who Balaam was.

The account of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-24. At that time, Moses led the congregation of Israel, numbering two million, wandering in the wilderness for nearly forty years. Finally, they arrived at the plains of Moab, across the Jordan River, directly opposite the city of Jericho on the west bank of the river. With only a river between them, they could enter the Promised Land. The Israelites camped in the plains of Moab.

When Balak, the king of Moab, saw so many Israelites, he became afraid. He sent messengers to Balaam, the son of Beor, and offered him a great deal of gold and silver to curse the Israelites. Balaam was a prophet, and God said to Balaam that he could not curse the people because they were blessed. The first time, Balaam obeyed God's command and refused to go. However, Balak sent messengers again, offering Balaam even more riches and promised him great honor, giving him whatever he wanted. At this point, Balaam's heart was tempted. Yet, he was hindered by God's direct command. He decided to wait overnight, hoping for new instructions from God. Eventually, God allowed him to go, but God wanted him to speak only what God gave him to say. According to the account in Numbers, Balaam attempted four times to curse the Israelites, but each time, God changed his words into blessings for Israel. Since he could not curse Israel with his mouth, Balaam advised Balak to use Midianite women to seduce the Israelites into committing adultery and idolatry. This ultimately provoked God's anger and led to His discipline of the Israelite people. In the end, Balaam became a snare to the Israelites.

With this historical background, Peter calls Balaam a prophet who loved the wages of unrighteousness, and Balaam is referred to as the representative of false prophets. The false prophets of the Old Testament serve as a mirror for the false teachers in the New Testament church, as Peter says the false teachers of the New Testament follow the path of Balaam. What is the path of Balaam? It is the path of loving money, craving for glory, and walking in unrighteousness, ultimately leading to destruction. Balaam's fate is recorded in Numbers 31:8, where it states that because the Midianites caused the Israelites to fall into sin, God commanded

Moses to wage war against the Midianites. Moses instructed a total of 12,000 men, 1000 from each tribe, to go to war against Midian. In verse 31:8, it says, "They also killed the kings of Midian with the rest of those who were killed... and they killed the son of Beor, the soothsayer, with the sword." Balaam died in that battle. Then, in Joshua 13:22, when an aged Joshua recounts this history, he says, "The sons of Israel also killed Balaam, the son of Beor, the soothsayer, with the sword among the rest of their slain." At this point, Balaam is referred to as a soothsayer, no longer as a prophet. The Bible does not recognize him as a prophet. Although he once spoke the words that God commanded him to speak, he ultimately became a disaster to Israel. Therefore, Peter categorizes him among false prophets and calls him the representative of false prophets, making false prophets a mirror for false teachers in the New Testament.

Verse 16: "But he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet."

When Balaam persisted in wanting to curse Israel, his donkey saw the angel of the Lord blocking the road ahead and refused to go forward three times. Balaam, who couldn't see the angel of God, then struck the donkey. Astonishingly, the donkey spoke human words to rebuke Balaam. God used a mute animal to rebuke the false prophet who intentionally disobeyed God's will. How ironic.

Indeed, it's the same today. God may use people, events, and things within the church to rebuke false teachers, even using the most inconspicuous matters to shame them. Peter says, "a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet." False prophets, driven by personal gain, defy God's will and commit acts of madness. In the last days, false teachers sneaking into the church do so for their own despicable gain, vain reputation, political power, or erroneous ideology. They preach doctrines contrary to God's will within the church. Just as the mute donkey was used by God to rebuke Balaam, today, God can use saints in the church who are willing to cooperate with Him to hinder the actions of false teachers.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you hear gossip in the church that undermines unity or attacks ministers or servants, it's best to immediately stop it with love. This is Satan's scheme. He wants to use false teachers to persecute the church, his most common trick. Don't let inappropriate gossip destroy the unity of the church or sow discord between servants and those being served. This is the responsibility of every saint in the church.

Verse 17: "These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

Peter goes on to say that false teachers are like wells without water. In the Middle East, where wilderness is common and water resources are scarce, wells are an important source of water, capable of quenching people's thirst. A well without water, however, is just an empty facade, giving false hope but failing to meet real needs. False teachers themselves are not saved; they are thirsty and thus cannot provide for others.

In John 4:14, Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at Sychar's well: "But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Christ promises that everyone who is saved and receives grace will have an internal spring, a spring that wells up to eternal life. In John 7:38, Jesus further says, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." Everyone with the life of God in them can flow with living water, meeting others' needs and quenching their thirst. However, false teachers are like wells without water; they might have some biblical knowledge and hold positions as teachers in the church, but they cannot meet real needs or quench people's thirst.

Peter then describes false teachers as mist driven by a storm. While mist contains water vapor, it cannot nourish the parched land like rain. Not only does mist fail to provide real help, but it also obscures the path ahead. False teachers preach doctrines that seem plausible but obscure God's way, offering no grace and failing to nourish the thirsty hearts, providing only illusory hope. This mist, soon driven by

a storm, dissipates and amounts to nothing. Peter's depiction is indeed very vivid. As for the fate of false teachers, Peter says that the blackest darkness is reserved for them. They are children of darkness, having no light and never having seen light. They will ultimately be consigned to darkness, where the blackest darkness is reserved for them, and they will be eternally condemned in darkness.

Verse 18: "For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error."

Peter continues to describe false teachers, stating that they speak great swelling words of emptiness. Because they lack life within them, they cannot speak words of grace; instead, they attract people with boastful and empty words. Teachers who have life do not need to use fancy language or eloquent speech to attract others. By simply explaining God's word and dividing His truth, they naturally produce teachings with an anointing that refreshes and satisfies the needs within, fulfilling the intended function of God's gracious words.

False teachers, however, lack genuine substance and thus focus on verbal embellishments and speaking techniques. Their words might flow smoothly or sound highly persuasive, but they are ultimately empty and devoid of content. They enjoy being novel and often use sensational language to create a shocking effect. While their speech might be enjoyable to listen to, like a form of spiritual entertainment, it leaves nothing lasting. Even worse, they allure through the lusts of the flesh and lewdness, targeting those who have just escaped from error.

The most deeply harmed by false teachers are new believers. These new converts have just left their old lives, recognizing their former pleasures as sinful. Having received grace and salvation, they aim to live a holy life. However, false teachers lead them astray, causing them to follow fleshly desires and commit acts of lewdness, thereby returning to their old ways and damaging their newfound faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must cherish and even protect the newly converted believers among us. They are just beginning to encounter God's word and their understanding of the truth is not yet complete, making them the most susceptible to being misled by false teachers. Therefore, we need to place great importance on nurturing new believers. It is best for the church itself to undertake this responsibility rather than outsourcing it to other groups. New believers lack discernment and can easily be swayed by seemingly plausible but incorrect teachings.

Verse 19: "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage."

False teachers, because they do not believe in the redemption of Jesus Christ, are still ensnared by the bondage of sin. They promise others freedom, but it is a freedom to sin, a freedom to do evil. They do not understand what true freedom is. Jesus says in John 8:32, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Therefore, true freedom is the freedom from sin, the freedom to lay down all the burdens of sin, to no longer be condemned by conscience, and to be free from guilt before God and men. This is true freedom. The freedom to sin is not true freedom because everyone who sins is a slave to sin, a slave to corruption. They may have the freedom to sin but lack the freedom not to sin, the freedom to escape corruption. Sin remains their master, and they are subdued by it, living their entire lives as slaves to sin.

Jesus continues in John 8:34, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." And in verse 36, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." Only Jesus Christ can give us true freedom because He has paid our debt of sin. We are no longer indebted and thus have true freedom.

Dear brothers and sisters, Peter spends much effort describing false teachers to help us recognize their characteristics. In the last days, Satan will raise many false teachers who will secretly enter the church to corrupt the house of God. May we

all be reminded that the best defense against false teachers is knowing the truth ourselves. May the saints treasure our daily Bible reading time, coming before God's word to listen to what He has to say to us today.

Let us pray together: Lord, grant us ears to hear and a spirit willing to be taught. We open ourselves entirely to You, seeking enlightenment from Your word and understanding of the truth that sets us free. Remember my church, especially the newly converted believers. Help them to love Your word from the beginning and to understand the truth through daily Bible reading. Let the truth guide their lives, preventing them from being swayed by every wind of doctrine, and allowing them to be firmly rooted in the church. Bless my church, and I pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.