

Living Differently in the Last Days

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[0 : 0 0] Why don't we just pray for a moment before we look at God's Word. Our Heavenly Father, again we do thank you for your Word and we pray this morning that you would help me to speak faithfully to it.

And again that you might give us minds to understand it and hearts that seek to live in light of it. And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well I thought I'd start this morning with a question.

And the question is this. If you could live anywhere in the world for 30 days, where would you like to live? 30 days, anywhere in the world.

I asked my Bible study group this question the other night over some dinner and one person said Sweden. Another person said Africa, you know visiting places like the Victorian Fours, the Victoria Fours. And some of our friends asked Michelle and I that question once as well.

And Michelle, my wife's answer, said Italy. You know, swanning down a canal on a gondola in the sun. You know, flitting across to other countries to take in their culture and history.

[0 : 5 9] And when they asked me that same question anywhere in the world, I said Marimbula. Anywhere in the world and I choose a little south coast, coastal town.

When I said that, my friends did look at me with some horror as though I was some kind of uncultured brute. But I know how good it is here in Australia, you see. But the point is, no matter where we live in the world, whether it's Italy or Marimbula, we're actually living in the last days.

Wherever we live, we're living in the last days. And because of that, there will be difficult times. Point one, verse one. Paul writes this, chapter three, verse one on your inserts. But know this, difficult times will come in the last days.

Now that phrase, the last days, is the phrase the Bible uses to describe the time between Jesus' first coming and Jesus' second coming. Which means we're actually living in the last days now.

You see, the next big thing on God's agenda before he establishes his kingdom fully and finally here on earth, is the return of Jesus for judgment day. Where Jesus will call everyone to account.

[2 : 1 3] And because we live in this time before the judgment day, which is also known as the last day, then that means those days we're living in before this last day, well, the Bible calls them the last days.

It's as simple as that. We're living in the days before the last day. That's what the Bible says. And Paul says to Timothy, know this. Mark it. Get out your highlighter and take note that there will be difficult times during these last days.

Why? Well, verse two. For or because people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, traitors, conceited, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.

You see, there will be difficult times in these last days because of people. People who are boastful, proud, unholy, slanderers, and the like.

And do you notice how many times the word love comes up there? These people are lovers of self, lovers of money. They are people who are unloving towards others or without love of good.

[3 : 28] They are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. You see, it's all about who you do and don't love. And this is particularly seen by the way Paul begins and ends his list.

Have a look at how he begins the list. Look how he begins the list there in verse two and how he ends the list at the end of verse four. You know, it begins with lovers of self rather than lovers of God.

And between these two loves is a world of difference. And we see this in our own world, don't we? Those people who love themselves, who are selfish, they often tend to be unloving towards others and it causes all sorts of problems.

For example, people who are selfish, it leads to oppression and war. But people who love God, who seek to live his way, it brings about peace.

You see, who we love impacts the way we live. And, you know, for us, there's something in this for us, isn't there? For us who claim to love God, then it ought to impact how we live.

[4 : 35] If we love our Lord Jesus, then it ought to show itself, by the way, that we live a life different to the types of things mentioned in these verses. It ought to show itself by the way we forgive others and love others and are patient with others.

Otherwise, we're just pretending to be Christians. See verse five? It says, people who are lovers of self rather than lovers of God, holding to the form of godliness but denying its power.

Avoid these people, he says. You see, while these verses describe the world around us, Paul actually has a particular group of people in mind. If he was talking about the whole world, then Paul is telling Timothy to avoid the whole world.

And that's pretty hard to do when we're meant to share the gospel with the world. Rather, he has a particular group of people in mind. People who claim to be Christian but don't live it out. And in particular, he has in mind the false teachers who have a form of godliness.

You know, they go through the motions. They say the words. They even get involved in religious discussions. And at first glance, they have the form of godliness. But they don't live it out in their lives. They deny the power of the gospel by the way they live.

[5 : 41] They don't let the gospel impact the way they live and change whom they love. And so in the end, these false teachers are not real Christians. And so Paul says, avoid them.

Last week, we heard Paul tell Timothy to avoid their talk, their babble, if you remember. And here, Paul says to Timothy, avoid them altogether. Have nothing to do with them. Don't support them.

Don't get involved with them. Don't offer hospitality to them. It seems the only time he's to relate to them is to instruct them with gentleness, as we saw in chapter 2, verse 25.

Otherwise, keep clear, Timothy. Why? Because they are dangerous. Again, back in chapter 2, verse 17, we're told that their teaching spreads like gangrene.

I don't know if you've ever seen someone affected by gangrene. I thought about, for a moment, showing you a picture. But it's just far too horrible to show you. The effect these false teachers have is not pretty.

[6 : 37] And so we're to avoid them like the plague, says Paul. For look at what some of them do in verse 6. For among them are those who worm their way into households and capture idle women, burdened down with sins, led along by a variety of passions, always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Paul says that some of these false teachers worm their way into households to capture idle women. Now, the word idle isn't a particularly good translation, I don't think. It literally is little women.

Not little in stature, that is in physically, but rather little when it comes to the things of God, their understanding and maturity about God. And we know this because the rest of verse 6 says that they are burdened with guilt.

They're burdened down with sins and led along by a variety of passions. That is, they're not mature Christians, are they? They don't know the grace that is in Jesus. The grace that brings forgiveness and freedom from guilt and also motivation to be self-controlled.

Now, it's not just women who can be like this, of course. Men are equally susceptible. But from what we understand, it seems like these false teachers preyed on these women for financial support. And the false teachers were kind of like first century gold diggers, if you like.

[7 : 54] They came along, found women who had money, and they wormed their way into their households so that they might get their money. And instead of teaching these women the true gospel that brings a clear conscience and self-control, these false teachers taught them a false gospel that, as we heard last week, leads to even more ungodliness.

And it was probably a gospel that these women liked hearing, because it probably told them that they could follow these passions rather than be self-controlled. But whatever it is that the false teachers taught these women, it wasn't what they needed to hear.

And so verse 7 says that they were always learning, sure, but they never were able to come to a knowledge of the truth. A couple of years ago, I met a young girl who was a friend of someone in my congregation.

This young girl was very enthusiastic about following Jesus. I mean, you know, her enthusiasm and commitment, you know, made me feel guilty. But her enthusiasm wasn't quite matched by her biblical understanding.

She was a young Christian at that time. And in particular, she didn't quite understand grace. She didn't understand that God graciously makes us right with him through Jesus. It's not about what we do.

[9 : 04] It's about what God has done for us through Christ. She didn't quite understand that. And so she worked hard at going to church and doing good at obeying her parents so that she might make herself right with God.

And then towards the end of the year, this would have been the end of 2009, she was approached by a sect called the Christadelphians. I'm not sure if you've ever heard of these people. But they don't believe in the Trinity nor being saved by grace.

But they said to her, look, if you really want to be right with God, and she did, she was really keen, then you come and join us. You follow us. You do what we tell you to do. And part of that meant cutting off all her friends, all her other Christian friends.

It meant coming to church every day of the week and sitting in classes such that she neglected her uni course and started failing exams. And the last I heard, my friend in that congregation had not heard from her again.

We don't even know if she even follows Jesus, if she even knows the true gospel. You see, here are some false teachers who worm their way into this little woman's life, who needed to know about grace, but was taught heresy.

[10 : 13] So while she was always learning, she never really came to a knowledge of the truth. We must be very careful, you see, when we listen to people, including me. Always check what I say, what everyone says, against the Bible.

This is God's word. Always check what it says in the Bible. And if Timothy, a pastor, is to avoid false teachers, then so too are we, I take it. I used to think when the JW's or the Mormons knocked on the door that I had to invite them in.

But you don't have to invite them in. We're to avoid false teachers because they are dangerous. I mean, you wouldn't invite someone holding a gun, who wasn't a police officer, you wouldn't invite someone holding a gun into your house, would you?

Because it would put your physical life in danger. Then why invite someone into your home who would put your spiritual life in danger? We're to avoid these false teachers. For in the end, these false teachers are corrupt in mind, just like Jarnes and Jambres.

See verse 8 and 9? It says, See, this is what the false teachers are like.

[11 : 28] Corrupt in mind. Worthless when it comes to the faith. Now, Jarnes and Jambres were most likely Egyptian magicians who opposed the truth that Moses spoke to Pharaoh.

Do you remember back in Egypt, back in the book of Exodus, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and Moses is sent to Pharaoh, and he says, Look, God is the true God. You know, the Lord alone is God.

Let the people go. And Pharaoh said no. And so Moses performed miracles, or rather God performed miracles through Moses, and the Egyptians matched them for a while, didn't they? We think Jarnes and Jambres were some of those Egyptians.

But could they keep up? They couldn't, couldn't they? They couldn't keep up with the miracles. In the end, the Egyptian magician said, No, no, this is the finger of God. This is the hand of God. And so it was clear to all that Jarnes and Jambres and Pharaoh was on the wrong side.

And Paul is saying, just like these guys back in Egypt, how they were shown to be on the wrong side, so too these false teachers will be shown to be on the wrong side. See what he says in verse 9? But they will not make further progress, for their lack of understanding will be clear to all, just as Jarnes and Jambres was clear to all.

[12 : 41] The false teachers won't get too far. In the end, they will be shown for who they are, just as Jarnes and Jambres were. So don't worry too much. But, but watch out.

Because they are still around in these last days. And so avoid them, says Paul. Timothy is to avoid them, not get sucked in by them or align himself with them. Rather, in order to guard the gospel, Timothy is to live differently to them.

And when this idea of living differently is signaled by the words, but you. See verse 10? But you live like this, you know, different to those people. Or verse 14. But as for you, live like this.

Timothy is to live differently. And the first way to live differently is to live like Paul. Point to verse 10. He says, But you have followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love and endurance, along with the persecutions and sufferings that came to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.

And what persecutions I endured, yet the Lord rescued me from them all, he says. Paul writes to Timothy and says, But you have followed me.

[13 : 51] And not in the sense that Timothy has followed Paul by doing all these things. I mean, Timothy wasn't persecuted in Lystra, for example. Rather, the phrase, you have followed me, means you know all about me and my life, as the NIV footnote suggests.

That is, Timothy has followed Paul like you follow someone's story in a newspaper and listen to them. And so Timothy knows all about Paul and his teaching and conduct, which is very different to the false teachers.

And Timothy also knows all about Paul's love, faith and endurance, as well as his persecutions. And the implication is, Timothy is to live like Paul. It's as though Paul says, Since you know all about my life, then live like me, even if it brings persecution.

In fact, Paul seems to deliberately mention Lystra because this was Timothy's hometown. So he may have even witnessed what happened to Paul those years ago, when the Jews came from Iconium and Antioch to Lystra.

And as we read in Acts 14, I love that picture.

[15 : 01] Paul is stoned to the point of death, but then he gets back up and goes back into the city. And Paul says to Timothy, I'm to be your role model.

It's a big call, isn't it? I'm not sure if you've heard the story of Gladys Stain. Her husband and their family were working in India among the lepers in Orissa, when in January 1999, their husband, Graham, and his two sons, Timothy, age nine and Philip, age seven, were burned to death in their car by a group of Hindu extremists.

It was big news around the world at the time. And shortly after, Gladys was interviewed on TV. And she said, Of course, I am deeply upset by what has happened. But I have one message for the people of India.

I am not bitter, nor am I angry. But I desire that each citizen of this country should establish a relationship with Jesus Christ, who gave his life for their sin. Let us burn hatred and spread the flame of Christ's love.

It's amazing, isn't it? And everyone shocked, she decided to stay with her daughter and to continue the work she had begun with her husband. Church leaders have since said that, as a result of her action, thousands of people began to question their Hindu beliefs.

[16 : 16] And hundreds had become Christians because of the life of the middle-aged Australian widow. I'm not sure who it is that you look up to in life, or whether you have any role models in life.

But Paul says, These are to be our role models. A middle-aged Australian widow, the Apostle Paul, the Lord Jesus himself. These are the people we're to look up to, people who endured persecution for the sake of the gospel and for godliness.

Of course, we won't probably be persecuted like that. I don't think so. Not in Australia. However, look at verse 12. Before we get too comfortable. Verse 12.

In fact, all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Even people and imposters will become worse than being deceived.

Do you notice verse 12? Verse 12 does not say, might be persecuted. Does it? Unfortunately. It says, will be persecuted. As I said, it probably won't be like Paul or even Gladys, but it will happen.

[17 : 17] If we are seeking to live a godly life, which includes standing up for Jesus, being different, and even taking those opportunities to talk about Jesus, then we will be persecuted.

Even if it's through the form of Australian relationships with work colleagues or family members. A lady at my old church was having a birthday party. Her sons were organized for her and they decided to hold it on Sunday morning.

And she said, oh please, can you not do that because I want to go to church. Can we do it on Sunday? And they were saying, don't you think your family is more important? And so they kept it on Sunday morning.

It's a birthday party. And they kept it on Sunday morning. And so she went to church and went to her own party late. It may mean persecution like that.

Of course, we're not going to be deliberately antagonistic, but it's always a good gentleman. And when we do, it sounds different. Then at times, we will be persecuted for it. I'm sure it's not there in John chapter 15, because the verses will come up.

[18 : 18] Now, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it's hated you first. If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world. I have chosen you out of the world.

That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you. No certain is greater than Israel. And so, if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

Now you might not think Jesus is a big mother. You know, come and become a Christian and be persecuted. Yes. But it also goes on to say that it will be worth it in the last day when we stand in glory with him.

And so, if we're never, ever persecuted, then could it be, it may not be, but could it be that we look too much up to the world and not enough like Jesus or Paul or Gladys?

But you live like me, says Paul. Live differently in these last days, different to the world and especially to these false teachers. And point three, and you live in the Bible.

[19 : 20] Verse 14, but as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you and you know that from childhood you have known the sacred scriptures which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man or woman of God may be incomplete, equipped for every good work.

Now, Paul had just said in verse 13 that people will get worse and in particular the false teachers, the imposters will get worse. They will get more resolutely sinful further and further away from the truth.

But Timothy is to continue in the truth, verse 14. He is to remain. The word continue in verse 14 literally means remain, live in the truth. Timothy is to remain in what he has learnt and believed.

And what particularly has he learnt or believed? Well, the true gospel and the Old Testament scriptures he is known from childhood. In other words, he is to remain in the Bible he has, the Old Testament scriptures and the gospel.

[20 : 29] Why? Well, four quick reasons. First, because he knows those who taught him. Remember chapter 1, the faith had been passed down from his grandmother Lois to his mother Eunice and then to him. And he knows these people and he knows the Apostle Paul who taught him the gospel.

He knows these people care for him and love him. They wouldn't mislead him. He can trust them. And so if they taught him the Bible, then it must be important. It must be worth hanging on to.

It must be worth remaining in. So Timothy is to remain in the Bible because he knows those who taught it to him. And secondly, he is to remain in the Bible because it is the Bible that tells us how to be saved.

You see verse 15 again? It says, And how you've known the sacred scriptures which are able to give you wisdom, that is, tell you how, to be saved through faith in Christ Jesus.

The sacred scriptures refer to the Old Testament again. So how does the Old Testament tell us how to be saved? Well, by pointing us to the gospel of Christ. The Old Testament alone does not save, but it points us to the gospel of Jesus who does save us.

[21 : 38] That's why Paul adds at the end of verse 15, you know, give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. It's as though Paul is saying, you, Timothy, know the Old Testament, how it pointed to a promised king who would save you.

And you know the gospel that says Jesus is that promised king. And so by knowing both, you know how to be saved. You know how to tell others to be saved in Jesus.

A friend of mine was 15 years old when he said to his father one Sunday, Dad, I don't want to go to church today. I'd really rather go for a surf. The swell's up. I want to get out there. And his father kind of looked at him and thought rather than battling, he said to him, okay, you can go for a surf, but at first I want you to go up to your room and read your Bible for half an hour.

And so he did. He went upstairs and two hours later he came down, thoroughly converted, wanting to go to church. Now, I'm not sure if you read the Old Testament or the New Testament, but either way, he read about Jesus and was saved.

Maybe I should try that on my own kids when they're naughty. You go to your room and read the Bible for half an hour. It would turn it into a punishment, wouldn't it? But the point is, the Bible shows us how to be saved by trusting in Jesus.

[22 : 49] And if you here this morning don't know salvation, that is, if you don't know you are saved from that last day, that judgment day, then come and speak to me afterwards. I'll sit down with you and read the Bible and show you how to be saved by trusting in Jesus.

Well, Timothy is to live in the Bible for it gives wisdom for salvation by pointing us to Jesus. And third, he is to remain in the Bible because all Scripture is ultimately from God. See verse 16?

All Scripture or every Scripture is inspired by God or is God breathed. So although the Bible is penned by human authors, it was God who inspired these authors to write what he wanted them to write.

And so every Scripture is ultimately from God. It's why we rightly call the Bible God's Word. And since it is God's Word, then it is the ultimate authority in life.

Above our reason, above our culture, even above our tradition. God's Word sets the standard, not the Pope, not our Archbishop, not our society, nor even us.

[23 : 54] Timothy is to remain in the Word because it's ultimately from God. And finally, Timothy is to remain in the Bible because it's what trains him in righteousness or right living. You see, because God knows the right way to live, then what he says in the Bible can train us to live that right way.

As it says in verse 16 and 17, he says, the Bible is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man or person of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

I'm still going to add to the personal trainer. I was a bit unfit and I was keen to get fit again when I was taking a personal trainer. This trainer offered training strength, endurance, weight loss and body sculpting.

I don't like it, but I don't like it. But I don't like it. I don't like it. I don't like it. I don't like it. I don't like it. I don't like it. I don't like it. I don't like it.

God's thoughts after him. Are we in a Bible study group so that we can help one another listen to God and be molded by God? Are we making every effort to come to church each week to encourage each other and hear again from God's word?

[25 : 34] In fact, I had someone here who normally comes to the 10 o'clock service deliberately come to 8 a.m. this morning because they were going to miss 10 o'clock. They wanted to come so that they could hear God's word again. Is that what we're doing?

And not only to hear it, but also to obey it. In life. Now, I know many of you are doing this, which is terrific. Keep going. But if you struggle to read your Bible, then please talk to me after the service and I can point you to some resources which are quite helpful.

And if you're not in a Bible study group but would like to be in a Bible study group, I actually have a room in mine. Come and speak to me. Come and join our group. And let's study the Bible. The importance of the Bible.

And let's keep encouraging one another to read it and about it. Where do I choose to read it? And how do we finish? I start this morning with the question, where would you live in the world during the last day?

My important question is, how will you live in the world during these last days? What does it mean if you live in the world?

[26 : 40] And live in the world? Let's pray. Christ, we thank you for role models like Jesus, Paul, Gladys, who sought to live the good of life even despite persecution.

Father, may we emulate these models in our own lives. And Father, we thank you also for your word which continues to teach, correct, rebuke, and train us that we might be people of righteousness.

Father, help us to live like Paul and to live in your word. And we ask it ultimately for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to sing again.