

The Lord Knows How

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[0 : 00] We come now to our reading from Scripture, which again is from the second letter of Peter to the young churches in Asia Minor and such places.

And you'll find this on page 1018 in our hardback Bibles. And again, we're reading from the second chapter tonight, and we shall think more about that in a few minutes' time.

So second letter of Peter, chapter 2, verse 1, false prophets and teachers. But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.

Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For 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 : 24] 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. 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.

And if he rescued righteous lot, 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.

Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and 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.

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones. Whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.

But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction.

[2 : 42] Suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions while they feast with you.

They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children, forsaking the right way, they have gone astray.

They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Baal, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression. A speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them, the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world, through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

[4 : 05] For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them.

The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord to us. May it be a blessing. Well, let's turn again in our Bibles to 2 Peter chapter 2.

My title for this evening is, The Lord Knows How. The Lord Knows How. And you'll see those words at the beginning of verse 9 here in chapter 2.

Then the Lord knows how. Now, at this point in his letter, Peter is reassuring his Christian readers about God's power, God's ability, and God's willingness to do certain things.

[5 : 11] And what those things are, are laid out for us in verse 9. Just have a look with me at the verse. The Lord knows how to do two things. First, to rescue the godly from trials.

And second, to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment. Now, this ninth verse comes at the end of a rather long sentence, which begins right back in verse 4.

And I want you to see just how Peter unfolds this long sentence, because if we can see how this sentence is put together, I think we'll feel the force of verse 9 much more strongly.

This sentence, as you look at it, is made up of four conditional clauses. That is, four clauses beginning with the word if. So Peter is saying, if this, and if this, and if this, and if this, then, verse 9, then we can be sure that the Lord knows how to rescue and how to condemn.

So look with me at these verses again, and I'll read them again so as to emphasize these four if clauses. Verse 4. For 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.

[6 : 27] If he did not spare the ancient world, but preserve Noah, a herald of righteousness with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. 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.

And if he rescued righteous lot, 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.

Now, do you see what Peter is saying here?

Peter is saying God has demonstrated his power both to judge and to save repeatedly in some of the great events of history. Peter is saying it's no fiction that God judges those who oppose him. Bible history shows him doing it. And equally, it's no fiction that God rescues those who trust him and serve him. Bible history shows that. Think of the rebel angels, he says in verse 4.

[7 : 41] When they sinned, they were not spared by God. On the contrary, they were cast into hell and chained up in the dark to be brought to final judgment on the day of judgment. And then verse 5.

Think of the ancient world. The world of men and women who lived in Noah's day just before the great flood. God did not spare the ancient world. He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. But he knew how to spare Noah and seven others. That's his family. Then verse 6. God did not spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

He turned them to ashes and condemned them to extinction to make them an example, a foretaste of future judgments. But he knew how to rescue righteous Lot and his family from Sodom.

So, if all these examples in history are true, we can be assured that the God who knew then how to rescue the godly and how to punish the unrighteous still knows how to do these two things.

[8 : 42] This is the true God. And his rescuing and judging are his two great characteristics shown again and again in the pages of Bible history. Salvation and judgment.

Those are the twin pillars on which the whole of the Bible's revelation is built and developed. God the Savior. God the Judge. The Savior of those who belong to him and the Judge of those who resist him and oppose him.

Now, that's what Peter is emphasizing here in this section of chapter 2. Now, why does he put this paragraph here? Well, as we saw last week, this letter and especially this second chapter is a strong warning to the young Christians that Peter is writing to.

He loves them. He loves these young churches. And just as loving parents often warn their children against dangers, so Peter, who's now an old man and knows that he will soon be gone from them, is writing to these churches to warn them of the dangers they face from false prophets, false religious teachers.

But he's also writing to reassure them. His message is, God knows how to rescue the godly. Therefore, friends, stick with the Lord.

[9 : 57] Stick with the true teaching about him. And you'll be saved. And don't let these false teachers hook you in. Because their end, their destiny, is to be destroyed. Now, one of Peter's aims in this passage is to unmask the false teachers who are seeking to infiltrate the churches.

The unmasking of evil. It's something which, of course, happens regularly in other spheres as well. I guess in modern Britain, there's an obvious recent case in the unmasking of Jimmy Savile a few years ago.

There was a man who was popular and very much praised, even knighted by the Queen for his philanthropy. He supported good causes. He raised large sums of money for charity. He became a kind of national treasure.

And then just a year or two after his death, the mask was taken off and the sordid and painful truth about him was revealed. Now, the evil influence always presents itself as an angel of light.

The wolf does not say, I'm a wolf. The wolf says, I'm a sheep. And what Peter is doing in this chapter is stripping off the sheep's clothing and revealing the wolf underneath so that young and vulnerable Christians can see the truth for themselves and be shocked and be no longer led astray.

[11 : 17] Now, there isn't time to look at all the details about these false people. I'm not going to work through every verse. But let's notice the most prominent features of these wolves. First, they want to get people into their clutches.

Look at verse 14. They entice unsteady souls. Unsteady souls. They don't bother with steady and mature Christians. They know they won't get very far with them.

But vulnerable and weaker people are the ones that they target. And verse 18 tells us more about this strategy of luring or enticing people. Verse 18.

Speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. Now, sexual immorality, it's always been a bait, a lure.

Verses 18 and 19 picture an unsteady and vulnerable person who is interested in Christianity and perhaps starts coming to a church where the Bible is taught and honored.

[12 : 21] But this person is vulnerable and lonely and sad and craves intimacy with other people. And then hears that there are churches of a rather different kind which not only sanction but, for example, encourage same-sex relationships to be developed.

And as verse 19 puts it, these people promise them freedom. So they say to the vulnerable young person, you don't need the old straitjackets and restrictions of the traditional view of marriage and so on.

We've discovered new freedoms. We've come of age. Come with us. Make new friends. Discover new joys. So this young person, craving friendship, goes with them.

But, says Peter in verse 19, although these leaders promise freedom, they are themselves slaves. Slaves to corruption. So they drag people into their circle under false pretenses.

Freedom proves to be slavery and joy turns out to be corruption. They promise much, but they deliver nothing. Look at verse 17.

[13 : 26] These are waterless springs and mists driven in a storm. It's as though you're parched with thirst in a very dry country. And up ahead you see a valley. And there's a valley bottom, a place where there's a water course normally.

But when you get to it, there's nothing there, nothing to drink. It's bone dry. It promises to slake your thirst, but it leaves you dehydrated and despairing. So these people want to get others, especially unsteady ones, into their clutches.

Secondly, these false teachers often turn out to be people who have once had a brush with real Christianity. Look at verse 20 here. For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

So these people often started off in a real church. They had some knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Perhaps they're amongst the folk that Jesus describes in the parable of the sower, where the good seed of God's word falls on shallow soil, where there's very little depth of earth.

And initially, it springs up and seems to be the real thing, but quickly it withers away because it's not willing to endure difficulty. So there was a brief glimpse of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, but then they turned away and ended up in a state far worse than the way they started.

[14:54] So Peter goes on to say in verse 21, it would have been better for them never to have known anything about Christ than to have had some little knowledge of him and then turned away. And so they prove, look at verse 22, they prove to be always what they were at the beginning.

They're shown up in their true colors. That proverb in verse 22 is very unflattering. But here is Peter unmasking reality. He's saying that these people are like dogs and pigs, displaying their true natures, licking up vomit and wallowing in muck.

It is very strong language, but Peter is wanting his readers to be absolutely clear about the real nature of these predators. Then thirdly, going back to verse 1, chapter 2, verse 1, the heart of their error is that they deny the master who bought them.

Now we know that the heart of real Christianity is to know Christ. As Jesus prayed to God the Father, this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

That's the delight and the glory of Christianity, to know Christ. But these false teachers are denying him. And look at how Peter describes Jesus in verse 1, the master who bought them.

[16:17] He bought them. He paid the redemption price for them by laying down his life willingly for his people by going to the cross. But these false people, they deny Jesus and spurn the love that drove him to lay his life willingly down for his people.

They are Jesus' deniers. Now all false teaching at its heart involves a denial of the truth about Jesus. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, speak much of Jesus, but they deny his deity. So they're denying the truth about him. The Mormons speak about him. Islam has a place for him in the Koran, but the Koran's teaching about Jesus fundamentally denies the New Testament's teaching about him.

Whereas real Christianity knows Christ, honors Christ, loves Christ, and submits to him as the unquestioned master. But the false teaching will always deny the master who brought redemption. Now I want to step back a little from the text, not too far back, but a little for a moment, so as to ask a big question. And that is, why is the situation as difficult for the churches as Peter shows it to be?

[17:30] Why are things so difficult for the churches? He tells us in verse 1 in no uncertain terms that there will be false teachers. He tells us in no uncertain terms as the chapter unfolds that these false teachers will bring great trouble and great difficulty to the churches.

They will mislead people. They will snare vulnerable ones. They will take them away from the truth. And we have seen this happening for the last 2,000 years. We long for a perfect situation where the church of Christ is untroubled and can live at peace.

It would be wonderful, wouldn't it? Not having to battle with theological enemies and theological lies. But life in the real world and life in the real church is always a life of conflict at some level.

And yet despite all that, Peter and the other apostles always convey in their writings a sure sense that God is thoroughly in control of every aspect of every situation.

Look, for example, at verses 8 and 9 in our passage. In verse 8, righteous Lot is tormenting his righteous soul day after day over the lawless things that he sees and hears in Sodom.

[18:45] He's distressed and he's a righteous man. He's a godly man. And yet his life is full of torment because of the horrible behavior of his near neighbors in Sodom. And yet, verse 9, the Lord's power and ability is unquestioned.

He knows how. He knows how to rescue and he knows how to punish. He is the sovereign. He knows how to rescue his people. He knows how to punish those who reject and oppose him. So Peter and the other apostles never suggest for a moment that his power or goodness is lacking or deficient.

So let me ask the question again. Why is the situation so difficult for the churches? God is undoubtedly sovereign. So why this struggle and battle against false teaching when our hearts long for peace?

Well, let's build up from the Bible more generally as well as from this passage. Let's build up an understanding of the power of God in the midst of falsehood. The first thing we need to be sure of and to recognize is that God permits falsehood.

Satan is not mentioned by name here in 2 Peter 2 but we know that he's the father of false teaching because we know that he's the father of lies. The whole purpose of his being, the whole purpose of his mission if you like, is to undermine the truthfulness of God's words.

[20 : 09] His very first words recorded in the book of Genesis chapter 3 are the words Did God Actually Say? Now those four words perfectly capture his diabolical purposes.

They were spoken to Eve and they were designed to make her think that what she thought was true about God was perhaps not true after all. And yet, God allowed the serpent to be in the Garden of Eden.

He permitted the existence of falsehood and evil and being all-knowing, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. God surely knew what was going to happen. He knew what Adam and Eve would do.

He knew that the human race would fall and be duped and defeated by the devil's falsehoods. And yet, he allowed it. Why? Well, we can't answer that question with full or ultimate certainty.

We can offer partial answers. So, for example, I think we can say that the presence of falsehood and temptation strengthens Christians. We learn to do battle.

[21 : 15] One of the Bible's purposes is to harden us, to train us to be fighters, to do battle with falsehood. And as we do so, we become strengthened and hardened. We grow in maturity and understanding because we have to start thinking hard.

We have to ponder the Bible's teaching. So, I think we can say the presence of falsehood develops the strength of the true church. Another answer might be that battling with falsehood enables us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus himself.

the Bible teaches us to imitate him, to learn from his example and to follow it. And in his teaching, he was battling with false ideas and confronting them and he calls us to do the same.

Again, we might say that battling with falsehoods helps us to teach Christians younger than ourselves. We have to think through various painful and difficult issues and once we've been there and we've thought them through, we're able to help younger Christians from our own hard-won experience.

Now, those partial answers may be true. I think they are true. But we can't get quite to the bottom of that question. We can't ultimately know why God allowed falsehood to enter the world.

[22 : 27] But because God is sovereign, we know that God has allowed it. Now, secondly, we know equally clearly that having permitted falsehood and the devil himself to be active in the world, God restricts the false devil.

He doesn't give him free reign. Martin Luther once said, never forget that the devil is God's devil. That's a rather odd way of putting it, but I think you can see what Luther means.

The devil is rather like a Rottweiler on a leash. He's restricted. So God allows him to cause great pain and trouble, but only up to a certain point.

This is the great lesson from the first two chapters of the book of Job. You remember how Satan appears before God and says certain things to the Lord God about Job. And God gives Satan permission to test Job, but only up to a point.

Satan is allowed to inflict Job with terrible suffering and loss, but he's not allowed to take Job's life. God restricts evil. He never gives it free reign.

[23 : 36] And here in 2 Peter 2, we see exactly the same thing happening. Look at verse 5. God did not spare the ancient world when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly.

Again, he's restricting evil. Do you remember the story? It starts in Genesis chapter 6 like this. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually.

And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, I will blot out man, man and the animals, for I'm sorry that I've made them.

And that's exactly what he does. He allows the evil to run on for a certain length of time and he then says, enough. And he drops the curtain and halts the evil and allows the world then to make a fresh start through Noah and his family.

So everything gets up and running and going again. But the sinfulness of the human heart reasserts itself and society becomes deeply wicked yet again.

[24 : 46] And a few chapters later in Genesis we find God considering the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. Now here we are in 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 6. God sees the sin of those two cities.

He sees the violence and the sexual perversion. The kind of perversion that some churches today are calling good and beautiful. And God says, enough. He doesn't send a Jonah to call them to repent.

They're beyond repentance. So he destroys them. He never gives free reign to evil. And we see this same pattern repeated again and again in the Bible.

Think of the people of Israel at the beginning of the 6th century B.C. God had been sending his prophets to them for centuries, pleading with them, to return to the law of Moses, often threatening them with judgment.

But for generation after generation they would not listen to the Lord. So eventually God says, enough. And he sends in the Babylonian army who besieged Jerusalem, the beloved city.

[25 : 48] They tear it to the ground. They destroy the temple and the people are sent away into exile. The same thing of course happens in church history as well. Where a church or a group of churches or a denomination may hold to the gospel and the truth for a while and bring real blessing to the land where that church is situated.

But then the church turns its back on the truth and walks away from the teaching of the Bible and a point can be reached when God considers it beyond recall and he brings its tenure to an end.

Enough, he says. God does not allow falsehood to run on forever. He allows evil and falsehood to exist in the world but his sovereign power over these things is absolute and unquestioned.

As our verse 9 puts it, he knows how to punish the unrighteous. But if Peter speaks here of God's sovereign power, he's also speaking of God's sovereign justice and righteousness.

And he explains that God's righteous punishing of evil is shown at two different levels. Part of it now in this life and part of it later at the day of judgment.

[27 : 03] It's important we should see these two levels. Think first of Sodom and Gomorrah who are dealt with there in verse 6. God judged and punished them in this life.

You might say on the spot, suddenly. He rained down fire and brimstone there and then. There was no delay in the case of those two cities when God had decided. It was the same with the flood in Noah's day.

Down came the rain and everybody was put to death then and there. But now look at verse 4 concerning the rebel angels. Their judgment is delayed.

They're chained up in the dark until the final day of judgment. And it's the same in verse 9. The Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.

judgment. So God's just judgment is revealed both in the here and now and in the great future day of judgment. Just think of what this means in terms of our own human experience.

[28 : 05] If you or I were to commit ourselves to a course of sinful behavior, let's say that you take a decision to embark on an adulterous affair or you decide to follow a policy of cheating and fraud at your place of work or in your personal finances.

These decisions that you make will not make you happy. You will quickly become miserable and wretched. We know this, don't we? If we embark on a sinful course, there is something within us that feels a revulsion against what we're doing.

We hate the wrong thing that we're doing even while we're doing it. And this is part of the punishment for sin. We become confused and wretched. We know that we've strayed from the path which leads to peace and happiness.

Now this is surely what it was like before the flood. Genesis tells us that the earth was full of violence. It wasn't a happy world. It was a wretched world. If the whole thing is violent, everybody is wretched.

People lived in fear of each other. So even before the flood came to destroy them, they were feeling the painful punishment for their sinful life. Think of Sodom and Gomorrah.

[29 : 14] the account that we have of those cities in Genesis shows that gangs of men were roaming the streets looking for someone to rape. These were not places of peace or security.

Life was horrible in Sodom and Gomorrah. Sin brings its own immediate pains and punishments. And don't we see this in our own day, here in our own world, our own city even?

Most days of the week, I walk between these buildings and Central Station. It takes about five minutes to walk from here to the station, as you know. And every time I make that walk, coming to work or away from work, I look at the faces of the people who are coming towards me in the opposite direction.

I find them fascinating. I look at almost every face that I see. But the overwhelming impression I have of those faces is that they are unhappy. They're troubled and stressed and exhausted.

Now that trouble and stress is not all due to sin, of course not. But much of it arises because people are out of touch with God, the source of happiness and joy.

[30 : 19] They're not honoring him, they're not rejoicing in the glorious gospel. It's repentance and trust that brings happiness into people's faces. But to be still unforgiven brings its own suffering, even in this life.

Isn't this what the prodigal son discovered? He went away, with his pockets bulging with money. He enjoyed himself for a short time, but then the money ran out and he was miserable.

He was wretched. So at one level, God punishes sin here and now with an immediate punishment. But far worse is the just punishment that comes at the end.

Look again at our verse 9. The Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment. judgment. Now Peter is talking here particularly about the false teachers who are leading people astray.

But this surely applies to everyone who refuses to bow to Jesus Christ. Kept under punishment until the day of judgment. The same phrase is used in verse 4, respecting the rebel angels.

[31 : 26] God committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment. judgment. So God's justice is worked out at these two levels.

First, a person who denies the Lord Jesus is punished in this life, in this world. Sin brings pain and guilt and confusion. In Paul's language, in Romans chapter 1, God gives people up, gives them over to the consequences of their sin.

But far worse is the final accounting when a godless person is sent away into a godless eternity on the day of judgment. This is frankly terrifying, terrifying.

But to deny it is to deny the whole of the Bible's teaching. Don't you fear, don't you tremble for those church leaders up and down the country who are enticing people into sexual immorality and telling them that what the Bible forbids is actually good and beautiful.

People are teaching these godless things as though it were a light thing, a light matter to turn away from the Bible. They've lost all true perspective. They've lost all fear of God. They're behaving in the manner of verse 18.

[32 : 42] Speaking loud boasts of folly, they're enticed by sensual passions of the flesh, those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. If only they would read what Peter says there in verse 3.

Look back to verse 3. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle and their destruction is not asleep. That is a fearsome verse. It pictures their condemnation as if it was some terrible carnivorous animal that has woken up in its lair and is lumbering towards them.

One of our problems today is that we live in a flippant and frivolous world where nothing seems really serious. Nothing seems really important. If we're Christians, we say that we believe in the judgment of God, but that belief can sit so lightly on our minds without sinking powerfully and deeply into our souls.

Think of the typical day in a typical life. You get home from work in the early evening. You put a lamb chop under the grill to cook. You put a potato in the oven to bake.

And you get out some frozen peas and put them in a pan. After your meal, you relax in front of the television for a while and you watch a soap opera. Then you go to your computer and you pay a bill and then you check your bank balance and do a few little bits around the house and then go to bed.

[34 : 06] The next day you get up, you go off to work. On your way home, you look in on your elderly parents. Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad. Everything okay? You help your old father to move some furniture because his shoulder is hurting him.

And you pop into Morrison's for a few groceries. You hurry home. You put on the grill and you put some sausages under it. Now, you have to eat. You have to work.

We all have to do that. But our lives can be so filled up with these mundane things, as well as all the music and sport and entertainment that comes into us by all these different channels, so filled up with these things that we don't pause to consider that the God who made the world and who loves the world is moving it inexorably towards its final accounting.

When you step out into Bath Street this evening, look up the street at the evening sky. Look at the fading light and say to yourself, one day, coming with the clouds of heaven, the Son of Man will be revealed in all his glory as he comes to judge the living and the dead.

It is a weighty thing to be a Christian. But imagine being a false teacher in the light of verse 3. Don't become a Bible teacher unless you are thoroughly determined to be true to the words of the Bible. [35 : 28] God then, in his absolute sovereignty, has complete power over evil and falsehood. He restrains it and he calls it to a halt.

And he is just. He has justice as well as power. He will bring all godlessness to a just accounting. But power and justice are not the only features of his sovereignty.

The other feature, the other great feature of his sovereignty, is his love. Now his love is not mentioned by name in this chapter. But the sweet sense of it runs through this whole letter. Why is Peter driven by the Holy Spirit to warn the churches about false teaching? It's because God loves the churches and wants their members to be saved on the day of judgment. Look back to chapter 1 verse 4.

God has granted to us his precious and very great promises. For what purpose? So that through them we should become partakers of the divine nature. That we should be born again and become children of our heavenly father having escaped from the corruption that is in the world.

[36 : 35] That is God's loving purpose. to provide us with a way of escape from the foul mess of sin and its terrible consequences. Look again to chapter 2 verse 9.

The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials. And why should the Lord wish to do that? It's because he loves the godly. His purpose is to acquit us because of what Christ has done for us. Christ has borne the penalty for our sins so that we should be free and saved forever. However, it's because God has loved the world so much that he gave up his only son so that whoever puts their trust in him should not perish, should not be condemned at the day of judgment, but brought to eternal life.

Look again at our verse 9 here in chapter 2 because it tells us so much about the experience of the real Christian. The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials.

Now it's the verses about Noah and Lot that help us to understand what Peter means by that. Peter does not mean that Christians will never suffer trials. And people misunderstand Christianity so badly at this point.

[37 : 45] They can think that to be a Christian must mean that you're protected from all trying circumstances as though you're cocooned in bulletproof clothing. But that's not what Peter means.

Think of Noah in verse 5 whom he describes as a herald or preacher of righteousness. Now the book of Genesis doesn't record that Noah was a preacher but Peter does here.

The world, you remember, was full of violence and wickedness. God told Noah that he was to build this great boat, this ark, which was to be the means of safety for him and his family and for the animals.

So he built the ark and no doubt he preached to the people who came to look at the ark. What was his message? He must have tried to explain the ark and told them that the reason he was building it was that judgment was imminent.

A great flood was coming. That was the very reason for him making this huge boat in a sun-scorched desert. But the people were committed to violence and wickedness. It must have been very trying, very testing for Noah to be faced with that kind of hostile reception day after day.

[38 : 51] He wasn't spared their hostility and their fierceness. Not at all. He preached to them about righteousness. righteousness. And yet God rescued him from their clutches finally.

He wasn't protected from the hostile world. He had to endure it for a long time before rescue came. And then think of Lot in verses 7 and 8.

He didn't live in a glass case protected from the violence of Sodom. That was no paradise island for Lot to live in. Peter tells us exactly what Lot's experience was like.

Look at verse 7. He was greatly distressed. By the sensual conduct of the wicked. These people had given themselves over body and soul to sexual immorality.

Verse 8 tells us more. That phrase day by day or day after day. It's so eloquent of his prolonged suffering as he was forced to look at their lawless behavior and to hear the things that they were crying out for.

[39 : 50] And this went on for a long time. It was tormenting for him. As verse 8 puts it. He wasn't cocooned against difficulty. Noah and Lot suffered greatly.

They were godly men and they suffered precisely because they were godly. But look at verse 5. God preserved Noah. And look at verse 7. God rescued righteous Lot.

Which demonstrates that, verse 9, he knows how to rescue the godly from trials. Peter brings these two Old Testament characters, Noah and Lot, into the letter to encourage and comfort the Christians that he's writing to.

Peter knows that it will be a great trial to them to be battling with these false teachers and false teaching. But he's reassuring them that God is able to bring them through their trials and to bring them finally to safety.

In a sense, the whole message of chapter 2 is wrapped up in that ninth verse. The Lord God is able. The Lord knows how to rescue the godly and equally he knows how to punish the ungodly.

[40 : 56] The message of the Bible is that at the end there will be a great separation. There will be a great division. There are two types of people in the world. The godly and the ungodly.

The Bible never suggests that there is a third category. And the destiny of each of these types of people has long ago been determined. The godly will be rescued.

The ungodly will be sent to final ruin and destruction. A lot of people dislike this idea. Dislike it deeply. They say, surely it can't be as straightforward as that.

Aren't there gradations? Aren't there shades of gray? Is it such a stark contrast between safety and destruction? But our verse 9 in a sense sums up the whole teaching of the Bible.

Rescue for the godly because of the love of God and judgment for the ungodly because of the justice and the righteousness of God. So friends, let me ask this.

[41 : 55] To which of those two groups do you belong? Do you belong to the godly? The godly are not self-righteous. They don't have righteousness in themselves.

The godly are those who recognize their fallenness, their need, and their moral bankruptcy. And then they turn to Christ, who alone can rescue them because he alone died to pay the price of their sin.

The godly are those who trust not themselves but Christ. Those who speak of him with love. Those who are unashamed of him. Those who acknowledge gladly before the world that they belong to him.

And besides that, the godly are those who recognize that the world is facing the judgment of God deservedly. Like Noah and Lot, the godly recognize the violence and hostility towards God that so disfigures human society.

So they seek to live a different kind of life in this world. A holy life. They seek to please God even when they're sorely tried and tested as Noah and Lot were tried and tested.

[42 : 59] And the godly are those who have come to believe with great joy that the Lord knows how to rescue them. Not only from their trials but from the final ruin which will overwhelm all those who refuse to bow their knee to him.

Let's pray. Let's thank the Lord. Dear God, our Father, in our own moral bankruptcy, we thank you so much indeed that you have looked upon us with love and have sent a wonderful Savior, the only Savior, our precious and beloved Lord Jesus.

And we pray that you will help us to love him and trust him, to obey him, to be unashamed of him and the words of the Bible and that you will build up your church in confidence and joy as we trust the gospel.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.