

The Last Days

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if I could, this evening, for a short while, and with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, 2 Timothy chapter 3.

2 Timothy chapter 3, and if we just read from the beginning. 2 Timothy chapter 3.

And verse 1, where Paul writes, Treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

Avoid such people. I don't know about you, but I find Paul's statement here the most solemn and in many ways the most scary statement in the Bible.

Because Paul is depicting and describing for Timothy the last days before the second coming of Jesus Christ. But the day that Paul is depicting and describing, it isn't a bright and beautiful day.

[1 : 5 0] It's a dark and difficult day. And what's more is that Paul emphasises and he explains to Timothy that this dark and difficult day will not only be present and prevalent in the world, but it will also be present and prevalent in the church.

Because in the last days, says Paul, the church of Jesus Christ will reflect and replicate these solemn and scary sins that Paul mentions here.

Which is why Paul makes this solemn and, I'll call it a scary statement. Because what Paul is saying to Timothy is, Timothy, understand this.

Timothy, understand this. In the last days, there will be difficult days. There will be dangerous days. And there will be dark days for the church.

In the last days, there will be difficult days, dangerous days, and dark days for the church. And there are our three headings this evening. Difficult, dangerous, and dark days for the church.

[2 : 5 9] So first of all, difficult days. There will be difficult days for the church. He says in verse 1, But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

We've said and we've seen before in our study of 2 Timothy that Paul considered himself as a father figure of the faith to young Timothy. In chapter 1, Paul referred to Timothy as his beloved child.

And then at the beginning of chapter 2, Paul referred to Timothy again as his child in the faith. And although Paul was not Timothy's biological father, he was certainly Timothy's biblical father.

He was a biblical father who sought to exhort and encourage Timothy to be a fearless and a faithful pastor and preacher of the gospel. Also that the gospel baton will be passed on to the next generation.

Because as Paul has told us before, this gospel, it is the power of God unto salvation. And so as a father figure in the faith, Paul loved Timothy.

[4 : 05] And he looked out for young Timothy. And understandably, Paul would have wanted to protect Timothy. Just like a parent would want to protect their children from all the solemn and scary things in the world.

But Paul knew that as he sat in his dark and damp and dismal dungeon awaiting his death, Paul knew that he couldn't protect Timothy any longer.

Which is why he doesn't soften or even sugarcoat this scary and solemn statement. Paul doesn't cover it up. He doesn't conceal the truth about the last days.

He just tells him how it's going to be. And he says, Timothy, the last days will be difficult days. They will be dangerous days. And they will be dark days for the church.

They will be difficult, dangerous and dark days. And you know, we're familiar with this phrase, the last days. Because as you know, we're already living in the last days.

[5 : 08] Our Bible teaches us that the last days are the days after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus until the second coming of Jesus. Which means that we're already living in this period between the cross and the second coming of Jesus.

We're living in the last days. And we've been living in the last days for nearly 2,000 years. And during that time, as Jesus prophesied and as Jesus proclaimed would happen, during that time there have been many who have been led astray by dishonesty and by deception from false teachers.

There have been many where worldliness and ungodliness has crept in. And it has caused them to fall away. It has caused them to lose sight of their faithfulness and their focus upon the second coming of Jesus Christ.

You know, in fact, the problem started less than 40 years after the resurrection of Jesus. 40 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter wrote to the early church.

He wrote to the churches and he exhorted and encouraged the church to remain faithful and remain focused upon Jesus. Peter said in his letter, he said, And they'll say to you, they'll question and query, they'll say, Where is his coming?

[6 : 39] Where is the promise of his coming? But don't listen to them. Don't listen to them, says Peter. Peter says, Because with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years.

And a thousand years is as one day. Therefore, the Lord is not being slow, says Peter, to fulfill his promise about the second coming and the end of the world. No, the Lord is being patient.

The Lord has been patient towards you. Because he's not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance.

He's not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance. We're in the last days. But of course, there will be last days to the last days.

But you know, what Paul highlights here to Timothy is that there will be times and seasons in the last days where being a Christian will be very challenging.

[7 : 41] That's what he says. He says, understand this. Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. Timothy, you need to realize this.

I'm going soon. Timothy, you need to remember this. You need to know this. I want you to know this and not be naive about it. Timothy, in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

There will be difficult days for you. There will be difficult days. And you know, that word difficult or come times of difficulty, the last word there in verse 1 that Paul uses, it's a word that expresses and explains that the last days will not only be difficult and dangerous and dark.

He's saying that the last days will be. He's saying that the last days will be volatile and violent days. The last days will be fierce and ferocious days.

The last days will be hard and hostile days. The last days will have anger and antagonism towards the gospel.

[8 : 47] Understand this, Timothy. In the last days there will come times of difficulty. In fact, that word difficulty or difficult that Paul uses here, it's only used one other place in the New Testament.

It's used in Matthew chapter 8. You remember there when Jesus, he meets Legion, who as you know, was demon possessed.

And before Jesus heals Legion from his demon possession, Matthew tells us that Legion was difficult. He was volatile and violent.

He was fierce and ferocious. He was hard and hostile to Jesus. He was angry and antagonistic towards the Son of God and towards everyone who came near him.

No one could pass Legion by without him attacking or ambushing them. Legion was difficult because he was demon possessed. And you know, in many ways, that's the image Paul is giving to us here.

[9 : 56] He's using the same word that Jesus used to describe Legion. And he's saying that in the last days there will come a time when things will be so difficult and so dangerous and so dark that it will seem as if people are not thinking in their right mind.

But the God of this world has blinded their minds in unbelief. They will be, as it was for Legion, they will be demon possessed.

My friend, in the last days, Paul is reminding us that the devil will be powerful. He will be present. He will be prevalent. And he will be powerful, present and prevalent within the countries of this world, within the communities of our nation, and even within the churches of our nation.

In the last days, there will be difficult days where the devil is raging and rampant. But as Paul says, secondly, there will also be dangerous days.

There will be dangerous days. In the last days, there will be difficult days and there will be dangerous days. So secondly, dangerous days. Look at verse 2. It doesn't make for good reading.

[11 : 12] It really doesn't. He says, People will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.

Do you know, as Paul continues his solemn and scary statement about the last days, he says that the power and prevalence of the devil, it will manifest itself and it will make itself known in people.

People will be the problem. People will be the problem. And people will be the problem, he says, because they will be lovers of self, rather than lovers of God.

And if you notice, that's how Paul bookends this solemn and scary statement about the last days. Because he begins in verse 2, saying that people will be lovers of self.

That's the first bookend. And the evidence and the effect of that love of self is in between. He says they'll be lovers of money, they'll be proud and arrogant and abusive and disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure.

[12 : 42] And then he bookends, at the other end of it, this solemn and scary statement. He says in verse 4, saying that they will not be lovers of God. Timothy, in the last days, people will be the problem.

And people will be the problem because people will be lovers of self rather than lovers of God. People will be lovers of self rather than lovers of God.

Which, as you know, is the complete opposite of all that God intended for us. Because our catechism teaches us, question 1, what is the chief end of man?

Our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Our chief end is not to glorify self and enjoy self forever.

We were created to love the creator, not to love ourselves as the creature. And you know, in many ways, that's why the Jews were given the Shema.

[13 : 44] They were given the Shema, which they were to read and recite each morning and evening, because, as Jesus explained, he said that the Shema contains the greatest commandment.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength.

And the second greatest commandment, as this says Jesus, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment, says Jesus, greater than these.

Therefore, we're not to love self. We're to love God and we're to love one another. We're to love our neighbour. And our love for God and our love for others is not to be as much as we love ourselves.

It's to be more than that. Our love for God and our love for others is to be as much as Jesus loved us and gave himself for us.

[14 : 44] That's what Jesus said in John 13. Love one another as I have loved you. Love one another as I have loved you. But as you know, loving self or being a lover of self, it isn't something new.

It has been around for centuries. It's been around for centuries. Because we've all heard of narcissism. We've all heard of narcissism, which is the love of self.

A narcissist is someone who loves themselves. They have a selfish and self-centred, self-absorbed, self-consumed personality.

They don't tell you that they're like that, but they are lovers of self. But you know, the idea of narcissism, it comes from Greek mythology, where there was a hunter, a hunter called Narcissus, who was known for his beauty.

But Narcissus, he rejected all the romantic advances of the women who came to him and wanted to marry him. And he rejected all these women in favour of himself. Because Narcissus fell in love with himself.

[15 : 53] And he fell in love with himself while looking at his own reflection in a pool of water. He fell in love with his own image. And the Greek myth goes that he fell in love with himself so much that he fell into the pool and drowned in it.

Of course, it's Greek mythology. But it's not far from the truth. Because narcissism, or the love of self, it's prevalent and it's present.

In our generation. One commentator said, We are the generation of the selfie. We are the generation of the selfie.

Because in the 21st century, we can't go anywhere, we can't do anything, we can't spend time with anyone without taking a selfie. We're the generation of the selfie.

This commentator went on to say that we're obsessed with image and Instagram. We're obsessed with selfies and Snapchat. Another journalist said, Selfies are an attempt to mark our short existence and hold it up to others as proof that we are here.

[17 : 07] This is narcissism at its worst, they said. Where we become our own biggest fans and our private paparazzi.

But more than that, we not only save our selfies on our phones and we secure our selfies in our memory, but we also send our selfies to other people.

We publish and post our selfies on social media so that everyone can know exactly who I am and where I am and what I am doing at that particular moment in time.

And that by looking at my selfie, they can either like it or love it or loathe it. Better still, they can comment on it, they can critique it or they can criticise it.

You know, we live in an interesting generation, don't we? Because we're the generation of the selfie. We're the generation of the selfie. And sadly, self has become the place of worship today.

[18 : 14] Self has become the place of worship today. And that's what Paul is saying here. Paul is saying, Timothy, in the last days, there will be dangerous days because people will actually worship themselves.

People will be lovers of self rather than lovers of God. Now, I've mentioned to you before Tim Chester's little book, Will You Be My Facebook Friend?

And I mentioned it again to you because I find it so convicting and so challenging to read. As Tim Chester, he highlights the delights and also the dangers of using social media.

And in his little book, he writes, he says, For countless people, using social media is not a problem. For many, it's all blessing. But there are dangers, he says.

Dangers in social networking. And he writes, here are some of the possible warning signs. So I'll just quote you the warning signs.

[19 : 15] Do you check your social media more than once or twice a day? Do you spend more than 20 minutes? That's all he gives us. 20 minutes a day on social media.

Do you find it difficult to imagine a day without technology? Have you ever read a text or gone online during a church gathering?

I hope not. Have you stayed up beyond normal bedtime because you were on social media? Do you use your mobile phone during meals or keep it in the bedroom?

Those, says Tim Chester, those are some of the warning signs. Because as Tim Chester goes on to explain in his book, he says, On social media, we can recreate our appearance.

And we can receive our approval. Here then, he says, is the test of whether you are facing this danger. Is your social media self, whether it's on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or Snapchat or whatever the young people use nowadays.

[20 : 23] Is your social media self more attractive and more appealing than your real and regular self? Are you trying to find your identity in self?

Or are you trying to find your identity as you should as a Christian in Christ? Are you looking for approval from others? Or are you looking for approval from God through his word?

And you know, they're very convicting, very challenging questions, aren't they? That's why I've said before, that's why I'd encourage you to read Tim Chester's little book. It'll take you probably half an hour. So if you haven't read it before, read it.

Will you be my Facebook friend? Will you be my Facebook friend? Because Paul is saying to Timothy, Timothy understand this. Understand this.

In the last days, there will be difficult days. There will be dangerous days. And there will be dark days. There will be dark days for the church. That's what we see lastly. In the last days, there will be dark days.

[21 : 26] Difficult days, dangerous days, and dark days. Dark days. We'll read it from the beginning again. I know it doesn't make for good reading.

But it's to emphasize to us the importance of understanding it. That's what Paul is saying. Understand this. That in the last days, there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Having the appearance of God. But denying its power. Avoid such people. You know, when I read this statement, this Solomon's scary statement by Paul about the last days.

You know, a reminder of what John wrote in his gospel. John chapter 3. John writes, this is the judgment. This is the judgment that light has come into the world.

But people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil. For everyone who does evil, writes John, everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

[23 : 05] Even as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, if the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness? And that's what Paul is saying to Timothy.

Timothy, in the last days, there will be dark days for the church. There will be dark days for the church. People will love darkness. The darkness of this world rather than the light of the world that is Jesus Christ.

People will be lovers of self rather than lovers of God. And sadly, you know, the love of self, it has manifested and made itself known in our generation through the agenda of the LGBT.

And I make, I'm not ashamed to highlight it. Because they claim and they convince many of our children, our children to think, I have the right to define who I am and what I am.

I have the right to be happy according to my own way and my own terms. They're convincing and confusing this generation, the generation of self.

[24 : 22] You know, I've mentioned to you before, I was at the Keswick Convention this year. And with this, I'll close. This year, Alistair Begg, if you've never heard of Alistair Begg, I'm sure you have.

A great speaker. But this year, he was speaking on 2 Timothy. And when he came to this passage, his message was so powerful. You can actually find a clip of this message on YouTube.

Because Alistair Begg, he makes this statement. And he says, During the past quarter of a century, our nation, Britain, has undergone an immoral revolution.

During the past quarter of a century, our nation has undergone an immoral revolution. And he highlights, he says that in 1988, so the year after I was born, In 1988, the British Parliament in Westminster passed a law banning schools from teaching homosexuality, calling it a pretend family relationship.

12 years later, in the year 2000, that same law was repealed. It was thrown out.

[25 : 39] Then in 2005, another five years later, gay and lesbian couples were allowed to adopt. That same year, same-sex couples were allowed to enter into civil partnerships.

This progressed, and in 2009, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland refused to overturn the decision to allow an openly gay minister to be their pastor, to shepherd over them as an under-shepherd of Jesus Christ.

In 2013, congregations in the Church of Scotland were given permission to call an openly gay or lesbian minister to be their pastor, to be their under-shepherd, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

In 2014, same-sex marriage was legalised in our nation of Scotland. And this year, in 2022, the Church of Scotland General Assembly passed an act allowing gay and lesbian marriages to be conducted by its ministers in their own churches.

Ministers who serve under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Well, they say they do. And suddenly, says Alistair Begg, this is the point, and suddenly, within a quarter of a century, our nation has lived through an immoral revolution.

[27 : 14] And we now stand at the very threshold of all that is before us, he says. And we're either going to bow our knee to the sufficient authority and timelessness of the Bible, or we will be swept away by that which comes to us, not simply by a secular culture, but he says it comes to us from a clergy that has lost confidence in the Word of God.

At a time when our world is most aware of its brokenness and its needy says, which is to be answered by the unerring message of the Gospel, those who are the proclaimers of this Gospel message, they have lost confidence in the message of the Gospel.

And you know, this is why Paul is going along this thread, because he's going to come to the end of the chapter, and he's going to remind us all, all Scripture is breathed out by God, and it is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete and equipped for every good work.

And from there, Paul is going to charge Timothy and say to him, Timothy, you preach the Word, and you keep preaching it in season and out of season.

Timothy, understand this. In the last days, there will be difficult days. There will be dangerous days. There will be dark days for the church.

[28 : 46] But you keep preaching. You keep proclaiming this Word and be ready with it in season and out of season.

Timothy, understand this, that in the last days, there will come times of difficulty. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy Word and that Thy Word doesn't hide anything from us, but it reveals to us the truth, the truth of who God is, but even more so, the truth of who we are.

And Lord, we look at the day and generation that we live in, and we live in a dark and difficult and dangerous day. We live in a day where the Word of God is trampled underfoot, where so many people hate the Word and the name of Jesus.

But we give thanks to Thee for the promise, the promise that Jesus gave to His people, the promise that Jesus gave to His church, that I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

[30 : 05] There may be many legions that stand against it, but we give thanks that Jesus has overcome them all and help us then, we pray as Thy people, to stand firm, to stand and to stay focused and to stay faithful, to keep looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

Oh Lord, bless us, we pray, in a nation that is moving away from Thee more and more. O Lord, our God, that Thou wouldst give to us the prayer of the prophet of old, where he said, Revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known.

In Thy wrath, O Lord, remember mercy, remember mercy, we plead. We pray for our government, that Thou wouldst give them wisdom, give to them the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.

We pray for our Prime Minister, we pray for Liz Truss, we pray, Lord, for Nicola Sturgeon, we pray for our King, King Charles. O Lord, our prayer is, that those who have been given positions of authority, that they would use their authority under the Lordship of Jesus, that they would use it for Thine own glory and the furtherance of Thy kingdom.

O Lord, remember Thy church in this land, a church that seems to be asleep, that we have grown lukewarm, that we have lost sight of our first love. But Lord, we pray that Thou wouldst open our eyes to see the beauty of Jesus, that we would learn to love Him more deeply and follow Him more closely and serve Him more faithfully and walk with Him and please Him more earnestly.

[31 : 52] O Lord, do us good, then we pray. Bless Thy truth to us, we ask. Help us to be faithful, to keep looking to the Saviour who loved us and who gave Himself for us.

Take away then our iniquity and receive us graciously for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 98.

Psalm 98 in the Scottish Psalter. We're singing from verse 5, so it's on page 361, verse 5 down to the end of the psalm, verse 9.

As I mentioned earlier, Psalm 98 talks about the first advent and the second advent. We're called to sing the new song to the Lord because of the first advent, that Jesus is coming.

But then we're reminded towards the end of the psalm that He is coming again. As we're told there in verse 9, before the Lord, because He comes, to judge the earth comes He.

[32 : 58] He'll judge the world with righteousness, His folk with equity. So we'll sing verse 5 down to the end of the psalm of Psalm 98 to God's praise.

With heart, with heart, the voice of Psalms unto Jehovah's Saint, with trumpets, cornets, gladly sign before the Lord, the King.

Let His unknowledge fullness roar the world undwellers there.

Let floods clap, and sunlet, the hills together joy declare.

For the Lord, because He comes, to judge the earth comes He.

[34 : 26] He'll judge the world with righteousness, His folk with equity.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.