

2 Timothy 3

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[0 : 00] So 2 Timothy chapter 3, if you've got a highlighter pen, there's a phrase that comes up three times. If you look at verse 10, you can see it, you however, and then verse 14, but as for you, and then verse 4 of chapter 4, as for you.

You however, but as for you, as for you, they're my three points. They don't make any sense at all, do they? Until we put in the context. So let me fill you in the background.

Notice how Timothy begins the chapter, start of chapter 3, he's saying there, isn't he, in the last days there will be times of difficulty. There will be terrible time.

And when's that going to happen? Perhaps your first reaction is a relief, because you think we're not there, but unfortunately we are. It seems to me that as far as the Bible is concerned, the last days are now.

The last days are that time between our Lord's first coming and his second coming, between his resurrection and his return. These are the last days biblically. But Paul is saying, in the last days, can you see it, there will be terrible times.

[1 : 23] There will be difficult times. The word used there is an interesting word. It's only used once in the New Testament, apart from this. It's the story of the pigs, remember?

When Jesus casts the demons into the pigs, and the pigs run down the hill, jump off a cliff, and are drowned. It's the only time you see this word.

It's a word to describe that madman who came rushing out at Jesus out of the seminary. We're told that that madman, out of whom Jesus cast the demons and put it into the pigs, he'd terrorized the region for so long.

No one was safe to walk down the street. He was a terror to the region. And what Paul is saying is that in these last days, there'll be times like that. There'll be dangerous times, difficult times, threatening times, menacing times.

Times that seem to be out of control. Times when things are unpredictable. Times when you're not sure if you should board the plane or open the mail. It's not always going to be like that.

[2 : 33] It won't always be like that. But there will be times in the last days when it is like that. It may not be like that everywhere. But for our brothers and sisters in Christ, around the world, there are places where it is like that today.

Dangerous times. Threatening times. Menacing times. Times that seem to be out of control. And you mustn't confuse the last days with the terrible times.

They're not the same thing. And the difficult days happen during the last days. It's like the tide of the sea coming in. I think it's probably true to say that there's a rising tide of evil in the world.

That's what verse 13 seems to be saying. While evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse, the tide is coming in. There's a rising tide of evil.

The world is certainly not getting better. It's going generally from bad to worse. But the waves come and go.

[3 : 45] Sometimes the water comes rushing up the beach and threatens to knock you over. Sometimes the waves come right over the beach, over the edge. And then they go down again.

And although the overall trend is slowly for the tide to come in, there are times when the water comes up more strongly. The waves hit the beach with a particular force and an intensity and strength.

And I think that's probably what Paul is talking about here. Certainly what many of our brothers and sisters are living through around the world. Times when evil seems to have been let loose.

And the question we have to ask is, what is going to be so terrible about the terrible times? What is going to be so dangerous about the difficult days and threatening and menacing?

And there are two things that are going to be so difficult and so terrible. Verses 1 and 2, it's people. Can you see that? For people, verse 2, will be lovers of self.

[4 : 49] Lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy. People. They're the problem, aren't they? It's a wonderful world, but the problem is people.

And if this is 2 to 4, you've got a devastating analysis of human nature. What's wrong with people? And Paul says, don't get me started. And he comes out with a list of 20 different things.

We haven't got time to look at them all this morning. But every one of them merits our attention. It's devastating. Let me read it to you. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.

And can you see, at the end of verse 4, all that list is summarised by those two great phrases. People will be lovers of themselves, not lovers of God.

Can you just note there, the problem is not that we don't love. The problem is not that we don't love. It's that we don't love properly. That our love is misplaced and misdirected.

[6 : 11] So that slogan, isn't it? Love is love. What they don't understand is that there is a misdirected love, a misplaced love. A love that is not right.

Now let me put it to you in this way. In the universe, there is God, and there are people, and there are things. And so we are meant to worship God, and to love people, and to use things.

But what have we done? We worship things, we use people, and we ignore God. And that's the problem, isn't it?

Me, myself, and I. Lovers of self, not lovers of God. So take money, for example. It's one of the things he mentions here. And he speaks of people being lovers of money.

And so as a church, we want to say there's nothing wrong with money. Money is a good gift from God. The Bible does not say that money is the root of all evil. It says that the love of money is the root of all evil.

[7 : 23] It's always misquoted, isn't it? When you hear it on the radio. It's not that money is the root of all evil. Money is a neutral thing. It's a good thing. The problem is this.

You've probably noticed it. That people who love money are often people who use people. And the question we ask is not how much money have we got, or how much money have we not got.

But do we see the money that God has given us as a way to love people, or do you see people as a way to make money? And that is the question, isn't it?

You're a lover, but what are you a lover of? Are you a lover of money or a lover of people? What an indictment these verses are on human nature. In the last days in which we live, there will be perilous, menacing, threatening, difficult days.

And the reason for that is people. People like you and I. People like us. Human nature. But it's not just people, is it? He gives another reason for these perilous times, and that is religion.

[8 : 33] You see that in verse 5? Now we're talking, someone says. That's the problem, isn't it?

That's the real problem in our world, religion. That's what makes the world such a dangerous place.

Such a threatening place. Religion fuels so much violence, doesn't it? And unrest around the world today. And politicians and community leaders bend over backwards to diffuse religious issues.

And our schools are so terrified of causing religious offence. Because they see religion as a problem. Let's not make this into a religious issue.

But according to Paul in verse 5, it is. According to verse 5, and what we're up against, is one of the world's greatest non-Christian religions.

And so what is the world's greatest non-Christian religion? It's not Islam.

[9 : 37] It's not Hinduism. It's what it says in verse 5. It says, in these last days, people will have the appearance of godliness, but they'll deny its power.

They'll have an appearance of godliness, but deny its power. And so can you see that the largest and most dangerous non-Christian religion in the world is a gospel-less Christianity.

It's a Christianity without the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the largest and most dangerous non-Christian religion in the world.

It's unspiritual, gospel-less Christianity. And Paul is saying, you can expect that. You can expect to find people who pretend to be what they are not.

You can expect to find people who've got a form of godliness, but they deny the power of it. It's quite shocking, isn't it? Because in these last days, in the difficult times, you suddenly find yourself sitting in church.

[10:52] And you and I belong in this chapter. And you think, he's speaking about human beings in general, and then suddenly you find he's speaking about yourself in church and the people sitting next to you.

And the great challenge of the times in which we live is that we've got to ask ourselves, am I for real? Am I really a Christian? Or am I just going through the motions?

Am I a Christian? Or am I just religious? Because religion doesn't change anyone except for the worse. Going to church will not make you a better person.

It will actually make you worse without the gospel. But it's a very dangerous thing to come to church. You'll go from bad to worse without faith in Christ. If all you've got is the shell, it will not do you any good at all.

Religion doesn't change anyone or anything. Only the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The good news of the gospel. Which is the power of God to salvation for all who believe.

[12:01] And to have a form of religion without the gospels, well that's one of the problems Paul identifies here. And so the greatest threat to the UK is not fundamentalist Islam.

It is actually liberal nominal Christianity. That goes under the name of evangelical in many ways. The greatest threat to healing is not the mosque.

Or the temple. It's tragically churches which call themselves Christian and yet have thrown out the gospel. People who have a form of godliness but deny its power.

And Paul can see that happening already, isn't it? He's in prison, he's in Rome, and you can see it happening in Ephesus. Look what he says in verse 5. He says avoid such people. Avoid such people.

For among them are those who creep into households, captured weak women, burdened with sins, and led astray by various passions. He's not saying that women are weak-willed any more than men.

[13:03] Don't misunderstand him. But he is saying that there are certain men who will take advantage of weak-willed women. He's not saying that all men are like that either.

He's not saying that all men are kind of specifically like that. Or all women are like that. He's painting a picture. And he's saying this. This is what happens.

And he says I can see it already. He's warning about it. He's saying in the name of religion, people who are imposters will steal the gospel out of churches. There was a great art robbery in Boston.

Two thieves walked into the art gallery. And they walked out with 13 works of art estimated at a value of about 300 million dollars. They've never been seen again.

Apparently among those works of arts which were stolen was a unique seascape by Rembrandt. The only seascape by Rembrandt. Apparently it was called The Storm in the Sea.

[14:00] The question is how did those thieves get away with it? How did they steal those 13 million pounds worth bits of art? Pieces of art.

How did they get away with it? Shall I tell you how they got away with it? They dressed up as policemen. They flashed their badges. They walked into the gallery.

Took the pieces of art. And walked out again. It was as simple as that. Simple as that. And Paul says that's what's happening in Ephesus. That's what's going to happen with the gospel.

He says to Timothy, in these last days, I can see people. He names them in other chapters. And these people, they look like Christians. And they pretend to be preachers of the gospel.

And they're going to walk into the church. And they're going to steal the gospel from under your nose. have nothing to do with these people. They'll knock on the door.

[15:03] And they'll say, is your mother in? Or is your husband in? Can I come in? And Paul says, you've got a verse for people like that. Look at it. It's 2 Timothy 3, verse 6.

You turn on the internet. And on your reels comes one of the tele-evangelists. Here's a verse for them.

It's 2 Timothy 3, verse 6. But among them are those who creep. Who are creeps. What do you say to the Joel Osteens?

To the Joyce Mayers? To the kind of God channel preachers? You say you're a creep. You're a worm. And I'm not supposed to have anything to do with you.

Because you're stealing the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ out of the church. These people, they worm their way in. It's a serious threat he's talking about. And so the question for us is, how do we guard the gospel?

[16:04] How do we keep the good news of Jesus Christ as a saviour for sinners? That's what 2 Timothy is all about. That's why the book was written. It's what we've seen in the last few weeks.

How are we going to guard the gospel so these creeps don't come in and steal the gospel out of this church? In these last days when evil is let loose and impostors run.

And what does God expect us to do? Three things. He expects us in verse 10 to dare to be different. In verse 10, you however, you Timothy, there are impostors pretending to be gospel preachers.

They walk in church but verse 10, you, you follow my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness. He's saying to Timothy as a leader in Christ's church, you've got to be different.

You've got to dare to be different. That's what holiness is about. It's about being different. To be holy as God is holy is not to be the same as everyone else.

[17:09] It will mean being different. And that's what we're called to. Just look at chapter 1 and verses 8 and 9. Look what he says. God who has saved us.

He's creating news. And God has called us. What is God's calling on your life? What is God's will for your life? What's his big purpose? Well, it's that you be holy. Verse 8.

He's called you to a holy calling, not because of your works, not because he ran things special, but because of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. And which now has been manifest.

It's been shown through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus who abolished death. And brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Jesus died on the cross to make us holy.

And God, through the good news of the Lord Jesus, calls us to a holy life, to a different life.

He calls us to be different. And Jesus didn't go to the cross to make you like everyone else. And so if we are to guard the gospel in this church, we are to dare to be different.

[18:18] I find it so easy to be like everyone else. I find it so easy just to be swept along with the tides like everyone else. And we're not to do that.

We're to stand out like a rock in a stream. And sometimes when we're like that rock in a stream, the water becomes like a kind of raging torrent. And you've got to stand against it, even though it threatens to engulf you completely.

And it feels like it's going to overwhelm you. And you stand like a rock in the stream with the water, sometimes gently passing around you. Sometimes like a raging torrent going over you.

Dare to be different. Look at verse 12 of chapter 3. Indeed, look at this. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. You've only got to want to live a godly life in order to be persecuted.

You don't even have to do it. You just have to want to do it. And if you're anything like me, you will find that your holiness consists a lot more in wanting to do things than actually doing them.

[19:29] But you only have to want to live godly in Christ Jesus to be persecuted. And there are no exceptions. I'll look at verses 10 and 11. You, however, follow my teachings, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings.

That happened to me at Antioch, Iconium and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured, yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

I don't think the Apostle Paul would have won Britain of the year. He wouldn't win kind of awards of popularity.

And neither will you if you follow his way of life. Why does he single out these places? Is that all about that? Why does he single out Antioch, Iconium, Lystra?

And I think he does that because that's Timothy's home turf. It's where Timothy grew up. It's where Timothy and Paul first met. You can read about it in Acts 13, 14.

[20:34] It's fascinating. Paul, driven out of Antioch, he's got to flee from Iconium to prevent him being lynched. In Lystra, he's stoned and left for dead. What kind of role model is that? I sometimes wonder if the Apostle Paul applied to become a minister in the IPC, would he get through candidates and credentials?

You can imagine it as he came to the floor of Presbytery, isn't it? He's got a prison record. He's a repeat offender.

He's one of those men who causes trouble wherever he goes. He starts a riot. He's got some kind of debilitating medical affliction that keeps on coming back again and again.

He's not the kind of guy you'd want to put in charge of the youth group, lots of titties. He's a dangerous man to have in your church. And yet the call of the New Testament is to follow his way of life.

That's the call of ministry. Gladys Staines. Did you know that name? He's one of my heroes. That name might mean nothing to you.

[21 : 45] On the 22nd of January 1999, Graham and Gladys Staines were missionaries in India and they were working amongst lepers. Graham and his two sons, Timothy, age nine, Philip, age seven, were burnt to death in their Land Rover by a crowd of Hindu extremists.

Gladys was interviewed the following day on kind of TV that went all around India. She said this, I am deeply upset, but I'm not angry, for Jesus has taught us how to love our enemies.

She's a remarkable woman. She stayed and she carried on the work that she and her husband had been doing. She's back in Australia now. Her words were carried around the world. Hundreds of thousands of people saw her words.

And many were led to question their faith. Hundreds became Christians as a result of that interview. Vinod Ramachanda, kind of Indian missiologist, says this, a middle-aged Australian widow has done more for the cause of the gospel in India than all the slick evangelists of the 24-hour networks being beamed into the country.

She's a middle-aged, now she's older, a widow, Gladys Staines. She's a hero. And we ought to model ourselves on a middle-aged Australian widow.

[23 : 14] And that's what we're called to do. That is what I mean when I say we've got to dare to be different. And these are to be our role models. The Gladys Staines, the Timothy, the Pauls.

And so let me speak to the children here, the little ones, and the teenagers. And heroes are really, really important. Heroes are vital.

Who you make as your heroes is how you will go. You should look around this room and there should be people who are your heroes.

People you look to. David and Marcia Jones. Never forget what they were like. Never forget that. Never forget the model they set. You could make your hero one of the kind of Instagram or Twitter heroes, isn't there?

There's a guy called Tommy Shepard. Thomas Shepard. I don't know whether he, I think Marius follows him too. But I mean, he gives a message, doesn't he? A message every breakfast. Kind of a motivational message. He could be your hero from Dino's calf.

[24 : 24] Don't make him your hero. Not even the superstars of the evangelical world, the kind of big American conference preachers. Don't make them your heroes. Look for people like Gladys Staines.

Look for people like the Apostle Paul. The Timothy. The Calvins suffering and keeping going, keeping plodding. The Luthers making a stand.

The Hudson Taylors. The Amy Carmichael's. So I'm going to survive in these last days, threatening times, menacing times in which we live.

The company we keep is vital, isn't it? The people we model ourselves on. The examples we allow ourselves to learn from.

And so if we want to preserve the gospel, we've got to choose what model are we going to follow? It's got to be different. Number two, live in the Bible. Look at verse 14. But as for you, there's the second one, as for you, continue in what you've learned.

[25 : 32] Continue in what you've learned and I firmly believe knowing whom from you learned it. The word is interesting there. It's the word you'd use about your address. It doesn't come out clearly here. But if somebody asks you, where are you staying?

I'm staying in the Bible. What's your address? And my address is the Bible. I'm living in the Bible. Well, continue in that address. That's the sense of the word. That's where I live. That's what Paul's saying.

But as for you, continue. Stay in the scriptures. Don't move. Make the Bible your home. Timothy's been brought up in the Bible, isn't he? We saw that in the first chapter. His mum and his

grandmother, they read the Bible with him when he was a little boy.

So children, when you're mum and dad, they read the Bible with you every day. Little bits of the Bible. Giving you, feeding it into your life. It seems that in verses 14 to 15, Timothy actually learned to read from the Bible.

We've got mobile phones, haven't we? They're like an extra limb, aren't they? We all get a bit twitchy when we lose our mobile phone. For all of us. We text message, we WhatsApp, we do those things.

[26 : 41] I'm told that young people's thumbs are different now because of the use of mobile phones. I don't know if that's true. Second nature, isn't it? Well, wouldn't it be wonderful if we used our Bibles that we use our mobile phones?

You go to the house and you kind of, where's my mobile phone? It's now, we panic. How good would it be if we loved the Bible like that? That's what Paul is saying to Timothy.

Live in the Bible. Read the Bible. Enjoy the Bible. Why is that so important? Verse 16, all scripture is breathed out by God. I'm profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

And the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I think that, I think, it wasn't deliberate, but I think sometimes the Bible has been taken out of people's hands.

And so you need tools to read the Bible. Is that really right? Certain things that you have to know to interpret the Bible. Actually, how is the Bible described?

[27 : 52] It's like honey, sweeter than honey. It's like gold. It's fine gold. Enjoy the Bible. Read it to relax. Don't let people take the Bible out of your hands.

All scriptures God breathes, useful for teaching or rebuking in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped. Why should you, why should you love the Bible? Why should you enjoy the Bible?

Why should you relax into the Bible? Well, because two things it says here. It's through the Bible you come to know Jesus. And when I was growing up, I couldn't stand breakfast. I don't eat breakfast.

I admit and fasting has given me an excuse not to eat breakfast but I've never liked breakfast at all. And when I was growing up, my mum and dad, they weren't particularly concerned about my nutrition but they wanted me to eat breakfast.

And so, cereal boxes, they don't do it anymore. I'm told, the Sunday school kids were telling me. But you ate cereal. Why did you eat cereal when I was growing up? Because there was a free gift inside. And you'd pour out the cereal and some toy you would pop out and you'd have the toy.

[28 : 56] Or there'd be a car in it or something like that. And you'd eat cereal because there was a free gift inside. Well, I want to say to you, read the Bible, love the Bible, enjoy the Bible because there's a free gift inside the Lord Jesus.

The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life. And that's why you should read the Bible. Not so that you can become a Bible nerd. There's enough of them about. There are lots of people who are like the scribes and the Pharisees.

They know the Bible but they don't actually know and love the one whom the Bible speaks of. And they think that by reading the Bible they will have eternal life but they've not come to the one whom the Bible speaks of.

They're not hard to not move towards him. And so you read the Bible because the Bible is about Jesus. And you and I deserve death and we're under sentence of death.

But we saw in chapter 1 didn't we? Jesus has come and he's defused death. He's taken the sting out of death. Jesus because he loves us. That's what the Bible is about and that's your free gift from him.

[30 : 02] And so read the Bible because there's a free gift inside. A free gift means you don't have to pay for it you just receive it. It's the free gift of eternal life. And so stay in the Bible and live in the Bible because in the Bible you will find Jesus as your saviour.

And not only that you'll find that the Bible becomes your personal trainer. All scripture is breathed out by God and useful and suddenly you find as you read the Bible somebody is teaching you and correcting you and training you.

Live in the Bible everywhere you go and you'll have your personal trainer with you. In every situation allow your personal trainer to correct and rebuke you. Where are you going to live? Do you

want to survive in these dangerous times?

Where are you going to live? Well you're going to live in verses 2 to 4. Boastful, proud, loving money, living to please myself or are you going to live in the world word and allow yourself to be corrected and trained and rebuked in righteousness.

Who are the big influences? Who's the company you keep? Do you want to live in verses 2 to 4 or verses 16 to 17? Dare to be different, live in the Bible and then thirdly and lastly pass on the gospel.

[31 : 10] Look at verses 4 and 5. Pass on the gospel. Look at verses 4 and 5 of chapter 4. The third but for you.

As for you, as for you, keep your head, should be. In the ESV, it's sober-minded. Verse 5, as for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

We'll come back to this next week. But the world is full of people who won't plant seeds unless they're around to taste the apples. I don't know who said that but it's a good quote, isn't it?

Lots of people won't plant seeds unless they're around to pick the apples. Lots of ministers are like that actually. And Paul isn't that guy.

He recognizes that ministry and the gospel work and the life of the church is not about himself. He knows he's not going to be around much longer but he's passing on the gospel, the pattern of sound teaching, the good deposit.

[32 : 21] He's entrusting it. He's saying life and death and eternity and people's destinies are at stake. He's entrusting this to Timothy.

And so he says to Timothy verse 1, I charge you in the presence of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead by his appearing in his kingdom.

Preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Talk about instant coffee and instant soup and instant hot water. He's saying you need to be an instant preacher of the gospel. To be an instant evangelist.

To speak in season and out of season. Ready to speak whether people listen or not. And so with your Bible open before you, put them right.

Convince them. Some of them are living in deliberate rebellion against God and they won't believe it. And some people will say well I've got an intellectual problem with the Bible but actually know that it's a moral problem.

[33 : 19] And with your Bible open, rebuke and encourage them. And there'll be others that go along with what you're saying but they lack the courage of their conviction.

So encourage them. So verse 2, preach the word, be ready in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and teaching. They're not so popular anymore but there were books, weren't there, that were about a thousand and one things to do before you die.

A thousand and one places to go before you die. A thousand and one movies to see before you die. People talked about bucket lists. I don't know if they still do.

But what does God want you to do before you die? Only one thing. Only one thing. He wants you to pass the gospel on to someone else.

He wants you to open your Bible and point to Jesus. Robert Moffat, the great missionary, said, we have all eternity to celebrate our victories but only one short hour before sunset in which to win them.

[34 : 26] That's what we've got, isn't it? One short hour before sunset to win people for Christ. So be instant. Be prepared.

Live in the Bible. Open your Bible. Correct. Rebuke, train, encourage. Point to Jesus. Tell them of the one who's able to receive them and give them eternal life.

Let's pray.