

# Made to work

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] But 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 godliness but denying its power, avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

Just as Janes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also opposed the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.

But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of the two men. You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 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.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

[ 2 : 0 7 ] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 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.

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 competent, equipped for every good work.

What do you most need when life is difficult? As I was thinking about my sermon last night and watching the World Cup, it had to come in, sorry.

I was looking at Portugal in the last five minutes, 2-1 down, in a difficult place as far as the World Cup is concerned anyway. What they really needed was someone to produce something remarkable, one of their star players to do something miraculous.

I was watching the news and thinking about Theresa May and all the Brexit negotiations at the moment. It strikes me, I don't really know very much about these things, but it strikes me that she needs something fairly miraculous right now, and that's just to get her cabinet on side, let alone the EU.

[ 3 : 3 2 ] We're meeting in a school. I've spent quite a lot of time in schools recently. I'm a governor of a primary school. Ofsted's coming tomorrow. It's not, actually. But imagine, if you're involved in a school, you'll know what this feels like.

Ofsted's coming tomorrow, and you're not ready. And you know that dreaded requires improvement is coming, unless some kind of miraculous thing happens tomorrow. How about church, then?

I mean, it's great when church is growing well, isn't it? It's great when church is growing, and people are becoming Christians, and you're covered in children. I love how many children you've got here. It's really exciting. But maybe not so good when church is growing.

Not growing. Shrinking. When actually it's really hard. When it's under pressure from outside. Or maybe even just as an individual Christian. Going on in your Christian life, and actually, and this may be you right now, life is full of pain.

Life is full of genuine difficulty and stress. What do you need? Now, we know about church in hard places, don't we?

[ 4 : 43 ] And probably enough of us know about life in hard places. We've got a number of guys from Iran in our church who had to flee Iran because they became Christians.

If they go back, they face either imprisonment or death. Or how about this church in Ephesus, around about AD 65?

It was going through trouble. Paul had told them that they would go through trouble. Paul can read it in Acts 20. Expect vicious wolves to come in. Even to rise up from among your own number, he says.

People who will take you away from Christ. Paul addresses it again in 1 Timothy. And again here in 2 Timothy.

Paul's last letter to his dear son in the faith, Timothy. Paul has a great concern for Timothy. He knows his race is done.

[ 5 : 45 ] I've fought the good fight. I've finished the race. He knows his time has come. It's time for him to go and be with the Lord. And he has an overriding concern, as that is true for him.

And that is that Timothy now would be the custodian, the guardian of the gospel. That Timothy would guard this gospel. And that doesn't happen by putting it in a box and burying it in the ground so no one can get at it.

Quite the opposite, in fact. The gospel is guarded by, chapter 2, verse 2, entrusting it to others who are able to teach others. The gospel is guarded by, chapter 4, verse 2, preach the word in season and out of season.

But what about when it is out of season? What about when it is really tough? What about when false teachers are arising up in your church and outside your church?

What about when everything is going wrong? Surely what we need in those times when life is really hard is some kind of miraculous work of God.

[ 6 : 49 ] Something big and massive to suddenly change everything around. Is that what we need? Let's see what Paul's got to say, shall we? Times of difficulty will come.

That's where we're going to start. So, chapter 3, verse 1. But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulties. Last days, basically between the first and the second coming of Christ, it's the run-up to the end of this present evil age and the continuation and fulfillment of the wonders of the age to come.

In this run-up, in this last days, there will be difficult times. Not all times everywhere will always be difficult. But there will be times which are especially difficult.

And Paul puts his finger on two reasons here. And he puts his finger on these two reasons because they're happening in Ephesus.

False religion in the heart and false teachers in the church. That list from verse 2 down to verse 5 is quite a list, isn't it?

[ 8 : 01 ] This is what people will be like. 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. What a list.

I don't think Paul is meaning to say that everybody in a society will have all of those issues. But all of those issues will be present everywhere in society.

But here's the killer at the end. Having the appearance of godliness but denying its power. How on earth can all of those things go on with the appearance of godliness?

Well it's like a piece of fruit that looks good on the outside and has gone rotten in the middle. Looks great in the fruit bowl but as soon as you pick it up you know something's wrong. Give it a squeeze and there's the proof.

[ 9 : 07 ] Here are things that are going wrong within the church. People who are able to put on a veneer of godliness.

Or a mask of godliness. But just straight underneath the surface there's all kinds of ungodliness. And they are denying the power of the gospel to change the heart.

By the mask that they're wearing. They've connected themselves to church without connecting themselves to Christ. And so the power there is in the cross to save and to sanctify is denied.

By this veneer of godliness. And it's so dangerous and damaging in a church. I've seen churches pretty much destroyed by this kind of thing.

Where love of self or love of power or pride or whatever it is. Has ruined a ministry. Good men preaching the gospel turned out of churches.

[ 10 : 26 ] Arguments and problems here, there and everywhere. A dominant personality trying to gain control of everything for their own benefit. There will be significant difficulty in the last days.

Because of this appearance of godliness. With a reality underneath that looks like verse 2 to 5. Now of course it's very easy to kind of try and think of situations or people who are like this.

That's the wrong way to go, isn't it? If we know anything about the gospel and ourselves. We're the place to start. And so as I read that list, as I think about it and I pray it through.

I think, well Lord, am I doing this? Am I giving an appearance of godliness? Do I look great on Sunday? But as soon as I get home, it's all different.

At work, perhaps I'm different. Or maybe I'm really good at hiding it. Maybe the makeup of the mask is particularly thick. And it's hard to get through.

[ 11 : 34 ] But you know your own heart before the Lord. Have you connected yourself to church and Christianity without connecting yourself first to Christ? Then of course there are the false teachers.

Avoid these kind of people. Because among these kind of people are those who creep into households and capture weak women. Burdened with sin, led astray by various passions.

Isn't this exactly what Paul was talking about in Acts 20? Wolves. Rising up even from among you.

Wolves in sheep's clothing. You can imagine this, can't you, in a film or a cartoon. And you're watching it. And all the characters see of this person is charm and smiles and a lovely guy.

But as it goes on, you as the viewer are given a glimpse to see they're not quite what you think they are. It's the same kind of character as Wickham, isn't it, in Pride and Prejudice.

[ 12 : 39 ] Seems like this great guy turns out to be anything but. In fact, these people are evil impostors and they know what they're doing.

They know what they're doing. It seems that there is a particular issue among some of the women in Ephesus who are particularly feeling laid down, laid under their sin, laid up with guilt.

People who these guys realize I can control them. I can use their guilt and their shame and their sin to control them. And have them in my little gang.

And so they do. And rather than learning the gospel and finding the freedom there is in Christ and the joy there is in sins forgiven and the weight of guilt being taken off their shoulders, they're always learning but never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

Is this not disastrous? Difficult times in the last days. Now just as Janus and Jambres opposed the truth in Moses' days, remember those magicians in Deuteronomy, not named there.

[ 14 : 02 ] This is their names as we understand from tradition. They were men who were corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. So these men are corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.

They're not pure of heart. They're not seeking to serve. They're seeking to gain for their own benefit. And the reality is rather than men who are qualified to pass on, to be entrusted with the gospel and pass it on, not those who are approved of God as good handlers of his word, they are disqualified regarding the faith.

But they won't get very far. Their folly will become plain. Just as Janus and Jambres' folly started to become plain. To start with, they were able to, by whatever means, replicate what God did.

But then eventually they couldn't do it. And they were exposed. So these men will be exposed. It's part of Timothy's job, actually, to be exposing through the correct handling of Scripture and the preaching of the word of God.

But whether now or then, they will be exposed. They are disqualified. Now, the thing for us, I think, is that we must, we mustn't be naive.

[ 15 : 20 ] I think for a long time as a Christian, I was quite naive. And I just thought, well, why would anybody do anything like that ever? I just didn't really get it or think about it.

But as I've gone on and I've actually seen it happening, we need to know not to be naive. We need to not be naive about ourselves, how quickly we begin to put this veneer up.

We need to be not naive that people will not rise up from within our churches or try and come into our churches and do these things. It's why it's so important that those who lead have theological depth and are seen to have theological depth.

It's why those who lead, it must be tested so that we can see that these are people who are servant-hearted, not who are trying to wheedle their way in. Wolves in sheep's clothing.

And that is true not just for us as churches, but it's true for the Enquirer, isn't it? If you're here today asking questions about Christianity, don't be naive.

[ 16 : 28 ] Just because someone puts their hand up and says, yes, I'm a Christian and I preached a Bible, don't believe them. See if they really do. That's what was so great about the Bereans in Acts. They tested everything Paul said against Scripture and they found it to be true.

Test what they're saying. Test what this church is saying. Ask questions. Find out if actually these people are preaching what the Bible says because this is God's word.

This has the authority. There's all sorts of people on radio, on television, who are telling things which are not true from the Scriptures. Don't be naive.

Times of difficulty will come and therefore real suffering will come. So these people, both the ones with the veneer and the false teachers, have been following this way, lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, and so on.

Timothy has not, verse 10, you, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness. Again, it's quite a list, but in completely the opposite direction.

[ 17 : 40 ] Paul has had the example, sorry, Timothy has had the example of Paul to follow. And what an example it is. It's quite a challenge, isn't it? As Christian leaders, reading that, we think, well, I wonder if people could say that of me.

If people followed my teaching and my conduct and my aim in life and my faith and my patience and my love and my steadfastness, would they get a good impression of the Gospel? Well, I hope that they would.

But they would have to realize my faults and my failings as well. But what a wonderful example for Timothy to be able to follow and that he has. But here's the thing that Timothy needs to get, my persecutions and sufferings.

That these things that Paul does, the things he teaches, the way he lives, his aim in life, the things he believes, his patience, his love and his steadfastness will ultimately lead to persecutions and sufferings.

It's not two lists, it's one. It all comes together. It's a package. In fact, following Paul's life helps us to see that what he says in verse 12 is it is true.

[ 18 : 55 ] Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. He cites Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. You can go and read it in Acts 13 and 14. Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.

He ends up in Lystra, just spoilers if you haven't read it, with Jews from Antioch and Iconium chasing him there, stirring up a rabble and stoning him to death. Well, they think death, they think he's dead and they drag him out of the city.

The church gathers round and prays for him and he's able to get up and continue. But this is Paul's confidence that the Lord has rescued him from all of these things.

You can look again in chapter 4, verse 18. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. I don't think here he means that the Lord stopped all the stones.

He didn't. I don't even think that he's most concerned about the fact that he was still alive after the stoning. In a sense, it's not much of a rescue, is it?

[ 20 : 02 ] Being stoned within half an inch of your life. No, the rescue is that the Lord has held on to him and will still take him to his heavenly kingdom. that despite the difficulty and the pain and the struggle, his eternal future is safe in the Lord's hands.

The reality of these last days is that the imposters and the evil men will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived and the Lord's people will be persecuted.

Now, we shouldn't imagine that our situation is going to be exactly the same as Paul's. Paul had a very specific and difficult calling, but we should understand that it isn't a surprise when Christians are persecuted in whatever way.

Now, my guess is very few of us are ever going to be stoned or even beaten with a rod for our Christian faith. But increasingly, we're finding the times in this country are becoming more and more difficult.

People are becoming more and more like verse 2 to 5. More and more folks seem to be arising up who are leading people astray, vicious wolves, twisting the scriptures. There is real suffering and if we really live for Christ, let's allow that phrase to sink in a little bit, if we really live for Christ the way that Paul did in his teaching and his conduct and his aim and his faith and his patience and his love and his steadfastness, we will find ourselves joining him in persecutions and sufferings in some way or another.

[ 21 : 55 ] Now, given it's going to be this hard, given real difficulties are going to come in the last days, what then do we need?

Paul. Now, Paul was someone who did some quite remarkable miracles. Maybe he's got one of those left off his sleeve that he can pass on to Timothy. Here's a great miracle.

This is how you do it, Timothy, to escape all of this. No. Given that in the last days there will come times of difficulty, but as for you, verse 14, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.

Portugal needed to do something different to win the game. They didn't manage it. Perhaps Theresa May needs to do something different. Schools need to change their game every five minutes, according to the government, in order to meet the required standards.

But believers do not. Believers need to keep doing what they have always been taught to do. Just as Timothy had, even from childhood, from his grandmother and his mother, Paul talks about in chapter one, through to the pattern of teaching that Paul has passed on to him.

[ 23 : 25 ] What he has learned from childhood, Timothy, when it gets really, really hard, go back to that. In fact, don't ever go away from it.

Continue in it all the time. Continue in it in this scripture, this sacred writing, because it will make you wise, it made you wise for salvation and it is the breathed out word of God.

These sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. That's the starting point, isn't it? If you are here asking questions, wanting to know more, well, the place to go is the scriptures.

That's what Timothy was taught, in fact, the Old Testament when he was young and in its fulfillment in Christ as he meets Paul. It is in the scriptures you will find out what God has done and the wonders of salvation.

Paul summarizes it, doesn't he, at the beginning in chapter 1 verse 9. God who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, which has now been manifest through the appearing of our saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

[ 25 : 03 ] You want to know how death can be abolished and life and immortality can be a reality for you? Go to the scriptures. They're able to make you wise for salvation, that is, wise to know and understand.

It's not about your works, it's about faith in the one who has worked for you, the Lord Jesus. And the scripture is so remarkable because it has been breathed out by God.

All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Breathed out by God. Do you remember that every time you pick up your Bible? Do you remember that every time you don't pick up your Bible?

Maybe that's the time really to remember it. Think, oh, I haven't got time today. Really? Really? I can say that because I do it. Really?

[ 26 : 08 ] I have to say that to myself. Really? You haven't got time to pick up the breathed out word of God. That email is more important. Something has gone wrong in our heads when we're thinking like that, hasn't it?

Continue, not in your email inbox. Maybe that's your difficulty today or tomorrow morning, more likely. 250 emails. Oh, that's all these. Continue in the scriptures.

The breathed out word of God. Now, for the man of God, that's a theological title for the pastor, straight out of the Old Testament, this is very, very significant.

Because through the scriptures you are made competent or even complete, you could translate that as, equipped for every good work. Anything that a pastor is to do, he is equipped for by the scriptures.

Answering emails included. Anything that a pastor needs to do, that God would have him do, he is equipped for by the scriptures. I hope pastors here are convinced of that.

[ 27 : 25 ] Now, there are plenty of other things pastors don't need to do that they end up doing. That's reality. But the things we really need to do, particularly things like teaching, reproof, correction, training and righteousness, the scriptures makes us competent for, equips us for.

So pastors, you need the scriptures. You need to be in the scriptures. If you're finding your time taking you away from the scriptures, something is going horribly wrong.

Churches, you need your pastors in the scriptures. If what's going on in church is taking your pastor away from the scriptures, church, you're doing yourselves a disservice, let alone your pastor.

What you need from your pastor is for him to be teaching and reproofing and correcting and training you in righteousness from the scriptures. How else are we going to cope when times are difficult?

The great pressure when times are difficult is that we turn across to sin. And that would be a disaster. But if our pastor is continuing in the scriptures, then maybe there's hope that we can too.

[ 28 : 39 ] As they teach us and train us and help us. As they equip us as through this word we are built into maturity in Christ. Christ.

The inquirer, the person asking questions, well you need to take this on board as well. This word is God's word breathed out. Paul says elsewhere the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

You want to know this salvation, you want to understand it, you want to have it revealed to you? Well it must be the scriptures to which you go. And even to those who are set aside to spend their time in the scriptures on your behalf.

go to them. Life can really throw us difficult times, can't it?

Now mercifully so far in this country in recent history churches have not faced en masse these difficult times. Individually as Christians we do still face enormously difficult times.

[ 29 : 49 ] But the answer for us is not to go looking for the miracle. Pray for it. God does remarkable things still. But the first thing is to continue in what we have learned and believed about the Lord Jesus Christ.

the moment we start wandering away from him bad things happen. And he will keep us just as Paul was confident so Timothy can be confident so we can be confident.

That as we hold on to him in his word he will hold on to us so much more tightly. be