

Living in the Last Days

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[0 : 00] You could keep your Bibles open at 2 Timothy chapter 3. Why don't I pray for us before we begin.

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight for the building up of your church. We pray this, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Well, tonight I thought I'd start with a question. It's a question that my wife and I were asked one time. The question is this. If you could live anywhere in the world for 30 days on the cheap for free, where would you live?

Anywhere in the world for 30 days for free, where would you live? Actually, one minute. Person next to you. Go. Someone straight away.

Paris. All right, that'll do. I don't want to breed envy. When we were talking with our friends, I don't know how it came up, but one of them was saying they'd like to visit Africa and places like the Victoria Falls, if you've ever heard of those.

[1 : 16] When our friends asked Michelle, she said, Italy, swanning down a canal on a gondola in Venice, and then just skipping across the neighboring countries to soak up the history and culture.

And they asked me where I'd like to go, anywhere in the world, and I said, Marimbula. Yes, seriously.

Seriously. There were all types, just like there are types who like that silly song contest. I mean, that fascinating song contest. My wife's a big fan of that. Anyway, my friends did have the same response.

They looked at me like I was an uncultured brute. But here's the point. In the end, it doesn't matter where we live in the world, because wherever we live, we'll be living in the last days.

So it's not so much about where, but when. And this is Paul's point in the passage tonight, and how we are to live in these last days. Because in these last days, there'll be terrible times.

[2 : 26] It's pretty depressing, isn't it? So at point one, verse one, have a look there in your Bibles, and see Paul, who says it very simply. He says, but mark this, there will be terrible times in the last days.

Now, the phrase last days is used in the Bible to describe the time between Jesus' first coming, with his death and resurrection, and his second coming, his return. In between those arrivals of Jesus lie the last days.

And so no matter where we live in the world, we are living in the last days. Now, the days before Jesus returns to fully judge and fully save, bring in salvation, his kingdom in full.

And so Paul says to Timothy, know this, verse one, mark this, get your highlighter out and underline it. There will be terrible times in this last days.

Why? Well, verse two. You see, there will be terrible times because, well, frankly, there will be terrible people.

- [3 : 49] It's depressing stuff, actually. And the main cause of all this behavior is because of whom we love. Do you see, the main cause is whom we love.
- It starts off this list about lovers of self, and it ends with not lovers of God. And throughout, you've got this repetition of what you do and don't love. It's all about whom we love.
- For whom we love will impact how we live. In other words, there will be terrible times because people love the wrong person. They love self rather than God. And we see this in our world, don't we?
- Where love of self leads to conflict and evil of all kinds. I mean, even this afternoon, there was a fight in my house because one child wanted to watch something on TV, while another child wanted to use it to play the Wii.
- Of course, their solution was, Dad, you should just buy another TV. I love it as my fault. But I said, no, you should just love the other person more than yourself. I don't think it sunk in.
- [4 : 57] But loving God leads to loving your neighbor, while loving self leads to fighting your neighbor. From fighting over the TV to murdering a 17-year-old girl down the road to bombing another country and everything in between.
- Whom we love impacts how we live. And so for us who claim to love God, then it ought to show itself by living a life very different to the people described in that verse or those verses.
- It ought to show itself in the way we forgive others, care for others, and serve God. Just as I see many of you doing here at 6pm, which is terrific. Because otherwise, we're just pretending to be Christians, aren't we?
- Verse 5. He says, These people have a form of godliness, an outward appearance of godliness, but they deny its power. And Paul says that Timothy have nothing to do with such people.
- You see, to have a form of godliness means you appear godly, you appear religious. These people look like Christians on the outside, but they're not really Christians on the inside.
- [6 : 05] Now I need to say that at this point, Paul has actually gone from talking about people in general to a specific group. Verse 5, literally, sorry, verse 6 literally says, no, forget that, I've jumped ahead.
- Rewind. He's talking about people, even people who call themselves Christians, who have a form of godliness on the outside, but deny its power. Now what is its power? Well, I take it, it's the spirit of God.
- So come with me back a page to chapter 1, verse 7. And we saw this a couple of weeks ago. So, chapter 1, verse 7, it says, For the spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.
- So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. You see, the spirit is God's power.
- But these people deny the spirit because they love themselves rather than God. Because they trust in their own version of the gospel where they are king, instead of trusting in the true gospel where Jesus is king.
- [7 : 23] And so Timothy is to avoid them altogether, to have nothing to do with these pretend Christians. Don't support them, don't spend time with them, don't condone what they do, don't offer hospitality to them.
- In fact, it seems the only time he has to relate to them is to instruct them with gentleness, to stop, as we saw last week. Now, while he describes anyone who pretends to be a Christian, Paul does have a particular group in mind.

This is where we come to verse 6 that I mentioned before. Verse 6 literally starts with, For among them are the kind. Okay, so he's talking about people in general, some of whom claim to be Christian, it seems, but are like this.

And then he says, From among that big group are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Here, Paul, it seems, focuses on false teachers who worm their way into households and literally capture these gullible women.

[8 : 36] Now, just to be clear, it could refer to gullible men as well. Us blokes are just as gullible. But in Timothy's situation, women seem to be targeted by these false teachers.

Whether it's because they were widows, women often live longer than men, still do, I think. And so perhaps they were widows and the false teachers were after their money, we're not sure. But they certainly seem to be targeted. And the sad thing is that these women, it seems like they want to have God in their lives.

They want some sort of spiritual comfort. They want some sort of release from the burden of their sins. Because it says they are always learning. They want to learn about God. But the horror of the situation is that they will never come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved, it says, because of these false teachers.

And we see this in America, well, not just America, but you see it in America, where people are searching, so they attend some sort of faith service run by one of those TV evangelists or something like that, who weasel money from them in return for lies, essentially.

We've had people come to us here at HGD, I know two single mums off the top of my head, who were at other churches for a long time where they were fed falsehoods for money. Thankfully, they've both got out, and at least one of them, I'm certain, as much as I can be certain, has come to a genuine knowledge of the truth, the gospel.

[10 : 02] The point is, in these last days, there will be not just pretend Christians, but there will be these false teachers who take advantage of people who are searching. It's real, it happens. And so be wary of them, for they stop those who are searching from coming to a knowledge of the truth and being saved.

These false teachers are actually ensuring people go to hell, if I can put it as starkly and truthfully as that. So do be wary of them. Pray for them.

In fact, when I see Mormons or JW's walking down the streets, I try and pray three things. Firstly, I pray that they might come to a knowledge of the truth themselves. Second, and I might get in trouble for this one, I'm sure they're nice people, but I actually pray that they will be rejected by every single door they knock on.

And thirdly, I pray the doors that are knocked on might actually get the people inside thinking about spiritual things, that they might actually find the truth. They're the kind of things I try and pray when I see these sorts of false teachers around.

The good thing, however, is that their impact will not belong, and they will be held accountable. So verse 8 and 9. Just as Yanez and Jambres oppose Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth.

[11 : 17] They are men of depraved minds who, as far as the truth is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

Now, Yanez and Jambres, I have no idea if that's how you're supposed to pronounce it, they were most likely brothers, though, and Egyptian magicians.

So if you remember the story where God sent Moses to Pharaoh to let his people go to say that the Lord is the true God, they had some magicians there. And they opposed Moses.

They opposed the truth that the Lord alone is God. Now, these men are not named in the Old Testament, but they are named in early Jewish writings, and so this identity seems to be widely accepted.

Most people would say this is who they are, Egyptian magician brothers back in the time of Moses. But as I said, the good news is that the impact of these men will not be too long, for people will see their lives for what they are.

[12 : 18] So in Exodus, God starts sending these extraordinary plagues, you might remember. He starts off with a staff that turns into a snake. The Egyptian magicians can do it as well. He sends another plague, and the magicians can do that one as well.

But I think it's about the third, second or third plague, where they can't match God anymore. And the magicians actually say to Pharaoh, no, no, this is the hand of God. And because they are pretenders, they are found out, you see.

And so Paul says, it's the same for these false teachers. Because they are just pretenders, they're not real Christians, then they are not only rejected, as far as the truth is concerned, but their impact will not be long.

They will be found out. Of course, often these false teachers are around long enough to still do damage. I've heard some stories of these kind of cults, like Mormons, who deliberately target overseas students down at East Doncaster College, secondary college.

And because the students don't know any better, they are dragged away from the truth. Over a period of time, most of them work it out, I'm told. They work out that these guys are dodgy.

[13 : 28] But by that stage, they're not interested in hearing anything, including the true gospel. And so Timothy is to avoid these pretenders and live differently to them, so that he might guard the gospel.

And living differently to them means living like Paul, which is point two on your outlines in verse 10. He says, You, Timothy, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.

What kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra? The persecutions I endured, yet the Lord rescued me from all of them, he says. Paul starts at verse 10 here by saying, but you, literally, but you.

And he'll say the same thing again in verse 14, literally, but you. And he actually says the same thing again in chapter 4, verse 5, but you. And so you've got these three sections that start with the phrase, but you.

And each time, it comes with a different instruction for Timothy about how he is to live differently to those false teachers, how he is to live differently in these last days. And here in verse 10, living differently to the false teachers means living like Paul.

[14 : 45] Paul says, you know all about my teaching, Timothy, my life, my purpose, my faith, love, endurance, and my sufferings. The implication is, now that you know all about it, live like it.

Follow my example. Paul is saying, copy or emulate my life, including even the persecutions it brings. And I suspect that Paul deliberately includes Lystra there because this is Timothy's hometown.

So Timothy may have even witnessed what happened to Paul. And where the Jews came from Iconium in Antioch, they came to Lystra. And on the next slide from Acts chapter 14, we read, they won the crowd over, they stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city thinking he was dead.

And then the next sentence, but after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back in to the city for some more. Not more stoning, more preaching.

Paul is stoned to the point of death, perhaps even death. It's not clear when it says the disciples gathered around him whether they actually prayed and he came back to life. It's hard to tell. But he gets up, goes back into the city, continues his ministry.

[15:57] And he says to Timothy, you live like me. I'm your role model. It's a big call, isn't it? I'm not sure if you've heard the story of Gladys Staines.

I may have mentioned it once before, although not at this service, I don't think. I think we've got a slide, a picture of her on the next slide. Here's Gladys. Her husband and their family were working in India among the lepers in Orissa when in January 1999, her husband Graham and his two sons, Timothy, aged nine and Philip, aged seven, were burned to death in a car by a group of Hindu extremists.

There was huge news around the world at the time. Shortly after, Gladys was interviewed. This is what she said. 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. And to everyone's shock, she decided to stay with her daughter, her remaining child, and continue the work she and her husband began.

[17:17] And church leaders have since said, since 1999, that as a result of her reaction, thousands of people began to question their beliefs, and thousands have become Christians because of the life of this middle-aged Australian widow.

I am not sure who you look up to in life, or whether you look up to anyone, but these are the types of Christians who 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, the people who endured persecution for the sake of the gospel and godliness. It will look different for us. Our gospel ministry will be different to those people.

Of course it will. But look at the promise of verse 12. Paul moves from the specific application of Timothy to everyone. Verse 12, in fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

While evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. Verse 12 does not say might be persecuted.

[18:32] It says everyone will be persecuted. Everyone who wants to live a godly life. As I said, it probably won't be like Paul or even Gladys, but it will happen. If we are seeking to live a godly life which includes standing up for Jesus, being different in these last days, talking of Christ, then we will be persecuted.

Of course, we're not to be deliberately antagonistic, not to go out looking for a fight. Rather, we're always to speak with gentleness and respect. But when we do, when we stand out as different, people don't like different.

persecution will come subtly often, but it will come. In fact, on the next slide, Jesus himself said in John 15, remember the words I spoke to you. No servant is greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. So if we are never ever persecuted, then could it be, I hope it's not, but could it be because we look too much like the world and not enough like our master, the Lord Jesus?

There are some kids at my daughter's school who have picked on both my daughters this year. They pick on my older daughter because she goes to J kids here at church, so a Christian thing, and they pick on my younger one because she's her sister, and so Christian family as well.

[19 : 57] And so even at the age of nine these bullies are, age nine, evil does not like the light. even at age nine they bully those who are different to them. And I kind of fluctuate between being angry, to being upset, to being, dare I say it, glad, because it means they are living differently in these last days.

They stand out as Christians. They say to their friends, I go to church. And as Jesus said on the next slide, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven. For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. And so Paul is saying to Timothy, in order to guard the gospel, Timothy is to live differently.

He's to be wary of the false teachers and he's to live differently, firstly by living like Paul in these last days, even if it involves persecution. And point three, Timothy is also to live in the word.

Have a look at verse 14. Verse 14, but as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it, he says.

[21 : 17] Unlike the false teachers, Timothy is to continue, verse 14, or literally remain or abide, live in what he has learned, live in what he's become convinced of.

And so the question is, what has he learned and become convinced of? Well, it's the gospel, of course, the news about Jesus, the message that Jesus died for our sins on the cross, rose again as king of all people, so that those who believe and trust in Christ will be forgiven and given life eternal.

Timothy has learned this truth, he's become convinced of this truth, and it's this truth that Timothy is to guard by living in it, remaining in it. And then Paul gives two reasons why Timothy is to live in this truth.

The first is because he knows those who taught him, it says in verse 14. That reminds us of chapter one, doesn't it? The faith that was passed down to Timothy from his grandmother Lois, to his mother Eunice, and then to him.

It was also taught by Paul. Timothy knows these people, he knows they are trustworthy, and so he knows what they teach is truth, that they believe it. And so continue in that truth, says Paul, live in that gospel word, because you know those who taught you are trustworthy.

[22 : 32] The second reason he is to live in it, is because the word of the gospel, well, he's become convinced of it himself. He knows the scriptures from infancy, which point to this gospel.

So verse 15, he says, and, this is the second reason, how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise, for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The phrase holy scriptures here refers to the Old Testament. That's what Timothy was taught since infancy, and so the question is, how does the Old Testament teach us how to be saved, make us wise for salvation?

Well, by pointing us to the gospel of Jesus. Passages that you know well, like Isaiah 53, the man who was pierced for our transgressions, or Genesis 15, Abraham was declared righteous by faith, and so on.

The Old Testament alone does not save, but it points us to the gospel of Christ, which does save. That's why Paul adds at the end of verse 15, that the scriptures give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[23 : 41] And Timothy knows this, he's checked it out for himself, and he's become convinced of it. of course, we have even more than Timothy had, don't we? Not only do we have people who taught us the gospel, not only do we have the Old Testament as Timothy did, but we also have the whole New Testament as well.

We have the whole Bible, which is reliable. There are good reasons for trusting the reliability of the Bible. You can ask me later about them. But the point here is that we have even more to believe the truth, to be convinced of it, that we might live in this gospel word too.

In fact, a friend of mine was 15 years old when he said to his father on Sunday, I don't want to go to Sunday school today or church, the teenage group, I want to go for a surf instead. And so his father said, okay, but I want you to read your Bible for half an hour first.

And so he went upstairs, and two hours later, he came back down thoroughly converted, he said, from reading the Bible. True story.

I should send my kids to their room to read their Bible a bit more often. No, no, you don't want to turn it into a punishment. But the point is, the Bible does make us wise for salvation, does point us to Jesus, tells us how to be saved by having faith in Christ.

[25 : 01] And if you are here this evening and you don't know salvation, if you're not sure where you are headed after you die, then please talk to me or Mark. Please think about trusting Jesus, because the promise of the Bible is that you trust in Jesus, you can be certain of life eternal.

Paul's point here is you Timothy, you've known those trustworthy people who taught you the gospel, you've known the Old Testament since childhood and how it points to the gospel itself, the king who would save us, you've seen it for yourself, how Jesus fulfills all these promises, you know the gospel word is true, and so live in this gospel word, continue in, abide in it.

In fact, he is to live in all of God's word. Why? Well, because it is God's word, and because it is useful. So, verse 16, have a look at verse 16, last two verses. He says, all scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul says, all scripture is inspired by God, God-breathed, and so that although the Bible is penned by human authors, God is the ultimate author. It is God's word.

And since it is God's word, then it has the ultimate authority in our lives, above what the world says, the culture says, above what tradition says, above what we say.

[26 : 28] I'm talking to people even at our church who are still struggling on certain issues that the Bible says one thing on and they want to believe another.

They just find it really hard to put the Bible as the ultimate authority. I understand that, but if it is God's word, that's what it is. It's God's. He's the ultimate authority.

And so we have to live in it because it is his word. It sets the standard for how we live. But what's more, the word of God is also useful because it trains or equips us in godliness. It's the primary means by which the spirit works, the spirit who is God's power, you remember.

And so instead of rejecting the word as the false teachers did and denying God's power for godliness, we are to accept the word of God and by doing so allow the spirit to powerfully work within us to help us grow in godliness, be equipped for every good work.

And this is true not just for Timothy but for all of us. He talks about equipping the servant, any servant of God. We are to continue or live in God's word, bathe ourselves in it, mark, learn and inwardly digest it as the whole preachers would say so that we might be trained by it, equipped for every good work.

[27 : 44] I saw an ad for a personal trainer, I think it was last year, I was just thinking I should try and get fit. Anyway, I wondered how much it was and this ad says it trains you in strength, endurance, weight loss and body sculpting.

I wasn't sure about this body sculpting thing, I was just keen to get fit so I actually rang up and got some prices for 10 sessions, \$760. dollars. But I tell you what, I can get you this trainer for free.

And it has much more value, doesn't it? So please do read your Bibles. It is the primary means by which God saves, encourages, governs, trains, equips.

It's why the largest part of our service is given over to the hearing and explaining of God's word. It's why we encourage people to join Bible study groups, read the Bible one to one and on your own.

For it is God's word that saves us by pointing us to the Lord Jesus and it is God's word that trains us for an eternity of godly living, which we were created to live. And if you need help, then please speak to Mark or myself, we've got resources and we can help you in some way I'm sure.

[29 : 01] Live in the word, the gospel word and the whole word of God which points to that gospel. Let me finish. I started with the question, where would you live in a world for 30 days?

But as I said, the more important question is how will you live in the world during these last days? For Timothy, he is to be wary that there will be terrible times and so he is to live differently to the rest of the world.

He is to live like Paul who suffered for the gospel and he is to live in the word so that he might continue in the truth, guard the gospel and be thoroughly equipped for every good work. And these instructions are the same for us as well.

Because each time Paul applies it to Timothy, he then broadens it to everyone else. He says anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus must be prepared for persecution.

Every servant is thoroughly equipped by God's word. So whether you live in Paris or Marimbula or Doncaster, be alert for we are living in the last days and live differently to the world around us.

[30 : 07] Live like Paul being willing to suffer for the gospel and live in the word of the gospel. God's word that is powerful to change and equip you for every good work.

Keep living differently in these last days while we wait for Christ to return on the last day. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you that we are not alone during these last days to live differently but that your power, your spirit is at work in us to help us and equip us and you have given us your word through which your spirit works to help us and equip us.

And so father we pray that you would help us to live differently in these last days to live like Paul who is willing to suffer for the gospel and to live in your word that we might continue to be trained and equipped by it and so live lives pleasing to you.

And we pray all these things in Jesus name. Amen.