

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/2/92  
II Timothy 3:1-5 "Living in Stressful Times"

**Communion:**

**Intro:** We're living in stressful times.

The times in which we live are especially perilous for the committed Christian. Society is growing increasingly secular. There is increasing hostility towards fundamental, evangelical Christians. We are described as naive, closeminded, outdated, out of touch with reality, and even a hindrance to society.

Illust:

Yes, we're living in stressful times. But you don't need me to tell you that. You know it all too well. You read about the clever, caustic attacks of the ACLU in the news, attacks against Christian freedoms. You see the gay-rights marches on the TV screen. You wonder what it's going to be like for your children and grandchildren. You know we're living in stressful times. What you're wondering is this.

Q: What should I do? How should I as a Christian respond?

A: Those are not easy questions to answer. But God's Word addresses them. Paul wrote to his friend Timothy about those very concerns in II Timothy 3.

This morning I want you to see what Paul told Timothy about living in stressful times.

**Proposition: In II Timothy 3:1-5, Paul provides us with practical words of help for living in stressful times. Here God helps us come to grips with 3 key issues.**

I. Our Reaction--How should we react in Stressful Times (1)?

II. Our Recognition--What should we recognize about Stressful Times (2-5a)?

III. Our Response--How should we respond to Stressful Times (5b)?

Q: Why did God give us the book of II Timothy?

Paul wrote this letter some 35 years after Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, leaving his disciples with the charge to make disciples throughout the world. In the period of just one generation, God used the followers of Christ to impact the mighty Roman Empire. Satan did not sit idly by. He organized his vicious forces. In AD 64, using the wicked pawn Nero, the Evil One instigated vicious persecution against the Christians. Three years later, Paul faced his execution, and would eventually be beheaded. Those were stressful times.

He wrote his last inspired letter to Timothy. One theme gripped the apostle's mind and heart--THE GOSPEL of Jesus Christ. Paul charged Tim (and us) to do 4 things with the gospel.

Chapter 1--Protect the gospel (1:14).

Chapter 2--Participate and even suffer for the gospel (2:3, 8, 9).

Chapter 3--Persevere in the gospel (3:13, 14).

Chapter 4--Proclaim the gospel (4:1-2).

Why is our task so difficult? We have an enemy. Who is it?

Look at the verse we left off with last week.

2:26 "...the snare of the devil..."

The devil is not idle these days. He is aggressive and active. He is the Prince of the Power of the Air (Eph 2:2). He is the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2). He authorizes the rulers of the darkness of this world as well as the spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12). He has an arsenal of fiery darts which he casts at God's people (Eph 6:16). He markets himself as a deceptive angel of light (II Cor 11:14).

Quote: Paul Harvey, "If I were the devil..."

Now notice the connection between II Tim 2:26 and 3:1. We have an enemy (2:26). We live in perilous times (3:1).

Here's the first key issue Paul hits.

## **I. Our Reaction--How should we react in Stressful Times (1)?**

V 1 "This know"

It's an imperative, a command. "Timothy, get a handle on this fact." What fact? "that in the last days perilous times shall come."

Paul didn't want Timothy to be blown away by the recent surge of hostility towards Christianity. It was not easy to live for Christ in AD 67! Roman civil authorities stripped legal rights from the followers of Jesus Christ. Christians were blamed for the economic and social problems of Roman society. Nero instituted a hate campaign against Christians. Talk about living in stressful times?!

How would you react if you lived in conditions like that?

Look carefully at how Paul told Tim to react--"Know this Tim, that in the last days perilous times shall come."

What are perilous times? The word "perilous" means "hard, difficult, even stressful." John Stott paraphrases, "There will come times of stress."

In classical greek this word was used of dangerous wild animals, and of the raging sea. The only other time this word appears in the NT is in Mt 8:28, where it described the condition of 2 demon-possessed men as being "exceedingly fierce."

Know this. The last days shall bring perilous, fierce, stressful times.

Q: When are the last days?

You need to know something critical. According to the Bible, we are living in the period known as "the last days." And so was Paul. In fact, when Jesus Christ entered the world 2000 years ago, He inaugurated the "last days." The entire period between His first and second coming is known as the "last days."

Heb 1:1-2 "God who...has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son..."

Acts 2:14-17 On the day of Pentecost, Peter explained the phenomena of the miraculous speaking in others languages by quoting Joel's prophecy, "But this is that which was spoken by Joel...And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh..."

Christians in the first century believed that Christ would come in their lifetime. They knew that they were living in the last days. If it was true for them, how much for us! Perhaps the last of the last days!

Key: II Tim 3 is not describing a future period, but the present.

That's Paul's point. "Tim, don't be shocked at the degraded conditions of society. Don't be surprised at the way God and His people are mocked. That's the way God said the "last days" would be. Opposition is not a passing thing, Christians can expect hostility until Christ returns (see Jude 18, II Pt 3:3).

Q: How do you react to the perilous times in which we live?

Illust: Post-millennialism said the world would get better and better...

Illust: Some people seem shocked by the increasing sinfulness of society

Q: How should we react?

A: We need to be like the men of Issachar. Why? Issachar was one of the 12 sons of Jacob, born to Leah. His descendants had earned quite a reputation by the time David was king.

I Chr 12:32 "And of the children of Issachar, who were men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do..."

Know the times! See the times through the lenses of God's Word.

Peter wrote a letter to 1st century Christians who were facing perilous times. He told them the same thing Paul told Timothy. I Peter 4:12 "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you, as though some strange thing happened to you." What fiery trial?

4:14 "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye..."

4:16 "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf."

4:17 "FOR THE TIME IS COME that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel?"

Illust:

Tran: Key issue #1 for living in stressful times--Our Reaction. #2...

## **II. Our Recognition--What should we recognize about Stressful Times (2-5a)?**

Q: V 1 says we live in perilous times. What makes the times so perilous?

A: The way people are!

In vv 2-5, Paul describes the characteristics of people living in the last days. So we won't be shocked, he tells us what people will be like. I need to warn you. The list of 20 characteristics that follows is an ugly list. It's a sad commentary of the condition of our country!

READ vv 2-5 "For men shall be lovers..."

I've scratched my head trying to see if Paul had any sense of order to this list. It's almost a shotgun blast description. He describes:

--personal traits: lovers of self, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers (2a)

--interpersonal traits: disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, etc (2b-4)

--religious traits: a form of godliness but denying the power

Let's stop talking in generalities. Let's zero in on the characteristics one at a time, some more carefully than others. Take inventory of your life as we do.

1. Lovers of their own selves = "to love" + "self"

This is the key link in the chain that follows. All the rest of the vices hinge on this. The natural man loves himself. Society is full of self-lovers. Which leads to...

2. Covetous = money lovers (Covetous = lit. "to love" + "money")

Timothy knew that all too well. He lived in Ephesus. Ephesus was called "The Treasure House of the Ancient World." "The Vanity Fair of Asia Minor." The city was situated on a great trade route. The city was prosperous. Its people were materialistic.

3. Boasters = braggarts (orig used to describe wandering quack doctors)

The person who pretends to have qualities he doesn't. They know it all.

4. Proud = "to show oneself above others"

Illust: Larry King tells the story about Ty Cobb...

5. Blasphemers = love of insult; to slander God or fellow man

Illust: Mudslinging in political arena

The next 5 may be grouped together. Have to do with family life.

6. Disobedient to parents

One of the first areas apostasy hits first is the family. Children have lost respect for their parents. Society puts parents and kids on the same plane. What the child thinks is right has as much say as the parent (eg--Nicolodian TV)

7. Unthankful

We live in a very unappreciative age. People forget how indebted they are to God. Especially in America. The baby boomer and bustle generations are ungrateful generations. Illust: Sr. Citizens appreciate little things...Not so others...

8. Unholy = without piety or reverence

9. Without natural affection = unloving

This is an interesting word. It's another compound word. It literally means "without family love". It describes people who no longer have the natural, family love.

What a contemporary indictment! Do you know what's tragic? We live in a day when mothers (and fathers) choose to kill their unborn children. The slaughter goes on at the rate that exceeds 1 million a year. The majority of those babies are rejected because of one basic reason. They weren't wanted. They were unplanned. They were inconvenient.

One of the marks of the last days is the absence of family love.

Illust: Article about Mandy Shelley, Leadership Journal, Summer 92

10. Trucebreakers = irreconcilable; a condition in which a person not even willing to come to the conference table to negotiate

11. False accusers ("diaboli") = lit. "like the devil"; slanderers; to pass on a story that ruins someone else's reputation

12. Incontinent = powerless; lacking in self-control (controlled by passions)

13. Fierce = to be savage; to live like animals

14. Despisers of those that are good = lit. "without the love of good"

A man that despises God will inevitably despise good. How true in our day! Our society loves and exalts evil. To those that despise God, sin is entertaining. Righteousness is boring and outdated.

15. Traitors = a man's word means nothing

16. Heady = describes a man who is unable to think sensibly; swept by passion and impulse; reckless

17. High-minded = swell-headed; one who is inflated with his own importance

Illust: Interview with Olympic Charles Barclay, "They're in trouble."

18. Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God

That phrase certainly incriminates our culture. We are a pleasure loving people. Oh, we love God too. More than 80% of Americans say they believe in God. But if there's a conflict in my schedule between God and pleasure, guess who wins out?

Illust: A man came to me a couple of years ago after the Sunday AM service (Ron B.). He told me, "I won't be in church next week. I've got tickets to the U.K. Basketball game. I knew you'd understand."!!

What could I say? What would you say? I'm not a legalist. I don't go to church because I have to. And I don't want you to come for that reason either. But when there's a conflict between God and pleasure, why is it that God so often takes second place?

Illust: I love the story of Eric Little (Chariots of Fire), a man who loved God more than anything, more than competing in the Olympics, more than life (he died in a prison camp while serving as a missionary in the Far East)

19. Having a form of godliness

Notice what Paul did NOT say would happen in the last days. He did not say wicked men would get rid of religion (as the Communists tried unsuccessfully). No. Satan doesn't try to get rid of religion. He merely perverts religion.

Most people today are not irreligious. I've already mentioned that 80% + say they believe in God. The problem is that they settle for a "form of godliness." But what's missing?

20. Denying the power of godliness

Listen. There are churches on corner after corner in America. But what's missing in many? The power of God. There are multitudes of religious people. But they've never experienced the life-changing power of God. As Wiersbe puts it, they have form without force, religion without reality.

There they are--20 traits of people in the last days.

Q: Have you ever asked, "What's the real problem with the world today?"

Some say the problem is that we need a new economic program. Others say what we really need is a new educational system. Others say we need a new president. What did Paul say the problem with society is?

The real problem is that people have MISDIRECTED LOVE. Why did God create mankind? To love and serve Him. But what have men and women done with their love? We've misdirected it. We love the wrong things.

1. They love self (2).

2. They love money (2).

3. They love pleasure (4).
- What should we love?
4. We should love God (4).

Listen. The reason our age is so stressful is because the way people are. Here's our root problem. We love the wrong things. We are consumed by the love of wrong things. The breakdown of society starts right here--when people start loving themselves, and money, and pleasure, instead of loving God.

Quote: Wiersbe, "In this universe there is God, and there are people and things. We should worship God, love people, and use things. But if we start worshipping ourselves, we will ignore God and start loving things and using people."

That's exactly what's happening all around us.

Illust:

Q: Why did Paul give us this ugly description of lost people?

A: So we wouldn't be caught off guard. So we could be prepared.

Tran: Which leads us to key issue #3--Our Reaction, Our Recognition, and...

### **III. Our Response--How should we respond to Stressful Times (5b)?**

V 5 "from such turn away" (imperative)

Paul is firm. He tells us, "From such turn away (KJV). Have nothing to do with them (NIV). Keep clear of people like that (Phillips)." He doesn't mean avoid all contact with sinners. Jesus didn't. He was a friend of sinners. Here's the point. We've just seen what the world is like--20 ugly characteristics. It's bad enough that the world has these 20 marks. But it's worse when these marks creep into the church!

Challenge: Don't be squeezed into the world's mold!

Romans 12:1-2

Illust: Earlier this week I was with Katie in the house. I noticed her eyes were fixed on something. She seemed to be staring into space. I couldn't see anything. Finally, she said, "What's that?" I looked more closely. Then I realized what she saw. She was standing in the path of the sunrays coming through the west window. What caught her eye were the dust particles hanging in the air, illuminated by the sun's rays. I told her, "That's dust Katie." She thought and said, "I've never seen the dust in the air before." I said, "Oh, the dust is always there but it takes the Sun to make it visible."

That's the way it is with the dust spots of sin in our lives. They seem insignificant, and go unnoticed. Until we're in the presence of the Son! The Light of the world Jesus Christ exposes our lives for what they are.

That's why the world hates Christians. When we allow the light of Christ to shine through us, we expose the sin in people's lives. They don't like that.

That's also why we must be separate from the world. You can't mix light and darkness. We must turn away from it.

Q: How can we live in times like these? Hymn: "In Times Like These..."