

# EXILES

LIVING IN HOPE  
1 & 2 PETER

SERMON TITLE: "Fake News vs. Good News"

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SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 2.1-22

PASTOR: Jim Thompson

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Identity is an ever-present buzzword. This should especially be true for Christians. We are chosen, loved, forgiven, and secure in Jesus. But Peter reminds us of another part of our Christian identity—we are exiles. The "world as it is" isn't our home. We are pilgrims on a journey, telling others along the way about the wonderful things God has done in calling us out of darkness and into his light. And just like Peter's personality, these two letters that share his name are bold invitations to cling to a living hope in the face of any suffering that may come our way.

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"Fake News" might be one of the only mantras of our day that people agree with. Now, what is actually fake and what is real is a different discussion altogether. Sadly, people are often too quick to believe what they're told if it's packaged just right. Sometimes we're more gullible than we think, and can be caught rushing to a medicine or a diet or a conspiracy theory just because we're looking for a quick fix of health or knowledge. Interestingly enough, in the first century, Peter's friends were in a similar situation.

Peter's friends were hearing fake news as opposed to the good news – the gospel of Jesus. There were false teachers spreading lies and destructive ideas about God and about what he was up to. And sadly, some people were starting to believe whatever they were told by these false teachers because it was packaged just right, and the message appealed to their "sensual passions of the flesh" (2:18). Naturally, Peter cautions his friends. He goes to great lengths to describe how these false teachers function so that they can be easily recognized. It's as if he's echoing Jesus in John 8, but with different words: "You shall know the lies, and the truth shall set you free."

First off, it's important to note that Peter is contrasting what he is saying in chapter 2 with what he said at the end of chapter 1. At the end of 2 Peter 1, Peter tells his friends that they *can trust* what God has said in Scripture. And his friends need this reminder and assurance because in 2 Peter 2, Peter tells them that they *can't trust* the false teachers. Well, why not?

Why can't these false teachers be trusted? Peter tells his friends that they can't be trusted because of their origin; they grew up in and around the church, know about Jesus, know the lingo, and know how to deceive and "entice unsteady souls" (2:14). Peter says that the false teachers can't be trusted because of their beliefs; they have denied that there will be any judgment and that Jesus will eventually come back. And based on their being no future judgment, they offer people a pleasure-driven, me-centered ethic. Peter also says that the false teachers can't be trusted because of their motives; "in their greed, they exploit people" (2:3). He even says that their hearts are "trained in greed" (2:14). Meaning, these people want to use you for their own personal gain, even financial gain! He says that they are like "irrational animals" (2:12) and unwanted scavengers. But in the middle of all of this, Peter tells his friends, "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials" (2:9), especially the trials brought on by these false teachers. Their fake news doesn't save anybody and only offers quick fixes.

So, how should we respond to Peter's teaching about false teachers? Here are three suggestions:

- **ASK QUESTIONS.** Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5 to "test everything, and hold fast to that which is good." How can you test something? By asking questions. Ask questions about their origin, their beliefs, and their motives. Ask questions like, Are these teachers more about my money, or my heart? Are they more about chasing experiences, or cultivating faith and trust in God? Are they more about your self-esteem or your service to God and others? Are they more about a new idea that no one has ever heard, or the old message that God loves sinners, and is undoing the mess we've made of his world?
- **STUDY YOUR BIBLE.** There are about five Old Testament stories that Peter briefly alludes to in 2 Peter 2, and his assumption is that his friends know those stories. In Peter's mind, they will help protect them against

false teachers. Furthermore, chapter 2 is intended to be read after chapter 1, and in chapter 1 Peter is emphatic that God has spoken in Scripture, and that we should be paying attention to what he's saying there. Or again, "You shall know the truth, and it will help you know the lies, and the truth will set you free." And this is especially true because truth is not ultimately a set of abstract ideas or propositions; truth is a person.

- **USE A JESUS-FILTER.** Jesus is truth with skin on. And if you're studying your Bible, then you'll find yourself face to face with him. He is the Hero of the story of Scripture. He is the true prophet who declares God perfectly. He is the true teacher who explains God clearly. The authority of the written word is to highlight the authority of the risen, incarnate Word – Jesus. So, how do these false teachers talk about Jesus? Is he a means to the end for them? Is Jesus just the way that you get what you want? Or is he Savior, Champion, Friend, Brother, and Lord?

In Jesus, we can see the greatest conspiracy in the history of the world, the good news that trumps the fake news. It's a divine conspiracy in which the only person who never sinned and never deserved to die took the weight of our sin and death upon himself at the cross so that we could be free. And he left an empty grave behind him, proving that sin and death don't get the last word. It is in trusting this message of the gospel that the lies are exposed for what they are, and people are liberated to be a part of kingdom come.

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### Discussion Starters

1. How do you think false teachers and or false teachings manifest themselves today?
2. Does Peter's extended discussion here ever make you worry that you might be believing a lie? Why or why not?
3. Do you know anyone who has ever been distracted and led away by false teaching? How did it happen?
4. What kinds of questions should you ask as you think about whether or not a teacher or teaching is true and good?
5. In what ways could you more faithfully study the Bible for the good of your own heart, but also in order to guard you against unhealthy and wrong ideas about God?
6. Explain the "Jesus-filter." How are Christians supposed to have a "Jesus-filter" for all of life?
7. Personally, what's your biggest takeaway from this message/passage?