

Studies in Second Peter

"When Animals Attack"

Second Peter 2:10-22

Introduction

Animal attacks on humans always make headlines. The most recent that comes to mind was thirteen year old Bethany Hamilton, whose arm was bitten off by a shark while surfing in Hawaii.

The apostle Peter picked-up on animal attacks as an illustration. In his first letter he described believers as "sheep" and then warned them that their adversary, the devil, was walking about "like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Here in our text he really got into the illustration and you need to see it in order to fully appreciate and understand what is being said. Peter was discussing and describing false teachers who were and would be among God's saints. He still saw the believers as sheep; but now they were sheep with **predators** *within* their flock! Look at what he said about the false teachers:

1. In verse twelve he called them "natural brute beasts."
2. Also in verse twelve, he said they were "made to be caught and destroyed." It's a description of wild predators that are hunted, captured and killed.
3. In the last verse of the Chapter, verse twenty-two, he called the false teachers "dogs" and "sows." While these are not necessarily predatory (*especially the sow!*), they are nevertheless animals.

I'm suggesting that Peter wanted you to think of the Church as a place where predatory animals were lurking, ready to pounce upon you and devour you. That being the case, we will organize our

thoughts around two points: #1 Be Alert To The Attack Of Spiritual Predators Among You, and #2 Be Aware Of The Tactics Of Spiritual Predators Among You.

#1 Be Alert To The Attack Of
Spiritual Predators Among You

(v10-14 & 20-22)

Straight-talk about false teachers is usually criticized more than their false teaching! Without over-emphasizing it, I want you to notice throughout this text that Peter did not mince his words. God's precious sheep were being attacked; like any good shepherd, he was out to capture and destroy the predators.

The predators were among the flock, passing themselves off as sheep. I'm holding the position that these men and women were definitely not born-again. They had made a profession of faith in Jesus; they had been baptized; they attended Church services. But they had never had a change of nature. They remained in their natural state.

Out in the world, you might see signs warning you of the potential for animal attacks by sharks or mountain lions or other such beasts. Among the flock you can see warning signs as well. In verses ten through thirteen Peter gave you two warning signs: These spiritual predators *revile*, and they *carouse*.

You see what is meant by reviling in verses ten, eleven, and twelve:

2 Peter 2:10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,

2 Peter 2:11 whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

2 Peter 2:12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption,

Let's first look at their **revilings**, then look back at how Peter described them. You are told they "despise authority... not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries..." There is disagreement among scholars as to exactly who the "dignitaries" are in this verse. They could be

angels, or civil officials, or Church officers. It is most likely a reference to all three and to anyone in a position of authority, whether it be supernatural or civil or spiritual authority. The point is that these false teachers do not recognize any authority over them. In the Church, they do their own thing without the oversight and direction of the leaders God has raised-up.

They eventually openly "speak evil of" those in authority over them. But long before they ever say anything, their actions have already spoken by simply ignoring God's chain-of-command. So a first warning sign is that they are doing their own ministry without any guidance or supervision.

The point Peter was making was that respect for God's order and authority is woven into the fabric of His creation. "Angels" are the good angels, God's messengers, who are involved in the affairs of the Church. When they report to the Lord in heaven, they simply state the facts about "them," the false teachers, without "reviling" them with "accusations." Anyone who disrespects God's order is acting more like the devil and his fallen angels - who most definitely despise authority and bring accusations before the throne of God in heaven.

Let's look now at the description of these predators. Verse twelve says they are, "like natural brute beasts..." The literal translation of the Greek words is important; the literal translation is, *born mere animals*... They were in the same condition as when they were first born. **They had not been born-again - never been saved.**

Because they had never been saved, "they walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness..." They are dominated by their old, sin nature and follow its lusts. Without the Holy Spirit in their hearts to control them, they are "presumptuous and self-willed." Without the Holy Spirit to guide their minds, they "speak evil of things they do not understand." They are like wild beasts - predators who are dangerous and therefore must be "caught and destroyed." Peter said this figuratively... But their end would be the end of all those who remain unsaved - they would "utterly perish in their own corruption."

The second warning sign is their carousing, in verse thirteen and fourteen:

2 Peter 2:13 *and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you,*

2 Peter 2:14 *having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.*

"Carousing" simply means they *indulged* themselves. In this case, they indulged themselves in sensual pleasures and in "covetousness."

As far as sensual pleasures... They had "eyes full of adultery." It means they looked upon every woman they saw as a candidate for adultery. The fact that they "cannot cease from sin" indicates once again that the Holy Spirit is not present in their heart. They go about "enticing unstable souls." They preyed upon weak Christians - took advantage of them to satisfy their own lusts.

They were "trained in covetous practices" means they were experts at manipulating people to get what they wanted from them.

Peter said they were "spots and blemishes." Jesus described believers as sheep who He would present to God without spot or blemish. Peter was letting you know that these false teachers were not God's sheep at all. They are "accursed children," which was a Jewish saying meaning they were worthy of being cursed and lost for eternity. They will "receive the wages of unrighteousness," or we might say, the wages of sin - which is death and eternal separation from God.

Whoa! Wait a minute... Can't these guys be saved? Drop down to verse twenty.

2 Peter 2:20 *For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.*

It will help us understand what Peter meant if we realize that Jesus said something very similar:

Luke 11:24 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.'

Luke 11:25 And when he comes, he finds *it* swept and put in order.

Luke 11:26 Then he goes and takes with *him* seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first."

The man in Jesus' parable cleaned-up his own life, but was never saved. He ended up worse off than before. That is what Peter said of the false teachers. They "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." In other words, they heard about Jesus, came out of their pagan background into the Church, and cleaned-up their lives. But they were never saved; never filled with God's Holy Spirit. They became "entangled again" and "overcome" by their former habits and were worse-off.

Why were they worse-off?

2 Peter 2:21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

These guys had made a public profession of faith...They claimed to "know" the Lord..." They knew "the way of righteousness..." But they "turn[ed] from" it - they willfully and deliberately returned to their former way of living while still professing to know the Lord. That is why they were worse-off. They were not ignorant of the Gospel; they were willfully, deliberately disobedient to it.

Listen to Peter's final description of them in verse twenty-two:

2 Peter 2:22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "*A dog returns to his own vomit,*" and, "*a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.*"

I should mention that dogs were not cute and cuddly pets; not "man's best friend." They were wild scavengers.

The dog vomits. He is rid of something that polluted him. Instead of leaving it and finding good food, *he eats it again!* The false teachers were like that. They made a profession of faith in Jesus, vomiting-out their sins and asking for forgiveness. But they returned to their vomit. They had no real change of heart.

The sow gets cleaned-up on the outside, but quickly returns to its mud. The false teachers were like that, too. For a time they seemed to walk in obedience. But they returned to their former practices. They had no real change of heart.

Dogs return to their own vomit because they are dogs; it's their nature. Sows return to the mud because they are sows; it's their nature. These false teachers had never had a change of nature. They'd never been born-again, never been God's sheep with a new, supernatural nature.

OK, so why does anyone ever follow them? Like all predators, they are cunning...

#2 Be Aware Of The Tactics Of Spiritual Predators Among You (v15-19)

Peter reminded them of a former false prophet:

2 Peter 2:15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;
2 Peter 2:16 but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

The history is in the Old Testament Book of Numbers. The nation of Israel was traveling through the land of the Moabites. They hired a prophet, Balaam, to curse the Jews. He tried; but he blessed them instead! He wanted so badly to get paid that he kept trying to find a way to curse God's people. At one point an angel with a drawn sword stood in his way as he rode along on his donkey. Balaam didn't see the angel - *but his donkey did!* The donkey refused to go forward so Balaam began to beat him. Through a miracle, the donkey began to speak to Balaam, saving his life.

The story was told here for at least two reasons. One is that it fits nicely with everything Peter has been saying. The false teachers were like "natural brute beasts." They were like Balaam, who was on a level lower than a donkey! Not only did the donkey have more spiritual sense, he spoke and Balaam spoke back as if it were normal.

Another reason the story is retold here is to show one of the motives of false teachers. Money; green backs; bucks; simolians; loot; moolah; scratch; wampum. Remember we saw in verse fourteen that they are "trained in covetous practices." You sometimes fall prey to these predators because of their expert manipulation.

Verse seventeen presents another reason you might follow them:

2 Peter 2:17 These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

"Wells" were life-giving fountains in the desert. "Clouds" promised to deliver much needed rain. A well "without water" could mean death to man and livestock. A cloud "carried by a tempest" was one that held no moisture. The false teachers promised to be a source of life-giving spiritual water but they could not deliver on their promises.

False teachers always promise you fantastic spiritual and supernatural benefits. You are thirsty and are drawn to their wells and clouds - only to find them empty in the end.

Peter can't help himself and adds, "for whom [the false teachers] is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." They have a reservation in Hell. It's bad enough they have willfully and deliberately rejected Jesus Christ, but they are leading believers into error.

Verses eighteen and nineteen present a third reason you might follow them:

2 Peter 2:18 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.

They "promise... liberty." They "allure you" with some earthly, physical, fleshly liberty. "Lewdness" can refer to a lack of sexual restraint; but it can also refer to excess in other areas of indulgence. The Prosperity Movement comes immediately to mind. You can have everything you want in gross excess - houses, cars, luxuries of all kinds. It's a lure some believers find it hard to avoid. It appeals to "the lusts of the flesh" by making what is carnal seem spiritual. A lot of believers are held captive in this heresy.

The phrase, "the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error," is referring to recent converts; new believers. False teachers especially prey upon new believers who do not have a grasp of the Bible. We should be especially protective of new believers. And we should be on guard for people who go after new believers in our fellowship.

One final look at these predators in verse nineteen:

2 Peter 2:19 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.

Their message of "liberty" is really one that will enslave you. If you are a Christian, you are set free from the *penalty* and *power* of sin. But you are not free to do as you please. You are free to serve the Lord. Someone said it like this: **"The purpose of life is not to find your freedom, but to find your Master."**

Conclusion

There will be predators among the flock. If you are a Christian, *you* are their prey. Be alert to their attack; be aware of their tactics.