

When God's Patience Runs Out

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Date: 27 November 2022

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[0 : 00] Paul wrote in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 1, Mark this, there will be terrible times in the last days.

Germaine Greer, who was one of the architects of the new society that emerged in the 1960s, a woman who wrote that book, *The Female Eunuch*, I wouldn't necessarily recommend that you read it, but in it she lays out the principles for the new world and the new freedom we would find by casting off all restraint.

It was only 15 years later when, interestingly, in a TV interview with Mary Whitehouse, Germaine Greer conceded, and this is what she said, she said that when we cast off all restraint, we thought that we would find freedom only to discover that we discovered a deeper bondage than the bondage we were trying to leave behind.

I think that was almost a prophetic word. For the world in general, and the West in particular, is in a mess.

Today is Advent Sunday, a day when the church looks back to that moment when the Son of God entered the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

[1 : 45] But there's a time also, which we're a little more diffident about, understandably, and that is looking forward to the time when God will pull down the curtain on the whole of human history and Jesus will return.

We are told very clearly in Scripture, read in Acts chapter 1 if you don't believe me, that it's not for us to calculate dates or times when Jesus will return.

But it is certainly for disciples of Jesus to seek to read the signs of the times. Mark this, wrote Paul, there will be terrible times in the last day.

When Paul wrote these words, he was in prison. He knew that his days were numbered on planet Earth and that very soon he would be executed by the Roman authorities.

His time was running out. And so he wrote to this, interestingly, exceptionally young church leader with some words of advice.

[3 : 03] Come back to that. Mark this. What that means is pay very careful attention to it.

And then he lists some things that I don't know what you felt when Ros wrote out that list of things to us.

But it doesn't read well, does it? Two things about what Paul's writing here. The first thing is, it shouldn't really surprise us.

Paul, in writing to the Christians in Rome, chapter 1, reminds his readers there, that godlessness in any society will have some shocking consequences.

He says there, in Romans chapter 1 and verse 25, He says, they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal men and birds and animals and reptiles.

[4 : 17] Verse 25, they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator who is forever praised.

Listen to me, I hope you understand that. Paul here is saying there is a fundamental problem with human beings and it's this, that we are always in danger of confusing the creation, the things that we enjoy here on planet Earth with the creator.

And then the danger becomes that our minds become focused on what God has created rather than the God who created them. I think we see that in our times, don't we?

The bondage we thought we were escaping from feels today like a greater, like a bondage today that really is worse than the bondage we thought we were escaping from.

All this stuff about the degradation of human life shouldn't surprise us in a culture which is godless.

[5 : 35] You've only got to look at these statistics to see that that is a reality. When I was born in 1949, almost 90% of the people, despite a world war, claimed belief in God.

Today, that figure has dropped below 50%. And amongst people between the ages of 0 and 35, that has dropped to below 20%.

This does not bode well. And if that were worrying enough, the world that we are creating increasingly, it seems, is making us ill.

The stress levels, the rise in mental health issues. At the moment in our world, though it's hard for us to imagine, there are 29 wars going on and 80 famines.

Friends, this is 2022, not 1452. 29 wars and 80 famines.

[6 : 52] I read it on Google, so it must be true. Our politicians today constantly crow about progressive policy.

And what you need to know is, Michael Blasland, in his amazing book, called *The Hidden 50%*, makes it very clear that 90% of policies inflicted upon us by democratic governments do not work. 90%. Just think for a moment. In 1942, our nation was at war. There's a man called William Beveridge, who was a social reformer, who wrote what we now call today the Beveridge Report. The Beveridge Report imagined what would be the priorities of a post-war government. He named what has come to be called the Five Giants.

The Beveridge Report were the founding documents for the National Health Service and ultimately the welfare state. Five Giants.

[8 : 10] One was idleness. He said post-war governments would need to create employment. Well, it is true today that we have a surfeit of jobs available in the United Kingdom.

The problem is that the majority of them are being paid at a rate that it's cheaper not to work than to work. He said ignorance would be another evil, another giant that needed to be defeated and talked about the need for an education system that was all-embracing and inclusive.

Yet, 20% of our children, your children in some cases, leave primary school without basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Interestingly, closely correlated with the number of free school meals.

The third giant, he said, was disease. There was a need for a healthcare system that embraces all and is free at the point of delivery.

I wouldn't say much more about that other than dream on. Squalor was his fourth giant. There would be good quality housing provided for all citizens.

[9 : 31] And just this past fortnight, we read of the tragic story of Awab Ishak, a little child who died because his apartment was so full of dangerous, damp spores that he got a respiratory disease and died.

And the final thing that Beveridge talked about was want. Poverty alleviation. I have no idea where these figures come from, but we're told that in the coming months, millions, millions of people in the United Kingdom, the seventh richest economy in the world, will be pushed into poverty.

Let me ask you a question. Don't shout out. But would you say our so-called progressive policies, 80 years on after Beveridge, have come home to roost?

We're in a mess and one fundamental question should be in the minds of Christian disciples and it's this, what is God saying to us right now?

have we lost the ability to listen to God? Is our life so fast track and microwave that many of us don't even find time to sit down and try and listen to God?

[11 : 02] And I want to offload on you today one very simple idea. I think you've seen this coming. And it's this. In a society which is increasingly godless, terrible, terrible consequences will emerge for people.

In a godless society, people begin to manifest characteristics that are the mirror opposite of what Paul wrote about in Galatians chapter 5.

There Paul is talking about the fruit of the spirit, characteristics that should increasingly mark the lives of Christian disciples. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, all these things.

And then you come to our text, 2 Timothy 3 verses 1 to 9. What will be the signs of the times in these last days says Paul?

People will be lovers of themselves. I don't know what kind of people do this but some people apparently like angling as well but some people count the words in our media, in newspapers and the like and note which words are coming into further prominence.

[12 : 19] You know the word that is increased in prominence the most in the media? The word self. We are a selfie culture but we're also a self-obsessed culture.

The Times newspaper, which I take every day, which used to be a serious newspaper, has a bit in it called Times 2. This is full of the most wrong-headed ideas imaginable and at the same time it's full of a lot of kind of pop psychology.

Do this and you will feel a lot better about yourself and about the world. love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Would the world be a different place if people focused on these characteristics rather than narcissism, lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy?

It goes on. We live a degraded lifestyle in the 21st century. Remember the prodigal son when he left home with his father's cash ended up eating pig fruit.

[13 : 46] And you can try and put a fitted carpet in a pig sty but it's still a pig sty. today our text reminds us that we are a society which is godless and reminds us of the kind of byproducts of that godlessness.

One, the self is elevated. Two, sin is normalized. Some of you are sitting there thinking you know what the world I was born into is a very different world than the world I experience today.

I'm not talking about the good things and there are plenty of good things. I'm talking about our degraded culture. In 1950, those of you who were around then will remember that there was a big course in what was the high court then, not the supreme court, regarding Lady Chatterley's Lover. Remember that book any of you? Don't put your hands up if you've read it. Because my gut feeling is on the basis of my experience in school is if you took that book and threw it in the air and you threw a hundred copies in the air, they'd all come down open at the same page. the attempt successful apparently of the gamekeeper to seduce Lady Chatterley.

[15 : 27] In terms of the kind of stakes of pornography that are available today, that book was pretty minimal. Compare it with today, what's allowed.

television programs where people who've never clapped eyes on each other before are encouraged to get married. Dating programs where people assess the person they might date on the basis of seeing them naked.

Won't bode well for me, I can promise you. And people will say, with complacency deep in their hearts, oh, it's always been the same.

No, it hasn't. We didn't have the internet, we didn't have social media, we didn't have these things, which allow depraved minds free license. Whatever the good of social media, and I'm persuaded that there are some good things, keeping people in contact with each other, my goodness, there are an awful lot of bad things that go on.

what happens, self is elevated, sin is normalized, and meaning is degraded. 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 4.

[16 : 51] Sorry, I don't mean verse 4. It talks about people being far away from the truth.

This is a slightly tricky passage, because at one level, Paul is talking about people in general, and then at another level, and this is a little worrying for church leaders, he's saying that part of the problem is church leaders who have depraved minds as well.

Men, who he says, oppose the truth. If you're worried about Jenner's and Jambres, those two people mentioned there, they were sorcerers, Egyptian sorcerers, who tried to oppose Moses. What is God saying to us in all of this? Have nothing to do with these people.

Now, there are some branches of Christian discipleship that have taken that very literally and decided they will shut themselves away from the world. You all have read about the Amish in North America, or the strict brethren here.

[18 : 09] I don't think that's what Paul meant. I think what Paul meant was have nothing to do with wrong-headed ideas. These ideas put about by depraved minds.

people are and if we'd read on, we would read there what Paul's antidote to all this is for Christian disciples.

Paul says to Timothy, get focused on the Bible. Preach it in season and out of season. And be very wary of false teachers.

I think the Church of England nationally is in a mess at the moment, because there are fundamental differences between leaders as to what the Bible actually means when it says stuff.

When a society becomes godless, terrible things happen. But listen, here's the kicker, which has particular relevance to church leaders, but also to all of you as well.

[19 : 20] Here it is, when a society becomes godless, God calls his church to account. You and me. That's the message of the prophets.

Message of the prophets describes what's going on in the world and then calls the faithful to step it up. Leaders must not be false teachers, but must be faithful to that which is handed down to them. And yet. And so on this Advent Sunday, I want to encourage you to do three things. One, look up to the sovereign Lord. This is not a recipe for complacency, but actually we do need to remember that the sovereign Lord of the earth and the heavens and all that therein is, is in control even when we don't feel that.

second, look down into your Bibles, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest its truth and seek to live as God would have you live.

And thirdly, look around. Look around you. This is not just, you know, too much of church just resides within the four walls of our ancient buildings.

[20 : 42] Some of you get this, and I thank God for you, but we've got to get out into the world, a world which is suffering immensely at the moment, and show people what God is like by talking to them about Jesus Christ.

Paul was writing to Timothy in Ephesus. And if you have been to Ephesus, it's a pile of rubble.

I mean, it's an interesting pile of rubble, but it is a pile of rubble. In Revelation chapter 2, we read there that the church had many things that the risen Christ could commend it for.

Commend it for its doctrinal purity. authority. They were very clear on who was a heretic, very clear on who was out of the kingdom. And I didn't expect, don't expect, that they thought the risen Christ would then accuse them.

He already said to them, all this is good, but you have lost your first love. friends, let me ask you, are there saints sitting in church this morning who've lost their first love?

[22 : 13] Isaiah chapter 64 and verse 6 says that our spiritual experience is like the autumn leaves, it fades and withers. Maybe the Holy Spirit is whispering in your ear this morning and telling you, step it up, come back.

There's a warning here for us, isn't there, that churches can be doctrinally pure but lacking in love. I think I've been to some churches like that.

Churches that sit in judgment over this world, forgetting that God loves the world that he created and calls us to love it as well. it's Advent Sunday, a day to repent.

I'm minded of Clive's talk when we came back from COVID where he talked about a reset, the church in reset. Maybe God is telling you today that Advent would be a great day for this to happen, to repent and return to the Lord.

Our society needs Christians who will stand up, will speak up in prayer to God and in witness to this world. Luke 15 tells us, there is joy in heaven when a sinner repents.

[23 : 48] Wouldn't it be great if a few of us could kick off a few parties in heaven today? God is going to be here to pray. I'm not here to tell you when Jesus might return, but I am here to tell you that we need to read the signs and we need to do something.

In the name of our amazing God who loved us enough to send his son onto this planet that we might be set free, redeemed. In the name of that wonderful God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the people who agreed said together. Amen. Amen.