

Rescue Me – 2 Timothy 3:1-17

The Apostle Paul is in prison and faces execution. He does not know how much time he has left, so he writes a letter to his young friend, Timothy, pastor of the church of Ephesus. He wants Timothy to not only be ready for what lies ahead but wants the young pastor to be able to encourage the church to remain strong and faithful. It was clear that God inspired Paul to write the things that are set out in this letter, and what was written for the church 2000 years ago still speaks to us today.

This morning we will look at all of chapter 3 in 2 Timothy, and note three sections to this chapter.

1. How bad things are without God – vss. 1-9
2. How this affects Believers – vss. 10-13
3. How to be Rescued – vss. 14-17

1. How bad things are without God – vss. 1-9

The Apostle Paul starts this chapter by saying “Mark my words: there will be terrible times in the last days.” (v. 1)

So when do the last days start? Is this the end of times described in the book of Revelation? Or is it something else? We look all around us and see evil everywhere. Already people are choosing to turn off the newscasts because of how evil things are, and how depressing that can get. Are things going to get worse than this?

The question hinges on the words, “last days.” This is a phrase Christians borrowed from their Jewish roots, and speaks of the time between the “Present age” and the “Day of the Lord.” For the Jewish nation, the present age was evil because of the sinfulness of mankind. One day God would come and set everything right, destroying all evil and setting up his glorious kingdom. This is the Day of the Lord. But before he did that, there would be the last days, days of unparalleled terror.

Paul hints at that with the use of the words, “terrible times.” The Greek word used for this phrase is the same word used to describe the demon possessed men in Matthew 2:28, as they were violent and dangerous – terrible men. The word was used to describe the last great assault of evil against God’s world.

So when will the “last days” begin?

In Hebrews 1:1,2 we read,

¹On many past occasions and in many different ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets. ²But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe.

God is telling us that the last days began at the coming of Jesus. God has intervened in human history, to bring salvation and hope to all people, and that is the beginning of the end. Now the early Christians believed, and hoped, that this meant Jesus' return was just around the corner and they would not have to endure these last days long. But that was over 2000 years ago, and we are still in the last days.

So what Paul describes is a description of life now when people choose to push God out of the picture. If God is not present in the lives of people, or in the life of a nation, what will things look like? This is what God reveals to us through Paul in verses 2-9. Though we just read these verses, look again at the list of evils that happen when God is rejected:

- people love themselves and money instead of God.
- people are boastful, proud and abusive. They are not boasting about Jesus, or the cross, as Paul says he would in 2 Corinthians 12:9, but feel they are superior to everyone else. And those who refuse to applaud them are abused.
- people are disobedient to their parents (no respect for authority), and therefore ungrateful and unholy. They live only for themselves...
- people are without love, which leaves them unforgiving, slanderous (telling people how bad other people are), with no filters, (no self-control) and therefore brutal.
- people will not love what is good, but are treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Interesting how there was a greater outcry when people could not travel to Mexico for winter vacations than when the churches were closed due to COVID...
- finally, people will have empty religion. They have a "form of godliness but no spiritual power." (v. 5) They may look like they are religious but they are just going through the motions. Instead of really knowing God and submitting their lives to Him, they live for themselves and go through religious practices when it suits them. These practices, however, make no real difference in the way they live.

Many years ago Lord Melbourne heard a message from an evangelical preacher, a message of how our walk with Jesus changes the way we live day by day as the Spirit leads us. Lord Melbourne remarked, "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the sphere of private life." (Barclay, DSB, p. 191).

But that is exactly what being a Christian means. Our private life is invaded by God and we are changed, praise God!

We look at that list prepared by the Apostle Paul and we cannot help but think of the 6 o'clock news. All around us we see a world that is shaped by the very things listed by Paul. We cannot doubt that we are in "the last days" he mentions. We see the effects of people and nations saying "No" to God, allowing sin to reign instead of Christ's righteousness.

But Paul is not quite done yet. In verse 6-9 he speaks of how this godless, proud, arrogant, self-seeking attitude can creep into religion, and bring destruction to the lives of many people, especially the most vulnerable. Paul cites how women are taken advantage of by so called spiritual leaders who only care for themselves. Have we ever heard of spiritual leaders, yes, even pastors, who have abused their positions of authority and had affairs with their secretaries, or church members, trying to justify it as part of their faith? Sadly, yes.

Paul mentions Jannes and Jambres, who opposed Moses. These were Pharaoh's priests over Egypt in Moses' day. They mimicked the miracles God performed through Moses and Aaron, for a time, but soon realized they did not have the power of God that was in Moses. So they were exposed as fakes. Moses represented the one true God.

This part of the chapter paints a very dismal picture of the world, and humankind as people shake their fists up at God and say, "We want nothing to do with you!" You say, "But there is some good in our world, Pastor. Even non believers live decent lives."

This is true, for God has not withdrawn from the world, and His grace is seen everywhere, yes, even in the lives of unbelievers. Praise God for this. What would our world be like if God did remove his hand from the affairs of people? It would be beyond terrible, and the only solution would be to destroy everything and start again with a new heaven and a new earth. That is the picture we get through the book of Revelation.

2. How Does the Godlessness of the present age affect Christians? (vss. 10-13)

The Apostle briefly outlines how living in "the last days" affects his life as a believer. He says to Timothy, "You know what my life is like..." Yes, there is purpose, faith, patience and love in all that Paul does, but that does not mean life is easy. He is living in the last days, so he goes on to say there is also persecution and sufferings.

Paul mentions Antioch, where he was chased out of town, (Acts 13:50) and Iconium where they tried to lynch him (Acts 14:5,6) and Lystra, where he was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19). It is suggested that Timothy might have witnessed the stoning of Paul and that helped him determine that he too wanted to count the cost to be a follower of Jesus.

Paul says even in these things God was there, and he rescued the apostle. Paul never sugar coated the life of a follower of Jesus – people who reject God, who reject what God says is right and wrong – will oppose Christians. The more a nation turns from God the more opposition

there will be towards Christians. Paul says, expect it, and be ready for it. God will rescue you, but not before you have suffered for His sake. That is part of the cost of being a disciple.

3. How can we be rescued? – vss 14-17

Paul ends the chapter with a note of encouragement to young Timothy. So far it has been all bad news: the world is evil and therefore you will have to suffer for your faith. Is there any hope?

Paul says, yes there is hope. Our hope is found in Jesus. And Jesus is revealed to us through scripture. As we study God's Word, and apply it to our lives, we discover what Paul calls the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Our only hope for these last days is Jesus Christ. That was true in Paul's day and is true in our day as well.

Timothy grew up with a godly grandmother and mother. He knew the scriptures, and those very scriptures pointed him to Jesus and God's way of salvation. The rescue we all need from this world of evil is found through faith in Jesus.

All the evil Paul listed in the first part of the chapter is the fruit of sin. Jesus died to free us from the curse of sin in our lives, so that the fruit of righteousness might be seen in Christians. The contrast between the saved and the unsaved, according to scripture, is like the difference between light and darkness.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

Scripture is not a collection of writings created by men trying to control us. Scripture, Paul reminds us, is "God-breathed" or is "inspired" by God. It is God's word to us, to teach us, and guide us, protect us and most importantly, to show us Jesus. From Genesis to Revelation we have God's Word to us, revealing God to us and his great plan for our lives.

The greatest thing we discover in scripture is "salvation," God's rescue plan for those who live in the last days. We do not have to live a life without hope or meaning or power. Jesus came to make us children of God, people who live above the evils of this world because of the power of God at work within us.

The rescue of God begins the moment we confess we truly are sinners who need forgiveness and rescue. We repent, meaning we acknowledge our life without God was wrong, and we seek God's forgiveness for all the sins we have committed. (Yes, we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God). We ask Jesus to not only come into our life, but to take control of our life, and to fill us with his Spirit so that we may live a life pleasing to God – a holy life. Then, my friends, we experience the great rescue of God from this present darkness. Have you been rescued?