

Week Nine: 2 Timothy 3:1 — 4:5

"The Last Days"

2Ti 3:1-4:5 (ESV) But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. 6 For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 11 my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. 12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

4:1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The first line says *in the last days there will come times of difficulty*. Difficulty? What Paul writes next I think is awful! *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 godliness, but denying its power*. Wait—let me catch my breath! I find myself rushing through that list so I can be done with it! “Who can really be that BAD?” you ask. The sad fact is, we all are that bad if left to our own selfish desires without any restraint. The happy fact is because we are *that BAD* we desperately need a Savior. And we have one! That is the good news.

When Paul says last days here he isn’t talking about some far off future date. I know this because he tells Timothy *Avoid such people. Like right now!* These are people he knows, the ones sneaking around into women’s houses and taking advantage of their weakness. Paul is quick to denounce false teaching as dangerous. He even names

those who spread it, like Hymenaeus and Philetus. And he names the ones he avoids, like Hymenaeus (again) and Alexander. He said in 1 Timothy he simply turned them over to Satan so they could learn *NOT* to be false teachers. Obviously, Hymenaeus hasn't learned yet. What is more scary than the traits in Paul's list is the thought "We are living 2,000 years later so things *MUST* be worse!" They are. But we don't seem to notice. Or maybe we just don't care? The wonders of our technology and the comfortable lives it helps us create seem to make up for it. Or mask it with



humor, like this cartoon. Tragically, one of the masks we wear is our "religion" mask.

Paul says *people will be lovers of self... lovers of pleasure but not lovers of God, all the while having, or holding on to, the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.* There is all that dark and willful stuff in between *lovers of self... lovers of pleasure* but we are still religious! This is a good description of what Augustine called "man's disordered loves" that he said was at the heart of all sin. Our loves are directed at everything but God. The rituals and the creeds continue on because they make us *feel good* and good feelings are pleasurable, but there is no hope, no Savior, and of course, no King (to tell us what to do) and no Judge. It is purely external "godliness" and it lacks any true character. Paul knows what Jesus meant when He confronted the religious men in Israel. "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. (Matt 23:27) Uncleanness, just like all the things in the list above. Jesus chose the perfect word: hypocrite. It means to wear a mask. To hide what is really on the inside. Paul had been one of those guys.*

This is not the first time the world has confronted a period known as *the last days*. It happened in the last age. What age was that? Before the big flood. *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Gen 6:5) The Lord is describing exactly what Paul tells us here but without the long list. If He had done a list would people have noticed? He wanted them to. He was grieving over what He sees man doing to His Creation. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. (6:6) It is breaking God's heart! He feels regret. Not a good feeling. He makes a decision. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." (6:7) He is going to remove anything that breathes, including every human, from the face of the earth. But NO! God sees one man and decides to favor him, that is offer him grace. Here's the deal. God tells him "I will let you live and you will serve ME." You know the rest, I am sure. Noah builds the Ark, everybody sees him build the Ark, they know why he is building the Ark, and if they want to go with him in the Ark, it is an open invitation. But there are no takers. They don't believe him? Or they just don't care?*

If you are a science guy reading this you may think this flood thing was not a real event. Just a story. But Jesus talked about Noah as a real honest-to-goodness person who experienced the *last days* and lived to tell about it. He became the actual *Father* of the age we are living in right now. Jesus uses Noah's life and the flood to tell us what *the last days* of the age in which we are living right now will look like. *For like those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark...* Do you notice how they are living? Looks really normal to me. Where's all the stuff Paul just wrote about how bad we are, and how bad they will get? The thing is, Jesus only describes what they are doing, we can't see their hearts. God can. *...and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away...* Unaware? Unaware of what? Everything going all the way back to when God grieved over these people 120 years before. Unaware of God, unaware of His grief, unaware of the promise of judgment, and unaware that if they would just listen to Noah, which would be the same as listening to God, they would get into the boat and they could be saved from the wrath of the flood. *...so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Mat 24:38-39)* The exact same thing is true today, at least according to Jesus and Paul. Jesus says when He, the Son of Man, comes back it will be the same. People who are unaware that a terrible judgment is coming, a judgment that will bring in another age, a New Age, when the Kingdom of Heaven will arrive and Jesus will rule as the Son promised to King David. As Gabriel told Mary, *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:33)*

When Paul said "*AVOID such unaware people*", what does he mean? Does it mean stay completely away from people? Noah didn't. He built the Ark right in front of everybody. How could you even hide a project like that? Genesis scholar Tim Chaffey says "*[The] possibility is that Noah hired people to help him build the Ark...just like today, ungodly people may have been willing to work for a godly man.*"² People helped him build it, yet they didn't believe in the reason he was building it. Or in the God who told him to build it. Then there is Jesus. He went right out among the worst people and let them know what he was doing. He proclaimed He was bringing a Kingdom, and that also meant judgment—like the flood—only *worse!* Jesus was very public about what He was doing. He knew it would get Him killed, but then, that is why He came. He will bear the *flood of God's wrath for us!* That is why Paul does not stop with the command *AVOID*. He tells Timothy to *PREACH: ...PREACH the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (4:2)* And this is a public proclamation, one that everyone can hear, one that some will find offensive, or ridiculous, or they won't care at all. They are busy with weddings and dinners and going to their favorite temple. But Paul knows many are believing this Gospel. In Ephesians he tells us every person who surrenders to this new King is like a stone in the building set on the foundation of King Jesus and the Apostles. This is the Church in the world that *grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph 2:21-22)* The Church is an Ark of refuge from the wrath to come in these *last days*, but it is so much better than Noah's Ark. His Ark landed on a mountain somewhere and rotted away. Our *ARK* is indestructible and will last forever as part of Christ's glorious Kingdom. And Jesus gives us the honor of doing the actual work the way His Father wants it done. Jesus is like the better Noah who also works with us as our head as well as our foundation. And to think there are still people working with us who have no idea why the Church is here,

and what is coming. We may not be in the same age Noah was in, but we humans are still the same.

The real heart of this letter to Timothy, both letters actually, is the relationship these two men have. Timothy is much younger than Paul, perhaps by more than 20 years. Paul has so much affection for Timothy he calls him *my true son* and *my beloved child* in his greetings. Paul not only sees himself as a father but as a commander, like a centurion, who is entrusting the command of his army to a younger officer. We see this when he says *I charge you ...* in 4:1 (*also 1 Tim 5:21, 6:13*). And to show how seriously Paul considers this solemn “transfer of authority” he calls on God the Father and Christ Jesus as witnesses. I think the most important relationship of all is Paul as Timothy’s mentor, his *Rabbi*, his teacher. Timothy is a disciple. A disciple is a learner and a follower. In the building trades we call them apprentices, people who learn by watching a master. In medicine we call them residents as young doctors, who have studied all the books and now must learn to practice under the hand of an experienced physician. Timothy began to travel with Paul on his second journey, when Paul came back to Lystra. He has seen the highs and the lows of Paul’s life. He understands the risks and the rewards of what Paul is asking of him. Paul is reminding him by naming some of the places they have been. Timothy was from Lystra. He can remember what happened when Paul was there the first time.

Some Jews came from Antioch in Pisidia and from Iconium [to Lystra]; they won the crowds over to their side, stoned Paul and dragged him out of the town, thinking that he was dead. But when the believers gathered around him, he got up and went back into the town. (Acts 14:19-20 GNB)

Paul says *You know...which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. (3:11)* “It may have looked like I got killed, but God rescued me, so it’s worth it!” This guy is tough! I wouldn’t think that kind of experience would be a great recruiting tool, but then he adds this: *Everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted...(3:12 GNB)* In spite of what Timothy has seen Paul go through as he has followed and watched. He has learned how to be a Jesus Follower. (3:10) It is time for him to grab the baton, to finish the race that Paul has begun.

Paul is telling Timothy the things he has to keep in mind after Paul is gone. Not only will the persecution continue, the forces of evil will not relent. When God’s Kingdom broke into history at Bethlehem the forces of evil began their attack on Christ and His followers. And they will not quit. The false teachers in the church are “*a reminder that the dangers within the church are just as destructive, if not more so, than the dangers from without.*”¹ Paul says, *...evil persons and impostors will keep on going from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves. (3:13)* That is why Timothy must stand firm and rely on the Scriptures. This last instruction in chapter 3 is so important because it is the reminder to us that our doorway to the heart of God is the written word of God. Paul reminds Timothy again of his youth with his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois and how by learning those *sacred writings*, what we call the Old Testament, *... they are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (3:15 GNB)* Everything Timothy and Paul needed to know about the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus is in the Old Testament. What an amazing thing that God has given us who are living today. We have so much more as we look at the richness of the Scripture we call the New Testament. As we see in the life of Paul, God speaks to us through faithful servants. And God’s most faithful

servant? His own Son, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, ...*in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb 1:2)*. Jesus explains the Father like no one else.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (3:15-16)

I really like the way the ESV translates the word *theopnuestos*. It literally means “God-breathed”. Most Bibles have translated it *inspired*, and so we talk about the Bible being “inspired”, which it is, but “inspired” has so many other meanings in English and one of them is that the Bible is “inspiring.” We often hear “I feel *inspired* when I read the Bible.” I am often inspired when I read a Shakespeare play, but I don’t believe it is what we call Scripture, or “God-breathed.” We all know what breathing is. It is inspiration followed by expiration. Could we say the Bible is “expired”? There are a lot of people who would *love* that translation. “Did you hear? The Bible has *expired!* It’s *dead!*” I think they believe that anyway. Do you ever try talking when you are *INspiring*? No, we speak as we are *EXpiring*. So God is speaking. That is Scripture! His words are “breathed out” and amazing things happen. God *said* in Genesis “Let there BE light.” And there was light. God said to John on the island of Patmos “Write down these things in a book.” And there was the book of Revelation. See? From beginning to end —all God. I like *breathed out*.

Having gone down that rabbit hole, we have to come back into the daylight and find out what the Bible is *FOR*. Paul tells us. First, for teaching. There are so many things that have to be explained and magnified so we understand them. It is the first step in understanding God’s commands, instructions and promises. Next, reproof, rebuke or correction. The Bible tells us what is wrong with us, not to diminish us, but to help us correct our thinking and our behavior as we walk the road the godliness. The life of faith is a commitment to a relationship with another person, just as in marriage, or in a parent-child relationship. Without correction and reproof there is no growth, and no love. Finally, for training. The Bible is our “discipleship manual.” It tells us how this life works, and we can become wise in the ways of God. The book of Proverbs is the starting point in understanding God and the wisdom He gives to us for the asking. In the life of Jesus we get to see that wisdom in action. The teaching, the reproof and the training accomplish a change in our character called righteousness, or to use another word Paul likes, godliness. ...*train yourself for **godliness** for while bodily training is of some value, **godliness** is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (1 Tim 4:7-8)* The righteousness we learn today carries us into our certain future as we walk forward into *the life to come*. The result of our training in godliness looks forward also to a result as we serve in the Church in which Christ has placed us ...*that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (3:17)* Do we ever reach “complete” in this life? Never. It is a journey that ends in that *life to come*.

The pursuit of godliness, or righteousness, can get us into trouble. And we don’t like that. But Jesus said we should be joyful! *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mat 5:12)* Paul exhorts Timothy to remain patient and gentle with false teachers because anger and fighting accomplish nothing. While truth is infinitely valuable, so are the people who oppose the truth. A gentle spirit adorns the Gospel better than judgmental denouncements. Jesus has left us here to make the offer of grace and forgiveness.

God gives people space, time to reflect, and then to repent. His desire, like a waiting Father, is that they will turn to Him.

The Church is not a judge banging a gavel. The Church is a bride holding forth a beautiful bouquet:

*The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." ... let the one who is thirsty come, let the one who desires take the water of life without price.
(Rev 22:17)*

And it is not just water we are offering—it is a rich and beautiful banquet. A wedding feast!

Heavenly Father, it is so much easier for us to judge and to be harsh than it is to be gently forgiving. There is violence and evil all around us. We avoid it where we can and confront where we must, but please Father give us the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Resources:

Tom Wright's *New Testament For Everyone. The Pastoral Epistles*. Westminster John Knox Press 2011

Kruger, Michael, Ed. *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the N.T.*

Barclay, William, Contrib. *2 Timothy* Crossway Press. Wheaton. 2016

Notes:

¹ Kruger, Michael, Ed. *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the N.T.*

Barclay, William, Contrib. *2 Timothy* Crossway Press. Wheaton. 2016
p.385

² Answers In Genesis. "How Many People Built the Ark?" AIG webpage.

April 18, 2013. <https://answersingenesis.org/noahs-ark/how-many-people-built-the-ark/>