



Central Peninsula Church

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2 Timothy 3:1-9
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Be Prepared for the Last Days

SERIES: *A Life That Counts: Studies in 2 Timothy*

I've showed you that disturbing video not because I think it's particularly edifying but because I think it will help you understand a bit the feeling of the Apostle Paul as he wrote the third chapter of 2 Timothy, which is our text for this morning.

Remember that these were Paul's last recorded words. They were written weeks, perhaps even days, before his execution in Rome. For 30 years he had been a faithful ambassador of Jesus Christ. Now he lies in a cramped and dark cell. He's preoccupied, not simply with his present circumstances, but with the future of the gospel. Timothy, his young protégé, is an unlikely candidate to receive the baton from Paul and pass it on to the next generation. Timothy is emotionally timid and physically frail. His faith is barely flickering amidst tremendous opposition. It's in light of all this that Paul unfolds for Timothy the characteristics of the age in which he was to minister. He wants Timothy to know what to expect. Were the present difficulties just some kind of anomaly? Would things ever change? After all, this good news about Jesus WAS a powerful force. Unleashed upon the world, wouldn't it sooner or later take hold and even take over all that stood in its way?

Twenty centuries later we might ask ourselves the same questions, especially as we embark on a New Year. We know how the Christian faith has indeed spread. America, the most powerful nation on earth, was founded upon Christian ideals. But then we see a video like this and we ask ourselves, "In which direction are we moving?" We know that the greatest cathedrals in Europe are Christian, but then we're reminded that they most of them are occupied only by art-loving tourists.

In which direction are we moving? What kind of environment and culture should we expect to live out our faith? Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

"But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with

sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also."

That reads like a summary of the six o'clock news! There are three observations we can make about the kinds of things that we can expect. These are the truths that would brace Timothy for the future.

1. We are in the last days.

The first truth has to do with this phrase "the last days." Many take the phrase, "the last days," to refer to the time just before Christ's return. I've often been asked, in light of wars, famines and earthquakes, if these are not indeed the last days. And my answer is always the same, "Yes." But I would add that Timothy himself lived in the last days as well. Why else would he tell Timothy about this? Is this just theoretical? Why would he say to Timothy in v. 5, "**Avoid such men as these.**"

You see, the biblical usage of that phrase tells us that it refers to the whole period of time between the first coming of Jesus and his second coming. For 2,000 years we've been living in the last days. In Acts 2, we read that on the Day of Pentecost Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel, who said that "in the last days" God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2:17). That, Peter said, was beginning to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, almost 2,000 years ago. The first words of the book of Hebrews confirm this: "**In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**" (Heb 1:1-2). So it is clear that "the last days" is a period which has now grown to 2,000 years' duration.

2. We should expect these days to be difficult and dangerous.

The second observation has to do with the nature of the last days; the kinds of things we can expect to see; the kind of environment we can expect to live in. Paul says "in the last days difficult times will come." The word for "difficult" here can mean both hard to bear and violent or dangerous. The word was used in Classical Greek to

describe dangerous wild animals as well as the raging sea. This will be the characteristic of the days in which we are called upon to minister. Days that are both painful and perilous, difficult and dangerous.

Paul's point is not that these times will be uniformly and continuously evil, but that they will include "seasons" like this. Paul is saying that within this extended period of time there will come repetitive cycles of distress and peril when all the conditions which he describes with these chilling words will take place. As we look back through human history during these last 2,000 years we can see how true that is. Again and again in our world we have had periods of relative peace and prosperity, only to have them interrupted by these terrible times of stress and agony. It's not unlike a ship that has been put out to sea; it's to be expected that there will be times of smooth sailing as well as times when it's buffeted by storms.

I think we could all agree that we live in a time of great stress and difficulty. If the moral temperature of our culture can be read in our youth, then we have cause for concern. I can't help but think of the story of a group of teenage girls who decided to run away from home. One of them had second thoughts and decided to tell her mother. When the others caught wind of it they got upset at her, so they took her out to the woods and stoned her and tied a rope around her neck and hung her. Then what do you think they did? They went to McDonalds and had a milkshake. Her body wasn't found until a week later. We read about that kind of thing all the time. These are the days we live in.

But while we should be shocked we really shouldn't be surprised. This is what Paul told us to expect. In the words of the songwriter, "I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden." We might have seasons of improvement and progress, but it will be a downward spiral.

3. Difficult and dangerous times are the result of depraved people.

A. The real problem: And Paul tells us specifically WHY things will be this way. He says in v. 2, "**For men will be...**" Then we get this long list of 18 qualities of moral degradation through the end of v. 4, describing wicked people who are responsible for this downward spiral.

I was a Social Science major in college and I spent four years studying sociology, psychology, anthropology and all the different social sciences. So much of it was trying to figure out what was wrong with our society. Why was there so much inequality and injustice and oppression? The assumption was that there was something beyond PEOPLE that was

the real cause of these problems. But Paul gives a very simple and straight forward answer to this question. He says difficult and dangerous times are the result of depraved people; people who are estranged from God, whose behavior is self-centered and violent. Who was it that said, "We have met the enemy and he is us." We're the problem.

Instead of going through each of these 18 qualities, which would take all morning, I want to make some general comments about this list.

B. Their misplaced love: Notice how the list begins and ends. The very first two things are that they're "lovers of self and lovers of money," while the very last things on the list is that they're "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." At the very center of the list we're told they are "unloving," speaking of course of their attitudes and actions towards others. What we have here then is a kind of sandwich and a very distasteful one at that. When people love self and money and pleasure more than God the inevitable result is all this stuff you have in the middle - not only will they be unloving, they will be boastful, arrogant, brutal, treacherous, reckless, conceited. The whole thing seems to revolve around a misplaced love. What are the two great commandments? Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. When those two things get replaced with self-love then the slide begins. Even a breakdown in family life is the result. A child who is taught that HE or SHE is the most important thing in the universe will end up disregarding both his parents and others!

Orson Welles was going through customs and he was asked what he had to declare. He answered, "Nothing but my own genius," which is a very humble posture! Some of us fight battles with this. We would like to write a book called, "Humility and How I Attained It." All kidding aside, it's very important to notice something here. Notice that what Paul describes here as a disease is offered today as a cure. Paul says people love themselves too much, but in America we're told that the real cure to all our problems is that we need to love ourselves more. Needless to say, any society is in trouble when it sets forth as a cure what God has called a disease. This is not to say a proper sense of self-worth isn't important. The opposite of self-love is NOT self-hatred. The opposite of self-love is to love God, and when God is at the center of our affections then we will have a proper estimate of our own value and worth.

B. Their form of godliness: Notice something else. In v. 5 it says they hold to a form of godliness but they've denied its power. It would be so nice if we could just point the finger at those big bad pagans out there who are the real cause of the problem. But we can't do that. Paul says that the real problem may be much closer to home. He says these are religious people. They have a form of godliness. They can talk about God with the best of us. They show up to church. They know the language. They know the gig. But they've denied the power of the gospel. Their religion is a

shell and their lives are a sham. This can describe liberal Christianity where the authority of Scripture is denied, or ultra conservative Christianity where the morality of Scripture is held up like a hammer. Either way, there is no sense that God can powerfully transform a life. The bottom line is still self. It's still all about us.

Over the holidays I read a very well-written, insightful and depressing book called *The Poisonwood Bible*. I don't really recommend it. It's the story of a missionary family who traveled to Africa in the 1960's. Their intentions of course were to bring the gospel to Africa, but they really just brought the worst of both American culture and religion. The father was abusive and legalistic. The impression that's left is that the African people were better off without his version of Christianity. But that's always true with legalism. Legalism leaves us dependent on ourselves rather than on God. It focuses on outer conformity to a list of rules rather than the inward transformation of the heart.

That's the kind of thing Paul is talking about here. And by the way, that's the kind of thing Jesus opposed. He indicted the Pharisees because they cleaned the outside of the cup but inside they were full of filth. Again, it was form without power, outward show without inward reality, faith without works. The Scriptures as a whole, and Jesus in particular, reserved his sternest indictment for the most religious people. That's why Paul says in v. 5 to avoid them.

C. Their deceptive methods: Paul also says something about their methods. In verse 6 and 7 he says they not only practice a denial of the gospel but they propagate it. They make their way into houses. The Greek word literally means, "to creep into houses." They're religious creeps who creep into the homes of certain kind of women. He's not saying that all women are like this. But some women in Timothy's church were weak and naïve, mentally unstable and gullible, and burdened by sins. These men chose a time when their husbands are away at work and they prey on these women, a method that is as old as the Fall itself. It happens in the church today as well, as men prey on those who don't have a foundation, who don't know the word of God and haven't learned of the freedom and the cleansing that's in Christ.

In verse 8 he compares the tactics of these false teachers with those of the two magicians who opposed Moses. The names of the two court magicians, Jannes and Jambres, are not mentioned in the Old Testament, but Jewish tradition gives them these names. He says, "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed the truth, so these men also oppose the truth of the gospel. Just as they were depraved and rejected, so are these people who are opposing you."

So there you have a pretty dark picture of the current situation. It's pretty bleak. With all the football on this week, I can't help but think of the coach who tries to give a pregame pep talk to his team, and all he does is

extol the virtues of the opponent and the terrible battle that lay ahead, so much that at the end of his little speech his team looks at him and asks, "Do we even stand a chance? Why should we even step on the field with those monsters?" At this point Timothy might have asked the same question, and so might we. It was imperative that he be prepared for the battle, but after the speech was over, he might have said, "Are we any match for the powers of darkness? If this is what we can expect to face throughout these last days, how can we possibly win?"

But there ARE reasons for encouragement. There must at least have been some encouragement for Timothy in v. 9. Paul says of these evil men and false teachers that just like Jannes and Jambres, eventually their folly will be clear to everyone. The stupidity of Jannes and Jambres was clear for all to see when they couldn't match the power of Moses and duplicate all his miracles. Then everyone saw they weren't worth following. Paul says the same thing will happen here. There's something obviously erroneous about false teachers; religious error simply doesn't have the ring of truth. What happened to the Moonies? What happened to those weird guys that used to dance around at the airports? What happened to the People's Temple? Paul says, "Their folly will be seen by all." So what we really need in this instance is just a little bit of patience to wait it out. God's power is greater. As we wait on him, he will make that clear to all who are willing to look.

Notice also up in v. 5 that Paul described the evil men of the last days as, "**having a form of godliness but denying it's power.**" It strikes me that real godliness, authentic Christianity lived out in a life, has real power! It has the power to transform people from darkness into light. Remember the word Paul used to describe the last days? He said they would be "difficult." In the NT that word is used only in one other place. In Matthew 8 there is a story of two demon-possessed men in an area called the Gadarenes. Matthew says that no one could control him. Matthew says they were so "extremely violent" that no one could pass that way. That's the word Paul uses here. But when Jesus came into that area we're told they came out of the tombs to meet them. And then Jesus saw that the real problem was a spiritual problem and he cast out the demons that were tormenting these men. It's a simple story of the power of God over the powers of darkness. That's why Paul could write, "**I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation...**" (Rom. 1:16). That's why we can be encouraged. Yes, evil, difficult, violent days are upon us, but we've been armed with something far more powerful! "**Greater is he than is in you then he who is in the world**" (1 Jn. 4:4). Our God is committed to

manifesting the greatness of his power in us and through us as we trust in him and share the life changing message about Jesus Christ with others.

On November 9, 2003, a 19-year-old women was baptized. Her testimony demonstrates the power of God.

I choose this day to love and serve Jesus Christ as the Lord, the Messiah - the rest of my life.

My name is Humaira Kahn Kabir [not her real name]. I became a Christian five months ago. When I was seven years old, I moved to Pakistan. I was injured, and I was in a coma. After eight months, I came out of the coma. I was in a wheelchair, my eyes were open, but I couldn't move and I couldn't talk to people at all. At this time in my life, I saw my 18-year-old brother die in front of me.

Every Friday, I went to the mosque and slept there because I didn't have any hope from the doctors that I could walk again or talk. One night I was really upset. I went straight to the picture of Jesus [who is recognized as a prophet in Islam] and started talking to him: "Why did you keep me alive? Why didn't you just kill me? Why did you keep me alive so I could see my 18-year-old brother dying in front of me?" My head was on the floor and I was crying.

Suddenly somebody squeezed my shoulder and said, "I kept you for something special." I looked back and it was the same person who was in the picture.

I fainted.

In the morning I woke up - my grandpa woke me - and he said, "You fell asleep all night on the floor." I looked at him and said, "He was here. He was right here."

My grandpa said, "Who?" Then he said, "Oh my gosh, you're talking again."

I said, "He was right here. Where is he now?"

My grandpa said, "Who?"

"This guy [pointing at the picture of Jesus]. He told me he kept me for something special."

"Sweetie, that's not true, because he died a long time ago. Remember, I told you that story."

I said, "No, I saw what I saw," and I stood up.

My grandpa had a hard time believing me, but there was a part of him that wondered because he saw me talking and walking again.

I kept that memory in my heart, just a vision, and no one believed me at all. Everyone kept laughing at me.

So that's why I chose to get baptized in the name of Jesus, but in my heart I am already baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Evil, difficult, violent days are upon us, but the power of Jesus Christ is greater than all.

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