

THE CHURCH IN THE LAST DAYS

2 Timothy 3:1-4:8

Intro: Several people have asked me how the war in the Middle East figures in with Bible prophecy. I have to say in answer to that question, "I do not know if it fits in at all, and I doubt if anyone else does." It seems that, whenever we are involved in a war, the Lord's people begin thinking more about the coming of the Lord and the fulfillment of prophecy. Books dealing with prophecy have already started coming off of the press, and they will sell in the thousands. I hope that you will use caution in buying them.

During WW II a number of books were written. Men got themselves into trouble when they tried to make Mussolini the Antichrist. And I know of at least one man who recalled his books because he was so far off the track in the way he had interpreted the Scriptures.

There is no question but that the Middle East is a significant area as far as prophecy is concerned. In fact, I am of the conviction that Babylon in the book of The Revelation means Babylon. Ancient Babylon, of course, was in the country which is now Iraq, our enemy in the present war. But to say that we are about to see the fulfillment of those prophecies is more than any honest interpreter of Scripture can say. Things may be headed in that direction. I do not know. We may be on the very threshold of the Lord's return. I do not know that either, but I certainly hope so. We need to keep studying the Scriptures while we keep our eyes on current events, but use a great deal of care before we say, "This is that!" What we need to do is to be well-acquainted with what the Word has to say about the coming of the Lord, and how that hope should affect our lives day by day. What we can say is that we are closer to the coming of the Lord than any generation of the Lord's people ever has been. The condition of the world is such that it seems that the Lord could come at any moment. But we also have to face the possibility that He may not come yet. The important thing is for us to be watching for Him daily, and to be living so that, as the Apostle John said in 1 John 2:28, we will "not be ashamed before Him at His coming." In the meantime we as a nation have a war to fight and a war to win. If the Lord uses the war to wean us away from this world, and to set our hopes where they should be, on the coming of the Lord and on heaven, then this will be one very good result.

It is with this in mind that I want to ask you to turn with me today to 2 Timothy 3. This epistle, Paul's second to Timothy, was, as far as we can tell, the last one he wrote before he died--at least the last one to have been God-

breathed. In chapter 3, verse 1, he began to speak about "the last days," the last days for the church before the Lord returns. Paul made no attempt to identify what was going on then with prophecy. For example, he did not try to fit Rome into the purposes of God. He simply described the conditions and told Timothy and the church down to the present day how they should live and what the church's ministry should be. And so I have given my message the title, THE CHURCH IN THE LAST DAYS. I believe that we are on safe ground when we follow Paul's teaching rather than to go with those who try so desperately to apply Scripture to current events.

I hope that I have made myself clear. I am looking for the Lord. Nothing would make me happier than to have Him come during this service. But I do not think that the Lord has given us the prophetic word to make speculators out of us. The prophetic word is to show us how things will be brought to a climax so that we will set our hopes on the coming of the Lord, and live holy lives while we are waiting for Him. Let us learn all that we can about the Word, but leave the fulfillment of it all in the Lord's hands.

I am going to take more than one Sunday on this passage rather than hurry through it and miss some of the things to which we really need to pay attention.

First of all, let me call your attention to:

I. PAUL'S INTRODUCTION TO THIS CHAPTER (2 Tim. 3:1).

I am referring to his words, "This know also...."

If I were translating the three words that Paul used I would state it this way, "But know this...." It ties chapter 3 with what he had been saying up to this point. He had written about his own ministry and about some of the many trials which he had experienced. He had pictured the Christian life as a warfare. He had not promised Timothy an easy time. The ministry had been very difficult for Paul, and he was assuring Timothy that it would be very difficult for him. He would not only face opposition from people, but he would be faced with temptations that would arise from the lusts of his own heart. Paul wanted Timothy to know all of those things, but then he said, "But know this...." And then he went on to describe what "the last days" would be like.

Timothy needed to know, the church has always from that day to this needed to know, you and I need to know what Paul has written here. We may have our own ideas about how things are to go in the world, but the only way we can know how things will go is by learning what God has said in his Word.

I set that challenge before you today. Set your heart every day to learn more than you have known about the Word of God.

Secondly, look at the expression:

II. "THE LAST DAYS" (2 Tim. 3:1).

This expression is found in only four other passages. Peter used it in Acts 2:17, quoting from Joel 2:28. Joel had used the word, "afterwards." In verse 29 of that same chapter Joel spoke of "those days."

Peter used the expression "last days" again in his last epistle: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?...." (2 Pet. 3:3, 4a).

The writer of the book of Hebrews spoke at the very beginning of his epistle of "God" Who "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...." (Heb. 1:1, 2). Peter used a similar expression in 1 Pet. 1:20 when he wrote of Christ,

Who verily was foreordained before the foundation
of the world, but was manifest in these last times
for you.

Finally, James warned the rich about their selfishness and corruption in James 5:3 when he said, "Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days."

If you will read these passages carefully, you will see that "the last days" is a term which applies to the whole period from the Lord's first coming to His second coming. We are living in "the last days," but the church has been in "the last days" since Christ came and the NT was written. So what Paul said here was not just for us today, but for this whole age of the church.

So there has never been a generation of believers since the time of Christ to whom this passage did not apply.

But this bring us to:

III. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE LAST DAYS (2 Tim. 3:1-9).

Paul gave a general description, and then he gave a particular description.

A. The general description: "Perilous times."

The dictionary describes anything perilous as that which

exposes anyone to imminent and constant danger, harm, or loss. The Greek conveys the same ideas. Paul was saying that the conditions in the world "in the last days" would pose certain dangers even for the church. It meant that the church could be harmed. The church was in danger. Our servicemen and women in the Middle East are in peril. They face injury and death every day. The Iraqis are out to do all of the damage to our men that they possibly can. So, as Paul even indicated in 2 Timothy 2, the church is at war with the world, the flesh, and the Devil. And on all three scores the church faces the most serious kind of trouble.

This, Paul said, was to be the case throughout this age. And, if anything would change, it would be that the conditions which have always plagued the church would get worse the closer we get to the coming of the Lord.

This does not sound like the church is going to win the world to Christ, does it? Certainly not! Neither does it suggest that the mission of the church in the world is going to end in failure. God's purposes with and for His church are not going to fail, but every child of God needs to stay on guard continually lest the enemy take advantage of us.

Today we in the church are living in "perilous times." "Learn that," said Paul, "and never forget it. And open your heart to the things I am about to tell you."

What are the kinds of things that constitute a dangerous situation for the church, for every child of God? Look now at:

B. The particular description of "the last days."

Note that the trouble will be seen in "men," including women. The trouble is not with nature, or the environment; it is with the people who live on the earth. As far as the world of nature is concerned, the heavens still "declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psa. 19:1), but the problem is man. We have many environmentalists today who are quick to point out how in many respects we are ruining our water, our air, etc., which, unfortunately in many respects is true. But they are dealing with the effects of a problem. The problem is in the heart of man. That is why we have crime. That is why we have a gigantic problem with AIDS. That is why we have wars. The problem is in the hearts of men. Those in the church are only sinners saved by the grace of God, and can so easily be re-infected with the sins of the human heart.

But what sins did Paul mentioned. Let me attempt to describe

them for you.

1. "Lovers of their own selves" (v. 2).

Do you what this is translated into modern language. This is what we hear so much about today. It is now called, self-love. Isn't it interesting that Paul put this first--two thousand years ago. Many Christian counsellors are advocating self-love, and whether they know it or not they are throwing their clients right into a very, very dangerous situation.

Self-love advocates are not your friends; they are putting you into the most dangerous kind of an attitude. Self-love is one of the most disastrous of all conditions. Paul put it at the head of the list of dangers, and it ought to be the head of our list, too.

2. "Covetous" (v. 2).

This is lit. a money-lover. Americans are inclined to measure happiness in terms of money. And yet Paul told Timothy in his first epistle to his son in the faith that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10)--all kinds of evil. It is hard to find a sin in which money does not play a part. A great baseball player, one of the greatest of all time, will ruin his reputation and, for the present at least, nullify his chances of getting into the hall of fame--why? Because he gambled. Why did he gamble? Because he loved money. People will kill for money. They will cheat for money. They will risk everything for money. The love of money was a major cause of the eternal damnation of Judas Iscariot.

Christian, we need money to get along in this world, but never become a money-lover. It will ruin you spiritually. Churches and schools have been ruined when money has become their major emphasis.

3. "Boasters" (v. 2).

This is the person who claims to be what he is not. He is a false pretender, an impostor. How many times in order to appear greater than we are, we act as though we know more than we know, that we have done more than we have done. This is another word for a hypocrite. It can affect Christians and professing Christians when they try to give the impression that they love the Lord when in reality the Lord is very insignificant in their lives.

4. "Proud" (v. 2).

This is the person who tries to put himself above others. He is not the best, but he wants to appear to be the best. This is a sin which God hates. It is exactly the opposite of all that the Lord Jesus was. We are all naturally proud, and it is one of the greatest perils facing us in our Christian walk. The world may make much of pride, but it has no place in the church of Jesus Christ. We need to be humble. God resists the proud; He gives grace to the humble. See 1 Pet. 5:5.

5. "Blasphemers" (v. 2).

This is a word which can apply to the way man can revile man, but primarily it has to do with man blaspheming God. God is blasphemed which His Name is used in a common, abusive way. To blaspheme is to take the name of the Lord in vain. A blasphemer is a God-less person, and it is risky for a child of God to be where he hears blasphemy. Sometimes it cannot be avoided, but we need to recognize it as a part of the peril which we constantly face.

6. "Disobedient to parents" (v. 2).

Children who are around disobedient children are in serious danger of becoming disobedient themselves. We see this in Christian families, don't we? Our laws even assist children in being disobedient. And those who do not learn to respect the authority of the home, and the authority of the government, usually treat the authority of God in the same way.

7. "Unthankful" (v. 2).

The child of God is taught to give thanks for all things and in all things, but most people these days do not even bow to thank God for their food. We live in a world that does not see the hand of the Lord in providing for all of the blessings of life.

But this word also describes the person who is unpleasant, disagreeable, the kind that complains about everything. We see how affected the children of Israel were with this sin because they were constantly murmuring against God. People blame God first when things go wrong. This is a perilous danger for the child of God.

8. "Unholy" (v. 2).

This is the person who fails to do his duty. He does not know the meaning of responsibility, or, if he does, he can forget it when it is to his advantage. Tax evasion is this kind of a sin. This is the person who decides for himself

when he will do or not do certain things, and is not really concerned about what is legal or right.

9. "Without natural affection" (v. 3).

"Natural affection" is the love that a parent usually has for a child, or that a husband has for his wife. Even animals have a very strong natural affection for their mates or their offspring which often is missing in the human family. How tragic when this gets into the hearts of Christians.

10. "Trucebreakers" (v. 3).

This is the kind of a person who will not settle problems. It is illustrated by some of our world leaders, but also in the lives of individuals who refuse to settle problems. It can be a husband and wife who never settle difficulties that keep them from true happiness.

11. "False accusers" (v. 3).

This is the Greek word for a devil. The word was used by Paul to describe the kind of a person who is quick to bring an accusation against another, while at the same time ignoring his own faults and failures.

12. "Incontinent" (v. 3).

This is one who lacks self-control. He will excuse his faults as being a part of his personality. It can be seen in every area of his life. This is the person who is promiscuous.

13. "Fierce" (v. 3).

This is the person who is untamed, wild, one who disregards the normally accepted code of behavior. He is a law to himself, and refuses to recognize any authority of man or God.

14. "Despisers of those that are good" (v. 3).

He is a person who does not love good men. He will ridicule them, seek to embarrass them, or simply scorn them in his heart. He chooses bad companions when he could choose those who are good, and who seek to do the right thing.

15. "Traitors" (v. 4).

Such was Judas. He is the person who cannot be trusted, who will turn against those who are closest to him. There are

husbands who are traitors to their families, men and women who are traitors to their country.

16. "Heady" (v. 4).

This is the person totally lacking in patience. He is headstrong, often to the point of being violent, but always determined to have his own way.

17. "Highminded" (v. 4).

He is the person who is proud, but his mind is so clouded that he does not realize what his problem is. And because of this he does foolish and stupid things.

18. "Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (v. 4).

Men love themselves, love money, and love pleasure--whatever will gratify themselves. This can apply to sexual desires, sports, travel, whatever is a person's god. This is why there are few, comparatively, who are in church on the Lord's Day. "God is not in all their thoughts" (Psa. 10:4).

It is interesting that right along with this is:

19. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (v. 5-9).

Since the Apostle Paul gave the greatest space to this, we can assume that this is one of the greatest dangers facing the child of God: people who are religious, but not true children of God. They go to church. They usually will place forms and ceremonies above the truth. They are not God-centered, but they think they are, and they want others to think that they are.

Immorality is often connected with "a form of godliness." Also a failure to understand the truth although they seem to be learning all of the time--but not learning the truth. Instead they will be like Jannes and Jambres who opposed Moses and resisted the truth. We do not know who they were, but Paul knew, and Timothy also knew. Perhaps they were Egyptian sorcerers. Some of the older Jewish writers said so.

Concl: These are the dangers that we face. These are the real perils that are everywhere present in the world, and in every generation. This is the world that we are in, but which we are not of. Out of the human heart come these sins. They are possibilities with every child of God. And

Paul was intent on getting Timothy to see the dangers so that he would better understand the action that he would be charged with as he sought to minister as a servant of the Lord in that generation. The child of God not only needs to know the needs of those he is seeking to reach, but he needs to understand how quickly he himself can be affected and pulled down by the very same sins.

We have nothing to fear if we are walking in the light as well as seeking to proclaim the light. But we need to be constantly on our guard, keeping watch upon our hearts, judging the things that we know to be contrary to the will of God for us, and turning away from temptation whenever it comes our way. We need to take heed to ourselves living in these evil days.

Let me conclude by saying one more thing about the term, "the last days." It suggests that the days in which we live are not going to last forever. A great and glorious change is coming. These old and evil things will one day be gone forever for those of us who know the Lord. There will be no more sin, not even any more temptation. We are going to be in heaven with the Lord, and like the Lord.

Therefore, let us continually pray that the Lord will keep us faithful, that He will cause us to hate what He hates, and to love what He loves. Dangers are all around us, but we can always say with Paul,

Now thanks be unto God,
which always causeth us to triumph in Christ,
and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge
by us in every place (2 Cor. 2:14).

LIFE IN THE LAST DAYS

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Intro: Last week we began examining 2 Timothy 3, looking especially at the first nine verses. There we saw Paul's description of "the last days," and how those days would pose a great threat to the spiritual life of the church. Paul made it clear that "the last days" would be characterized by all that is most displeasing to the Lord. People would be corrupted. Homes would be corrupted. Even churches would be corrupted by concentrating on the outward form of worship while denying the very heart, "the power," of a true relationship with the Lord. "The power" is the Gospel. "The power" is the teaching of the Word of God. "The power" is the exaltation of Christ. "The power" is the necessity for the work of the Holy Spirit.

So, on the one hand, we see a man-centered, man-corrupting life. On the other hand we have a professing church which carries on outwardly with all that it is supposed to do, "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

Be sure to note that word "godliness" in verse 5. We have learned recently in our Sunday night services from 2 Peter 3 that "godliness" means God-centeredness! Here in 2 Timothy 3, verse 12, Paul referred to the "godly." So that has to be Paul's concern as he wrote to Timothy: God-ly people and God-ly living! (If you are taking notes, it will help you to see the emphasis in this word if you will capitalize the word godly, and put a hyphen between God and ly.)

God-liness is rare in any generation. Even among the Lord's people it is often hard to find those who want their lives to be centered in God, and who are concerned about being God-like in their characters and in their behavior. Those who are concerned about pleasing the Lord, and being like the Lord, find that they are in a real battle. Our hearts usually resist such a life of wholehearted devotion to the Lord, and the world in which we live discourages God-liness in every way. In fact, notice Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3:12. That was true then; it is true now! Let us not think otherwise. If we are not experiencing some form of persecution, it is probably because we are lacking in God-likeness. We are not to make ourselves obnoxious to the world, but God-liness always creates problems for us.

If we understood this, and remembered this, it would help us to persevere even in times when it seems that we are standing alone.

Paul said three things in this chapter which should help us

to know how we should live in these "last days." The first is to find a good example of God-lieness. The second is to face the realities of life in this world. The third is to continue doing what we have been doing providing we have been doing the right thing! The first is in verses 10, 11. The second is in verses 12, 13. The third is in verses 14-17.

Let us look at these verses, looking to the Lord to help us to understand what Paul wrote here.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOD-LY EXAMPLE (2 Tim. 3:10, 11).

What would be the reason for Paul to refer to his own life and experience if it were not to give encouragement to Timothy? When times get rough (as they are today), we need the help of God-ly examples.

The best examples you can find are right in your Bible. The greatest Example of all is our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ you have One Who lived a perfectly God-ly life. He never failed to please God. His whole purpose on earth was to do the Father's will, and to bring glory to the Father's Name. And He never failed to do so. Peter, in 1 Peter 2, spoke of our Lord as our Example. Read that, and then read the Gospels to see what a perfectly God-ly life is.

In addition to our Lord, read the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. Read about King David in your Bible. Read the prophecy of Jeremiah. Read the book of Daniel. And then read in the NT about Peter and John, as well as Paul. You cannot help but be challenged by the example left behind by these men.

The women of Scripture have also given us great examples. Think of Sarah, of Rahab, of Ruth, of Hannah, of Esther, of Mary, the mother of our Lord, of Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

No one in Scripture was perfect except for our Lord. They all had their failings. But they were people who loved the Lord, who lived for the Lord, and who suffered for their faith. This vile world is no friend to grace.

Perhaps one reason that there has been a such a revival of the Puritan works in our day is because God is calling His church to greater God-lieness! Just a few years ago books by the Puritans were not available to most people. Today we have an abundance of Puritan literature available. The Puritans loved the Lord. They loved the Word of God. They lived what they preached, and the suffered for it! If you are not getting in on the rich teaching that the Puritans

have left for us, I encourage you to start reading them right away. You will find many Puritan books in our library. Check them out, and read them. Or start buying your own books. But get acquainted with the Puritans.

Read the biographies of well-known Christians of the past. I think of Samuel Rutherford, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Martyn Lloyd-Jones—just to name a few. You ladies would enjoy the writings of Amy Carmichael, but you men could profit immensely from them, too. I know because I have read several of them.

Get acquainted with the saints of the past. It will do good to your soul, and it will help you in these days of war, of gross immorality, of formality and deadness in many of our churches, and of frivolity and lightness in many others.

But what about Paul? Timothy was intimately acquainted with Paul and the kind of a man Paul was. What did Paul want Timothy to remember about him? He mentioned nine things. Look at them in verses 10 and 11:

- 1) "Doctrine."
- 2) "Manner of life."
- 3) "Purpose."
- 4) "Faith."
- 5) "Longsuffering."
- 6) "Charity," or love.
- 7) "Patience."
- 8) "Persecutions."
- 9) "Afflictions."

Do like I have done in my notes. List them one after another. Keep them where you can see them often. And think of them, not only in connection with Paul, but think of them as you read about some of the people I have been mentioning today. Look at what they taught. Notice how they lived. Discover what their main purpose in life was. See how they trusted the Lord. Observe how they controlled their anger when we could have expected them to go to pieces. Note how they were motivated by love in the face of great difficulties and often great opposition. Be sure to notice how they persevered when they were under great trials, how they refused to give up. Learn about their behavior when they were being pursued relentlessly by their enemies. See how they suffered.

When we see all that Paul endured for the sake of the Gospel, beginning with the message he preached, and going on to see how he suffered for the way he lived and how he ministered, it will put greater courage and strength into our hearts to

carry on in the ministry that the Lord has given us today.

Think about these same words with our Lord Jesus Christ. And then apply them as you read Biblical biography, as well as the lives of men and women who have served the Lord throughout the history of the church. It will do a great deal for you.

Timothy was faced with going on in the ministry without the Apostle Paul. Paul was telling Timothy not only to remember him, but what to remember.

All of this would be rather discouraging if it were not for what Paul said at the end of verse 11.

He said in the first place that he had survived it all. It had not been too much for him.

But notice the last of the verse: **"But out of them all the Lord delivered me."** Paul did not want Timothy to be discouraged, but encouraged! The Lord would not forget him, but would help him, and give him blessing and victory in those times when everything seemed most futile and hopeless. What an encouragement this ought to be for us, too!

Let me hurry on to my second point.

II. THE REALITIES OF LIFE IN THIS WORLD (2 Tim. 3:12, 13).

Timothy needed to know two things about the world.

A. God-ly living will bring persecution (v. 12).

God-ly living pleases God. God-ly living brings peace and blessing. God-ly living means fruitful ministry. But God-ly living never has been popular in the world, and never will be. It brings opposition and persecution. The verb that Paul used here suggests that Timothy's enemies, the enemies of the Gospel, will pursue him just like they pursued Paul, and just like they pursued the Lord.

The more we try to please God, the more our lives will be displeasing to some people.

The second thing is this (and we should have already realized this if we learned what Paul was saying in the first part of the chapter.

B. The number and opposition of evil men is not going to diminish, but it will increase, and become more severe (v. 13).

When I started out in the ministry over 40 years ago, nobody spoke to me like this. I had a different idea altogether about the ministry. It was not one of rejection, but of acceptance. But I have learned through the years that Paul was right. Those of you who are in your 50's or 60's or 70's, answer some questions for me. Is this world better today than it was when you were young? Is there less crime? Is sin generally on the decrease? Would you say that proportionately there are more Christians today than there used to be? Are people more interested in the Bible today than they used to be? Is there a great hunger in the hearts of the Lord's people to be God-ly, God-like, God-centered in their lives?

The world is not going to experience a great change for the better until the Lord Jesus Christ comes to reign upon the earth. Until then, we must expect the trend spiritually and morally to be downward. This does not mean that we cannot expect times of real blessing, but it does mean that the world is not going to improve, but just the opposite.

In the light of all of this, we come, finally (as far as the chapter is concerned), to:

III. PAUL'S EXHORTATION TO TIMOTHY (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

How should Timothy as a servant of the Lord live in view of the conditions described by the Apostle Paul? Should he be discouraged? Should he consider some other life work? Should he try to come up with some novel ideas of ministry in order to make the Gospel more acceptable to the people of the world? Or should Timothy give people something besides the Word of God? What about us today? What would Paul tell us to do? How would you answer these questions? How is the professing church answering these questions today?

Paul had no new methods to suggest. He did not recommend that Timothy follow a different course from the one he had taken. His exhortation to Timothy can be summed up in one word which Paul used. It is the word, "Continue."

Paul could not have said this to every Christian in his day because not every Christian had the foundation that Timothy had. Nor could it be said to every Christian today. Some have gotten a bad start. Some have had foolish, worldly-wise teachers, not God-ly teachers.

Who had been Timothy's teachers?

Cf. 2 Tim. 1:5. He had three teachers: Grandmother Lois, his mother Eunice, and the Apostle Paul. What about

Timothy's father? He may not even have been a Christian. What about his grandfather? We do not know. But it is significant that neither his father nor his grandfather had taught him anything about the Lord, or about the Word of God. I can be thankful for a father who taught me, and a mother who taught me, and a host of Sunday School teachers who taught me, and a pastor who taught me.

But some have not had this teaching. There are very few who are really being taught today. The church has gone in more for giving people a good time. Learning about God, learning about the Word, learning how to live God-ly lives, does not have real priority among Christians today.

But Timothy was well-taught. And so Paul said, "Continue." "Continue" remembering how reliable your teachers have been. "Continue" knowing that no other teaching tells us how we can be saved. "Continue" because the Book we have is God-breathed! It teaches us what we need to know, how we ought to live, and it alone prepares us to serve the Lord.

Concl: I have no doubt but that one purpose that God has in this war is to bring us as a nation back to the realization that we live in a world of wicked men, men who will do anything to get what they want, men who make this world a dangerous place for everybody. God is speaking; I hope we are listening.

Do we need a new message? Do we need new methods? Do we need something in addition to the Word of God? No, to all of these questions. What we need is to get back to the Word of God IN OUR TEACHING, IN OUR LIVING, AND IN OUR MINISTRY! It seems like we are trying every ridiculous thing under the sun, and with determination seeking to stay away from the Bible, from the God of the Bible, and for the Savior Who is revealed to us in the Bible.

The message we need for today is to continue on if that is what we have been doing. If not, then we need to turn to the Word of God with all of our hearts. That is where you will find the answers to the important questions everybody ought to be asking. There we find the answer to the sin problem which is the problem that faces us, all of us, today and every day.

May God keep us faithful to Himself, to Christ, and to the Word of God. Let no one shake our confidence in the Scriptures. God works through His Word. He accomplishes all that He intends to accomplish through His Word. If we want peace in our own hearts in a world like this, if we want to see lives changed, if we want the blessing of God upon our

work, then each one of individually needs to seek to be God-ly, and we cannot be God-ly unless we have trusted Christ, and unless we are seeking each day to pattern our lives according to the Scriptures.

One final word. It seems to me that this is a passage that encourages us to reach children while they are children with the Gospel message, and with the teaching of the Word of God. Children by the thousands are growing up in this Portland-Vancouver area without any Bible teaching, without any knowledge of Christ at all. I do not know when Timothy was saved. Paul called him "my own son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). This may mean that Paul was the one who led him to Christ. But it seems from Acts 16:1, the first time Timothy is mentioned in the NT, that he was already a disciple of the Lord when Paul met him. I am rather inclined to believe that Paul was spiritually his father because he became his main teacher. But that Timothy had been introduced to the Scriptures and to Christ, first of all, by his mother and his grandmother.

Parents, make sure that your children know the Gospel. Tell them about Christ. And pray for their salvation. And those of us who are grandparents need to help when we are asked to help, but, most of all, to pray that the Word will take root in the hearts of our grandchildren, and that the Lord will bring them to Himself. We can see in our own cities, what is happening to our children. Most of them are headed for hell as fast as they can go. Let us reach them now. Time is running out. Tomorrow may be too late. May God help us to reach as many as we can in the time that we have.

THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LAST DAYS
2 Timothy 4:1-8

Intro: We have been considering for the past two Sundays what the Apostle Paul had to say about "the last days." We began at the beginning of chapter 3 in 2 Timothy, and today I want to conclude this brief series by examining the first eight verses of chapter 4.

As we learn in the passage before us today, the Apostle Paul knew that his ministry was coming to an end. How this was made known to him, we do not know; but he knew it. Timothy would remain to carry on in the work of the Lord. It was important that Timothy would understand the times in which he would minister, and what his chief responsibility as a servant of the Lord would be.

The times, spiritually, would not be good. Not only did Paul give nineteen terms to describe "the last days," but he went on to say in verse 13 that "evil men...." And it was at that point that Paul told Timothy not to forsake the teaching he had received from childhood from "the holy scriptures" (v. 15). The Scriptures, Paul said, are unique because they are God-breathed. And it would be through Timothy's submission to the teachings of Scripture, and to the practical exhortations of Scripture, that he would become equipped to do the work of the Lord.

As we approach chapter 4 it is important to note that Paul addressed Timothy about the personal application of the Scriptures in his own life. He needed to know the teachings of Scripture. He needed the personal rebuke of Scripture, then its correction, and on to further instruction in a life that would be pleasing to God. This was the note upon which the third chapter ended.

So Paul was not just interested in having Timothy serve the Lord, but he was concerned about the godliness of Timothy's life if he were to be an effective servant of the Lord. God wants us to be holy servants. He is not concerned about service just for the sake of service. It is important to keep this in mind as we take up chapter 4.

The first eight verses of chapter 4 give us four important things:

- 1) Paul's charge to Timothy (vv. 1, 2).
- 2) The conditions which will prevail in the world and in the church (vv. 3, 4).
- 3) Timothy's conduct of the minister (v. 5).
- 4) Paul's comfort for Timothy (vv. 6-8). Such would have been the effect of Paul's words here upon Timothy.

Let us look, first of all, at:

I. THE CHARGE (2 Tim. 4:1, 2).

Paul was committing to Timothy the highest responsibility, the greatest obligation, that can be placed upon any man. It did not come just from Paul; he would have had no right in him- self to place such a task upon Timothy. He did it "before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ." It was in the presence of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you noticed this preposition in your reading of Leviticus and Numbers? The people of Israel were taught to do all that they did "before the Lord."

The charge really came from God and Christ, and only from Paul as God's instrument. Paul wanted Timothy to know that he was being charged with this task not only by God and Christ, but in their very presence. This charge would mean that it was not Timothy's right to determine what would be the main part of his ministry; that was determined by the Members of the Godhead. And Timothy was to accept this charge knowing that ultimately he would be accountable to God and to Christ. The time of that accounting would be "at his appearing and his kingdom."

But what exactly was the charge? It is stated in verse 2:
"Preach the Word!"

Of all of the responsibilities that fall upon the servant of the Lord, this is the one that is take precedence over all of the others, this is the one that is always to have the greatest priority. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is more important than this: **"Preach the Word."**

Preaching is a public proclamation, a verbal declaration of a message. It speaks of a message that is to be made known. It really says nothing more than that. But the message that is to be made known is "the Word"!

It is clear that Paul had in mind just one message: the Word of God! That which he had a part in writing, must be spoken out to the world for all people to hear. It must not be concealed, but made known. This was to be Timothy's greatest work, his primary concern.

When Paul wrote for the first time to the Thessalonians (which was probably his first epistle to be a part of the New Testament) he wrote this in chapter 2, verse 13:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing,
because, when ye received **the word of God**
which ye heard of us,

ye received it not as the word of men,
but as it is in truth, **the word of God**,
which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

"The word" was "the holy scriptures" of chapter 3, verse 15, the truth of God which Timothy first became acquainted with when he was a child. This is a minister's first responsibility; this is the first business of the church! NOTHING WAS EVER TO REPLACE THE WORD OF GOD SO AS TO MOVE IT OUT OF FIRST PLACE. NO NEW THING WHICH MIGHT SEEM MORE PLEASING, OR MORE WORKABLE, WAS EVER TO TAKE THE PLACE OF THE PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD!

Guy King who preached in England earlier in this century had this to say about preaching:

"Preach the word"--not his own ideas, not the sermons of other preachers, not the topical snippets of the daily newspapers, not the ill-digested scraps of knowledge, a little of which is a dangerous thing, but the Word, is to be his source of truth and instruction... Timothy was exhorted to be a thorough-going Bible man;... His work was to be a thorough-going Bible ministry (To My Son, p. 111).

This was to be done "in season, out of season." Timothy was to be prepared to make the Word of God known when there was an opportunity, and even when it did not seem timely. He was to take his stand on the Word of God, and always be giving it out to those who were around him. If there were no opportunity, he was to make an opportunity.

Illus: Dr. Walter Wilson of Kansas City.

As a part of his preaching Timothy was to do three things:

- 1) "Reprove" -- to convict. He was to aim at the conviction of his hearers, to expose their wrongdoing, to show them their need before God.
- 2) "Rebuke" -- to warn them of impending judgment.
- 3) "Exhort" -- to encourage people to obey, to comfort. And this was to be done "with longsuffering." The servant of the Lord was to avoid anger, but to continue patiently with the work of preaching. "And doctrine" -- the teaching of the Word of God.

There is no thought in the above of harshness, vindictiveness, but rather of fearlessness and boldness, with patience, in preaching the Word. The preacher is to be always thinking of the spiritual good that can come to those who hear, believers and unbelievers, if they will only listen and believe and obey the message of the Word of God. His calling is to preach the Word.

Timothy was to do as Paul did with Felix when "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). The result was that, although Felix did not believe, yet he "trembled."

Cf. 1 Peter 3:15.

The preacher is not to defend the Scriptures, but to preach them. He does not substitute something else to lead up to the Word; he is to "preach the Word." He does not determine how the Word is to be used; that is God's work. But he preaches the truth, exhorts people to receive the Word, and then leaves the results in the hands of the Lord.

How important it is for us in the church today to understand what Paul was saying to Timothy. And we need to make it clear to people that the proclamation of God's Word is our calling. People are not to come to church to be entertained. Watch your newspaper at Easter and at Christmas and see how churches compete to put on the most attractive program to draw people into the church. This is not God's way; it is not our calling! People need to know that when they come to church they are going to hear the Word of God clearly and boldly and yet lovingly explained to them.

All that Paul has said here takes on an even stronger emphasis when we read what he wrote to Timothy about:

II. THE CONDITIONS TO COME IN THE WORLD AND IN THE CHURCH (2 Tim. 4:3, 4).

Paul was speaking here of the time when the preaching of the Word of God would clearly be "out of season"! There is no doubt but that we are living in such times today. People not only do not want the Word of God; they will not put up with it! Paul was speaking of times when the pressure would be on the preacher to take his orders from the people, not from the Lord. People will demand what they want to hear, not what they need to hear, not what God has called the preacher to preach. If the teachers they have will not give them what they want, they will get their own teachers who will submit to their desires.

Our country to day is suffering from the voice of the people. We have many leaders (not all, we can thank God) who are more concerned about what the people want than they do for that which is right. This is democracy at its weakest. But what a tragedy when this spirit gets into the church! Today it is in the world, and it is in the church. The pressure is on preachers to take their guidance from the pew, not from God!

What happens when people turn away from the Word of God?

Our answer is in verse 4. They are "turned unto fables."

What is a fable? It is a legend, a myth, something that it not true! Instead of being the truth, it is a lie! As far as sin and salvation are concerned, it is of no more value than a fairy story!

When Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians, he spoke of the time when the Wicked One would be revealed. And this is what he said: (See 2 Thess. 29-12.)

See what Paul said to Timothy about "fables" in 1 Tim. 1:3, 4:7. And to Titus in connection with the qualifications of a bishop, see what Paul said in Tit. 1:9-14 (esp. v.14).

People today are more interested in the wisdom of men than they are in the wisdom of God. But the true servant of the Lord will not be turned aside. If no one listens, our call is to keep on preaching the Word.

Now we come to verse 5.

III. TIMOTHY'S CONDUCT AS A MINISTER (2 Tim. 4:5).

Paul told Timothy to do four things:

A. "Watch thou in all things."

Timothy was to be extremely careful lest he be deceived by such evil influences that would characterize "the last days" to draw him away from his calling as a minister of the Word of God. No one is immune to the possibility of going along with the times. Be careful about being "geared to the times."

B. "Endure afflictions."

He was to be prepared to persevere even in the face of pressures that would be put upon him to conform to the desires of men rather than to the will of God.

C. "Do the work of an evangelist."

Matthew Henry makes the interesting observation that Timothy was not to be a pastor settled with a particular congregation, but that he was a kind of a deputy to the apostles who worked with infant churches until they could be under the regular ministry of a pastor. In other words, the care of believers was to be laid upon Timothy as a part of his charge

from the Lord.

D. "Make full proof of thy ministry."

Remember Paul's word to Archippus in Col. 4:17: "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." And so Timothy was to give evidence in the way he conducted his ministry, holding fast to his calling, that he was indeed a man appointed by God for the work that he was doing. He must be faithful in prayer, faithful in his life, in his teaching of the Word of God, faithful in caring for the spiritual needs of those who were under his ministry.

Finally, we have:

IV. PAUL'S COMFORT FOR TIMOTHY (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Like Paul's words in 2 Tim. 3:10, 11, these words were to be an encouragement to Timothy.

Three things can be said about these words:

- A. Paul was going to heaven; Timothy was greatly needed.
- B. Paul had endured great trials, but had been faithful; by the grace of God Timothy could do the same. The two men might be different, but their God was the same.
- C. The reward was great.

For the second time in this passage Paul mentioned the "appearing" of the Lord. The fact that the Lord is coming, that we will stand before Him, hopefully, to receive His approval and His reward, should all be an incentive for us to give ourselves to the work of the ministry with all of the devotion and zeal that we can possibly exercise.

Concl: These are words for us today. We are living in the very times that Paul was describing to Timothy. Even many professing Christians are not really interested in the Bible. They do not read it. They do not live by it. They may want to hear it when they go to church, but they can easily be satisfied with something else, or something less than the Word of God.

Let us take heed to ourselves. Let us be faithful in praying for those who are ministering the Word. Instead of lessening our efforts for the ministry of the Word, let us increase our efforts to make sure that the people around us, and people throughout the world, are hearing the true Word of God.