



“Surviving Dark Days”

Part I

Kevin Presley

It's good to be with you today to inquire into the truth of God. Aren't we thankful for the grand old book? It has endured the centuries and even millennia and is still pointing us to God. I'm thankful that we have the Bible for times like these: times when common decency and morality are on the decline, times when there is such moral and religious confusion, and when it appears storm clouds may be gathering for people of faith and virtue.

In many respects, we are living in dark days, but it's not anything new. In fact, there have been times that were much worse for the church as it has existed in the midst of pagan and faithless cultures. There have been times of such turmoil from within the church that perhaps disciples of that time wondered if the church could withstand it. Such times are not unanticipated by God. Rather, we are warned that they will come.

II Timothy 3:1-5 “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

What period of time is Paul warning us of? Are we living in the days of darkness that the apostle described? If so, what does it mean for the future of the church? How do we survive dark days? Most people who read and respect the Bible believe that the church and much of the world is entering into a dark period of time. Particularly in America, we have enjoyed freedom and a great measure of peace as we've existed in the culture. The first 200 years of America's existence as a nation saw widespread acceptance and even to some degree a promotion of the basic morals that emanate from

the Christian faith. As late as the twentieth century, the person who claimed the Christian religion and regularly attended worship was in the mainstream of much of American society.

But the tide began to turn several decades ago. Today, the younger postmodern generation is turning away from faith and toward secularism in alarming numbers. If that trend doesn't change, that will certainly portend a more difficult time ahead for the church. But should we be wringing our hands? Of course, we don't want to see our children and grandchildren be lost, but should we despair over the decaying culture around us?

What about what we see *within* the kingdom of God itself? We're living in a time where the church in many quarters seems to be in turmoil or at least in a state of unrest or transition. And the direction the church is going in so many places seems to alarm many of us. Is this something unique and unusual to the church? Might it signal the approach of the end of time? Some would tell us that we're seeing prophecy fulfilled and that Jesus' return is imminent, if for no other reason than what we read in the first verse of our text passage.

II Timothy 3:1 "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come."

We're told that living in *perilous times* must mean that the world is about to end. But is that what Paul is saying here? Let's notice the term *last days*. That phrase is often taken to mean *the days immediately before the end of time*. We hear it used that way consistently by supposed end-time prophecy preachers, premillennialists and others. But if you look at the whole of church history, you'll see that people in just about every time period, when some crisis, persecution or perplexing world events took place, felt as though they were surely living in these *last days*.

Actually, that is not what the phrase means at all. Rather, it refers to *the whole of the Christian dispensation* when it is often used. That is, the *last days* began with the time leading up to the destruction of the Jewish temple and the establishment of the church on the Day of Pentecost, and they will continue until the end of time. The Bible refers to that time period as *the last days*. Therefore, Christians of all ages, since the Day of Pentecost in one sense, have been living in *the last days* or *the last times*.

Hebrews 1:1-2 "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets (speaking of the patriarchal and Mosaical dispensations of time), Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;"

Jesus came in the first century, bearing witness of the truth and His revelation was made known and complete through the work of His apostles in the first century subsequent to His ascension back to heaven. The Bible calls those *the last days*. The Day of Pentecost was referred to as *the last days* by the prophet Joel (**Joel 2:28**). When the Spirit was poured out on the apostles that day in the upper room, Peter later declared this:

Acts 2:15-17 : For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh:..."

Peter is quoting Joel hundreds of years earlier as he prophesied of the events of the Day of Pentecost that are now unfolding with Peter and the others. Peter says that Joel referred to those as *the last days*. What then is Paul telling Timothy in our text passage? He's not talking about times getting particularly dark just before the end of time. He's talking about times that were already upon them even back in that day; times that godly people living in an ungodly world would experience then and in times to come. But beyond that, he's talking about trouble that would arise even from within the church. The fact that we're living in the Christian age or the reign of the kingdom of God on earth doesn't mean that dark and difficult times will not come.

Some think that if the Bible is true and if Jesus really is Lord and King, that we should be living in a kind of utopia here on earth, but the Bible never promises anything of the sort. Dark days will come. They came in the very beginning times of the church and they will come until Jesus comes again. The Bible warns us of it again and again. We don't want to be derailed or spiritually knocked off course when these times of apostasy and oppression come. Times of distress, digression, and diabolic opposition would and will meet the church time and again while she remains on earth. To make matters worse, the conditions that Paul describes here aren't even things that come from *without* the church, but are rather an apostasy that arises from *within* it.

So, first of all, we should take comfort in the fact that we are not the first to face difficult days and if time continues, we won't be the last. I don't mean to diminish the seriousness of the times in which we live. They are very serious and challenging, but this is not the first time that people who profess Christianity have turned away and deserted the truth. Perilous times have and will continue to come. Notice also that Paul calls them *perilous* times. That is an interesting word that is very intense. In fact, it's used only twice in the New Testament. It was used in **Matthew 8:28** to describe the two demoniacs who were living outside the city amongst the tombs.

Matthew 8:28 "And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way."

That word translated *fierce* is actually the same word that Paul uses in **II Timothy 3** to describe the brutal force with which apostasy would disrupt and distress the church. Paul said these times will come. You see, God is not surprised by any of this, and we shouldn't be either. We wring our hands and fret and think that somehow God is not in control or the Bible must not be true or we must somehow be wrong. We're intimidated into losing our faith when people from even within oppose us. But Paul told Timothy to be watching for such times and to prepare for them. He even tells Timothy how to survive them. We can survive them and remain strong in our faith as well. If we're going to survive dark days, we need to learn to recognize perilous times when they come. The things we're seeing around us and in some cases among us may be expected, but they're not to be accepted. They're not the norm. They may be the way things are, but they're not the way things should be. Paul lists nearly twenty things that will all be the marks of apostasy when it comes. We need to recognize and beware of them. You don't have to look very far today to see them.

First, this apostasy will be marked by *moral wickedness*. Secondly, it will be marked by *carnal worldliness*. And thirdly, it will be marked by *doctrinal waywardness*.

II Timothy 3:2-7 "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection,

trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

I. Marks of Moral Wickedness

When people leave the faith, it will first be marked by gross immorality and wickedness. This is a dark picture that Paul paints but his words aren't describing the world *without*. In fact, why should we expect anything different from the world? You can expect men of the world to be unholy, lacking self-control and blasphemers and so forth, because they are the world; they don't live by the same standards or moral and spiritual compass that the people of God do. These words are rather describing when the things that are *without* infiltrate the church *within*. They are describing apostasy as it takes place from *within*.

Paul says people will *love themselves*. Have you noticed how little we hear about self-denial today? Do you hear many preachers talking about repentance? Do you hear church leaders saying what we must give up to follow Jesus? No, rather we hear about how special we are and how God loves us, smiles on us and accepts us just as we are in the lives we now live. As I heard one preacher say, we've replaced THEOLOGY with MEOLOGY. I think that's the watchword of religious people in the twenty-first century. Paul also says that men will be *covetous*. The modern prosperity movement says to reach for riches, that God wants you to have more and more. Money has become the primary theme in the lives of many people and churches today. He says that the apostates will be *boasters* and *proud*. Not poor in spirit, or in other words, broken and contrite, as Jesus taught. Paul says they will be *blasphemers*; making light and speaking against that which is holy, right and good.

He also says they will be *disobedient to parents*. We can see the dismantling of the Christian home as children are raised to think that what they think is just as important as what their moms and dads think. When children are not taught respect and reverence at home, you can bet that they won't have any at school, at work, or in society. He also says men will be *unthankful, unholy*. We are not being challenged to be holy today in most modern pulpits. Many so-called Christians will even make fun of you if you are too holy, if you try to live too separated of a life, if you try to be too much like Jesus and different from the world.

Next Paul says *without natural affection*, referring to the absence of normal, loving relationships that should exist between human beings, such as parents loving their children. We see this lack of natural affection openly displayed in the world today in the forms of abortion, child neglect/abuse and so forth. He says that men will be *trucebreakers*, meaning unforgiving or implacable. The church will be filled with the poison of division, turmoil and people will not be of a disposition to love and forgive each other. He says there will be *false accusers* and *slanderers*; the church will be filled with talebearing, accusation and malicious gossip. Men will be *incontinent*, meaning without self-control, doing what pleases them and their fleshly desires. Not abstaining from lusts, but indulging in them.

He says they will be *fierce, despisers of good*; the wicked will turn against the righteous, the tares will despise the wheat. They will be *traitors*, treasonous when it comes to their allegiance to the truth and the people of God. They will be *heady* or reckless and headstrong, uncontrollable. That's a picture of the moral wickedness and apostasy that will come from time to time throughout the church's history.

II. Marks of Carnal Worldliness

Paul goes on to say that men will be *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*, meaning their desire will be toward earthly things with no time or interest for those things that are spiritual. That's one of the great crises we face in the church today, isn't it? No time for God, no time for worship, no time for the church. No real interest in the things of God or the work of the church. Don't keep us from our busy and hectic lives for more than a few minutes, if we can even carve out a few moments to get to worship, if we even think it's important enough to go to worship. That's simply because of worldliness and apathy that exists in the hearts of so many Christians today.

Look again at what Paul says is the result of all of that:

II Timothy 3:5 “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

You see, that's what worldliness produces: pseudo-disciples who outwardly claim to love Jesus and go through some pretense or form of religion, but their lives in no way reflect the power of the gospel and the transformation that the Lord Jesus Christ affects in a life when He moves in and reigns in the heart. Can't you see that we're living in days of apostasy and trouble today? We are living in dark days, not because of what is taking place outside of the church, but within it.

III. Marks of Doctrinal Waywardness

II Timothy 3:6-8, 13 “For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith...But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.”

These perilous times were already present with Paul and Timothy, and they will continue with us through the church's life upon this earth. Paul describes the very method and mandates by which false teachers operated then and still do so today: they seek out the weak, ignorant and vulnerable and deceive them with their heresy. We see many people led off into digression and who turn away from the truth in these perilous times. Men and women who have renounced the truth that they once believed and practiced. False doctrine and division have wielded a mighty sword in our time and it is increasingly difficult to find those who are simply committed to the sincere, pure practice of New Testament Christianity.

I realize that paints a very discouraging picture. It must've been the same for Timothy. When Paul lists twenty things and tells him that he's going to see them, even of men within the kingdom of God who turn away. Oh, that must've been discouraging to Timothy! It's tempting to say, *what's the use?* and throw in the towel. It's tempting to give in and give up, but don't do that. the church can and will survive dark days—even the ones we're living in today.

The first thing we must do to survive them is to recognize them for what they are and to understand that they do not nullify the Christian faith. They do not discredit the word of God; rather they confirm the word of God because is word prophesies that such times will come. So, don't be dismayed,

discouraged or deterred from seeking the truth and the type of Christianity that you read about in the scriptures. That is the ONLY type of Christianity, by the way.

You are going to have a hard time finding a multitude of people to go along with you. In fact, God's people have always been in the minority. Jesus said in **Matthew 7** that MANY follow the broad way and are going to be lost. He's talking about "religious" people. FEW are ultimately going to be saved. Don't place your faith upon multitudes of people, numbers, or what's popular or most widely accepted. It's going to be difficult to stand for the truth. Sometimes it will seem as though you stand alone as you stand for what the Bible says and for the practice of pure, New Testament Christianity. But those difficulties confirm the word of God for us.

©2017 BibleWay Media. All rights reserved.
BibleWay Media grants permission to copy this material for personal use. Permission is also granted to distribute this transcript as long as it is reproduced in its entirety, used solely for its original purpose of spreading the gospel, and attribution is given to the author and Let the Bible Speak.