

'Live differently in these Last Days'

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder if you could live anywhere in the world in the next month, where would you live? Somewhere warm, I'm guessing most of us would say. Perhaps somewhere like Venice, where the sun's shining right at the moment, and you can take a gondola down one of the waterways. Or perhaps Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, going on a sunny safari. Or even Queensland, where a number of our Nine Clock members have already gone, actually. Very wise.

Whereas, where would you live if you could live anywhere in the world? Because I'm guessing most of us would go, maybe not here, where it's cold and wet, although the sun's coming out today, which is beautiful.

But here's the point. While where might be different for each of us, when is actually the same for all of us? That is, we all live in the same time period of history. What the Bible calls the last days. The last days is not a Hollywood movie about the apocalyptic end times. Rather, in the Bible, the last days refers to the time between when Jesus first came into the world, and when Jesus returns to the world on the last day.

Which means we are living now, which means we are living now in the last days, plural. And in these last days, Paul tells Timothy, there'll sadly be terrible times. So at point one in your outlines, in your bulletins, and verse one in the Bibles or the screen.

[1 : 44] Paul writes, mark this, there will be terrible times in the last days. Paul says to Timothy, get out your highlighter and mark this, highlight it. There'll be terrible times in these last days.

Aren't you glad you came to church this morning? Of course, we already know this, don't we? I mean, every time we turn on the news on the TV or read it in the paper or look at it on our phone, it's almost always bad news, isn't it?

And it would have been the same for Timothy as well. I mean, he would have known there were terrible times living under the Roman Empire. So why does Paul tell him again here? Well, to prepare him with realistic expectations.

You see, a lot of disappointment in life comes from unrealistic expectations. Last week, I was so excited when Annette mentioned that it was the winter solstice here in Melbourne last Sunday, which meant every day was going to get a bit longer.

And I got kind of excited thinking that they would get really long. I was disappointed because I had unrealistic expectations. And yes, while there are good times in life, Paul wants Timothy to be prepared with realistic expectations, that there will also be terrible times in life.

[3 : 03] And while they should concern us, they shouldn't surprise us or cause us to doubt that God is in control. Rather, he's told us to expect these things because people are sinful.

Verse 2. Verse 2 literally begins with the word because, even though it's not translated in our versions, giving the reason because of these terrible times, because people are lovers of themselves.

Lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

It's pretty depressing stuff, isn't it? And again, it's sadly true though. There will be terrible times because there are terrible people. I heard just this week of a story of a young student, I think it was grade 6 or maybe 7, who committed suicide because of the relentless bullying by others at his school.

It's at a terrible time because of terrible people. But it's not just school bullies, it's all humanity. Because all of humanity naturally has a sinful heart that often loves the wrong thing.

[4 : 24] The word love actually comes up five times here, but it's all negative. And the list begins with lovers of themselves and ends with rather than lovers of God. In other words, humanity is naturally selfish.

I mean, take away all the laws of society and then you'll see it. Or just read Lord of the Flies and you'll read it. Humanity is naturally selfish, lovers of self rather than God.

And this is actually the essence of sin. I've said before, you can write the word sin with a capital I and that tells you what it's about. It's about living my way rather than God's way.

It's having I as my king rather than God as my king. It's about being selfish rather than loving. Humanity naturally has a selfish or sinful heart.

And we see it from kids who act selfishly and bully all the way up to world leaders who govern selfishly and cause suffering to all the people in between.

[5 : 28] But Christianity offers a better way of life. A way of loving God and loving our neighbor. Of not being boastful but humble.

Of not being abusive but gentle. Of not being unforgiving but forgiving. Can you imagine if the whole world lived God's way? We would have peaceful times rather than terrible times.

And I'm pointing this out because Christianity may not always be easy but it does offer actually a better way of life in this world. But because people don't live God's way, we shouldn't be surprised that there will be terrible times as though God is not in control.

For he is and it grieves God more than we realize. Some people might then ask, well if he is in control then it grieves him. Why doesn't he do something about it and end it?

And he will one day. But he's patiently waiting. Giving people more time to turn to Jesus for forgiveness. And be saved from judgment on the last day.

[6 : 38] When Jesus returns on the last day, he'll return to put this world right. But that includes calling everyone to account. Unless we believe in Jesus, we will have to pay for our own sins.

And suffer our own judgment. But out of love, he's giving people more time to believe in Jesus. And be saved from their own judgment. Perhaps like some people here in this room today or online.

And it even includes people in Timothy's day who only pretend to be Christians. Verse 5. He goes on to list those who have a form of godliness but deny its power.

Have nothing to do with these or with such people. Here Paul moves from the world in general, verses 2 to 4, to fake Christians in particular.

In verse 5. Those who have a form or appearance of godliness on the outside. But deny the power of godliness on the inside. Which means they deny the Spirit's work in their lives.

[7 : 43] Because you see, the Spirit is the power for godliness. Remember chapter 1 of 1 Timothy where Paul writes, The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid but gives us power.

And the way the Spirit does this is convict us of God's truth. And prompt our conscience to live God's way. Have you ever kind of done something and thought, oh I shouldn't really do that.

Or know you should do something and have been prompted to do it. That's God's Spirit working your conscience to follow God's way. This is how the Spirit powers godliness.

But these fake Christians refuse to believe God's truth and resist the Spirit's prompting in their conscience. And so verse 5, they may have a form or appearance of godliness.

Appear religious on the outside. You know, go through the motions. But they deny the Spirit's power on the inside. They're fake Christians. And Paul says have nothing to do with them.

[8 : 43] In fact, the only thing Timothy is to do is to gently instruct them as we saw last week. But he's not to hang out with them and have meals with them. Go up to shopping town with them.

Watch a movie and so on. Why? Because as we'll hear, he's to be different to them. Not associate and look like he's one of them. What's more, it's not just fake Christians that he's to look out for.

But also false teachers who come from those fake Christians. Verse 6 literally begins, From among them, the fake Christians, verse 5, are those, as we'll see, false teachers, 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 desires.

Always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. From among these fake Christians come false teachers who worm their way into homes.

And the fact that they can suggest that these women are widows without a husband to fend off these most likely male false teachers. And so Paul is not picking on women by calling them gullible.

[9 : 55] I mean, guys can be gullible too. I remember when I first saw this picture, I thought it was real. And I even showed it in an illustration way back when and some people had to come and go, you realise that's photoshopped, Andrew.

What? I thought it was actually real. But it's fake. Guys can be gullible too. But here in the text, since women often outlived men, since they were widows, and in those days widows were really vulnerable, remember?

That's why these false teachers target them. And that's why Paul mentions them. In fact, in 1 Timothy, he tells us to care for widows so he's not having a go at them.

It's just that they're easy targets for the false teachers who worm their way in, no doubt, to get money from them, like email scammers today. And what makes these particular widows easy targets is that they are also swayed by evil desires.

And they're always wanting to learn, but it seems they're gullible enough to learn anything. And so they're always learning something, but never actually the proper thing, the gospel. And so they, end of verse 7, never able to come to a knowledge of the actual truth.

[11 : 07] We see this today with some young people, actually. Over the last five or six years, there's been a cult, a Korean cult called Synergy, that's been spreading across Australia, including here in Melbourne, targeting young adults.

Now, it claims to be Christian, but it isn't. For they say, it's a bit hard to read in the bottom, I realise. They say, unless you've heard the word of Synergy as interpreted by the 94-year-old founder, then you cannot be saved.

That's false teaching, isn't it? I mean, they even wear all the same clothes and they all have lines and worship in the same way. I mean, that looks pretty cultish to me. And they worm their way into the lives of these young people who are searching, eager to learn about the Bible, but never quite coming to a knowledge of the truth.

In fact, they take control of these young people's lives, telling them to cut ties with their friends and don't tell their parents what they're doing. And they say, don't search the internet about our group either.

They say that it's dangerous for your spirit. It's like committing spiritual suicide if you search for us online. And so they use these fear tactics so that they don't find out that the group is really a cult.

[12 : 25] And many young people have believed in it. Here are false teachers today who worm their way into people's lives and gain control over them. People who are searching for the truth, but never quite arriving.

And yet their claims oppose the truth. Verse 8 and 9. Just as Yanaes and Jambres oppose Moses, so also these teachers, these false teachers, oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds who, as far as their faith is concerned, are rejected.

They're fake Christians. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone. Now, Yanaes and Jambres are not named elsewhere in the Bible. They are named in Jewish writing. And it seems like they are brothers who were magicians for Pharaoh back when Moses appeared to Pharaoh.

And so you might remember from Exodus chapter 7, Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh to say that God's the true God and to let his people go. They even do some miraculous signs to show that, you know, God really is the true God, like putting the staff on the ground and becomes a snake.

[13 : 30] But verse 11, Pharaoh then summoned the wise men and sorcerers and the Egyptian magicians, probably Yanaes and Jambres, who did the same things by their secret arts.

But it doesn't last for long because only a chapter later, the magicians can't keep up. And in verse 19, they say, actually, this is the finger of God. Moses is God.

He is the real deal. But Pharaoh, of course, refuses to believe. And so just like Sinjurji, these men, well, they're exposed.

In verse 9, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone. The point is, in these last days, there will be terrible times because of sinful people, including fake Christians and false teachers.

But we're told this so that we might be prepared for this and to live prepared, knowing they will come, but God remains in control and they will not last.

[14 : 30] Their folly will be exposed. More than that, we're to live differently to this world. And we get this idea, by the way, Paul begins at verse 10 and verse 14 in our passage.

Verse 10 starts, you are however, which is literally but you. Verse 14 begins, but as for you, which is again literally but you.

And so the idea is the world lives like this, verses 1 to 9, but you are to live differently. That's the implication. Why is he to live differently?

Well, firstly, because he knows all about Paul's life. Point 2, verse 10. He says, you, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.

What kind of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra? The persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Timothy knows all about Paul's life, which is different to the world and the false teachers.

[15:38] But why does Paul remind Timothy of his life if he already knew it? Well, again, the implication is so that Timothy might live it. Paul's saying effectively, look at my example and live like me, different to the world too.

Even if it means suffering and persecution, verse 11. Because as Paul goes on to say in verse 12, in fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Notice, not might be, will be. Just last week, 39 Christians were killed in Nigeria.

And earlier this year, in January, 160 were adopted from a Sunday church service, which the Nigerian police confirmed after, or initially denying it.

Here is real persecution today. Now, of course, it will be different to us. I doubt that will happen here in Melbourne. But it will involve ridicule and isolation.

[16:48] I remember a four-year-old, sorry, a grade four-year-old student who prayed before his spelling test one day. He wasn't a great speller.

But then the kids in his class saw him and asked what he was doing and he told them. And for the rest of that year, they made fun of him, didn't let him join in with soccer at lunchtime, and even refused to invite him to their parties after school.

He was persecution. Or just recently this year, a family has joined us, and they've said since becoming Christians, their friends call them crazy, and now they don't always want to hang out with them.

It's actually harder to get on with them. Here is persecution. And so it would be tempting to live like the world, to avoid persecution from the world.

But Paul says, no, no, we're to keep living differently to the world, knowing that this persecution will actually end in blessing. Isn't that what Jesus said, Matthew 5?

[17:50] 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.

Why? Because great is your reward in heaven. But you, Timothy, know all about Paul's teaching life and even persecution.

And so the implication is, for him and for us, live like Paul, despite even pressure and persecution, and not like the world.

And keep living for Jesus. Point 3, verse 14. Paul continues, but as for you, again, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.

Here, Timothy is to continue in what he has learned. And what has he learned? Well, the good news about Jesus, right? That Jesus is God's son, who died for our sin and rose again as our king.

[18:58] In short, he's to keep living for this Jesus. Why? Well, one reason is there in verse 14. Because you know those from whom you learned it.

Those who taught him about Jesus. Those, excuse me, people like his mother and grandmother and Paul himself. He knows they care about him.

He knows they're trustworthy. And so he knows they'd only teach him what is true and good for him. You see, he can continue believing the message about Jesus.

He can keep living for Jesus because he can trust those who taught him about Jesus. I don't know who taught you, whether it was a parent or a family member or a friend or even a pastor.

But I'd like to think it was someone who cared about you and wanted you to know the truth. And so when you doubt, and we all doubt at times, then perhaps look to those who taught us and know that they wouldn't lead us astray, would they?

[20 : 05] That you might instead continue with Christ. And perhaps we can be those kind of caring and trustworthy people for others by teaching them about Jesus too.

Timothy is to continue in the gospel that Jesus he learned. Firstly, because he knows those who taught him about Jesus. And secondly, verse 15, because he knows the scriptures.

So continue because you know those who learnt it. And because how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The word scripture here refers to the Old Testament in particular. That's what they would have had in their hands at the time. And that's what Timothy's Jewish mother would have taught him from infancy, from being an infant.

Before then telling him about Jesus. But how does the Old Testament make us wise for salvation? How does it give us wisdom about being saved? Well, by pointing us to Jesus.

[21 : 09] Like that classic verse from Isaiah 53, where it talks about the punishment that brought us peace was on him. And by his wounds we've been healed or forgiven. I mean, who does that sound like?

That's not rhetorical. Jesus. Excellent. I had three people out of the continent. Yeah, it sounds like Jesus. This is how the Old Testament points us to Jesus, you see.

I remember one of our church members who works for AFES opening the Bible with an overseas student and looking at the book of Exodus. And the student saw how serious God took sin and then asked our church member, well, is there a solution?

And she said, yes, his name is Jesus. Even Exodus points us to Jesus, you see. And having faith in him to be saved. Which is why Paul adds at the end of verse 15, it's not that the Old Testament scriptures say us.

No, no, no. It's because they point us to Jesus who saves us, or as he says, through faith in Christ Jesus. That's how we're saved. Timothy is to continue in the gospel about Jesus he learned and continue to keep living for Jesus in life.

[22 : 21] First, because he knows those who taught him about Jesus. And second, because he knows the Old Testament, which points him to Jesus. Of course, we may not have known the Old Testament since we're infants.

But we have something even more than Timothy had. We have the New Testament, which points us directly to Jesus, doesn't it? And we can trust that too.

That it's been reliably handed down to us. That what they saw and heard in his Jesus' day and wrote down is what we are reading here in our day.

Why? Well, because one reason is the sheer number of copies or portions we have of the New Testament. This came up at our Wednesday service recently, and I showed them this table. So in terms of Julius Caesar, who wrote the Gaelic Wars, we have 10 copies of his writings.

For the Greek poet Homer, who wrote the Iliad, we have 643 copies. But for the New Testament, 24,000 copies or portions of the New Testament.

[23 : 27] And so we can compare and contrast and know that we've got the truth. That what they wrote back then is what we have right now. For example, if 1,000 copies have a scribal error, what we call a typo, we have 23,000 other ones.

So that we know which is true. That's how it works. And so for us, we can keep living for Jesus too. Perhaps because we trust those who taught us.

But certainly because we can trust the New Testament, which points us to Jesus. And not just points us, but helps us to live for Jesus. Different to the world in these last days.

Verse 16 and 17. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. So that we, in this room, the servants of God, may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

It's not just Old Testament Scripture here, but all Scripture. The Bible, God's Word. Because it is God-breathed. And it's useful for equipping us to follow Jesus with every good work.

[24 : 37] Works that are different to our world in verses 2 to 4. Works that are not selfish or boastful, but selfless and humble. Works that are not unloving or unforgiving, but works that are loving and forgiving.

In other words, the Word helps us to live differently to the world we saw before. And keep living for Jesus instead. Of course, that only happens if we read the Bible, doesn't it?

I mean, it's hard for God's Word to teach and train us if it's not read by us. And so how are you going at reading the Bible? Not just here on Sundays, but during the week. Is it something that you're able to do or find hard?

If it's something that you find hard, please talk to me. There's oodles of resources out there. Or join a Bible study group. Part of Ricky's new role now that he's gone part-time and doing his PhD at the other part-time is to write devotionals.

And we're starting a new series in 1 Corinthians in a couple of weeks' time. And he's writing devotionals with a few others on that. Make the most of those so that you might keep reading God's Word and being equipped for every good work.

[25 : 50] Keep living for Jesus. We're to live like Paul despite pressure and persecution, not like the world. And we're to keep living for Jesus according to the Word, not like the world.

We're to live and even stand out as different to the world in these last days. And let me finish with a story about a young boy who, this is from the end of last month, end of May last month, who lives in Scotland.

And his scout group went to a Muslim mosque to find out about it. And at the mosque, the Muslim leaders invited the group to bow down and worship their God and pray.

And so here's the Muslim leader at the front and the scout group behind. The scout leader is right at the back near the TV on the wall there. And they all bow down except one little boy.

And here he is. He doesn't close a scene. He just puts his hands in his pocket, looks down, but he refuses to bow down, even though it looks like a Muslim leader come and stands next to him, which I would have felt the pressure of that.

[26 : 54] Why? Well, because he's from a Christian family. He knew those who had taught him about Jesus and he knew the Bible, which pointed him to Jesus.

And so he wanted to keep living for Jesus, which meant living differently to those around him, even despite the pressure of literally standing out.

Pretty impressive, isn't it? No matter where we live in the world, whether it's Queensland, Venice, Zimbabwe or Melbourne, we all live in these last days.

But despite peer pressure or persecution, we are to live differently. We're to live like Paul and live for Jesus as we await the last day.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder that we are to live differently in these last days from the world.

[27 : 50] We pray that you would help us to look to those who taught us and certainly to your word that points us to Jesus and encourages us to keep living for him.

Help us to do that, we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.