

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *In Times Like These 2*

Truth

August 13, 2023

## 2 Timothy 3 (NIV)

*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. <sup>2</sup> People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – <sup>5</sup> having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.*

*<sup>6</sup> They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, <sup>7</sup> always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>8</sup> Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. <sup>9</sup> But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.*

*<sup>10</sup> You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, <sup>11</sup> persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. <sup>12</sup> In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, <sup>13</sup> while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

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We are in 2 Timothy, Chapter 3 today, if you'd care to turn there. Second Timothy, Chapter 3.

My high school, at the time I graduated (35 years ago) was a pretty good school academically, though the quality of my own scholarship surely dragged down its averages.

We were not so great at sports, though. We had our bright moments here and there, but for the most part, opposing teams usually came to the "Beaverdome" (we were Beaver Local High School), fully expecting to win.

And usually – their expectations were met. But I remember one night when they were not.

I was there at a basketball game as a spectator, not a player. I did not play.

I tried to play. Back in 7<sup>th</sup> grade I went out for the team, but I was cut on the first cut. Coach Staley said, "Come back next year."

So, the next year, I went out for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade team, but I got cut in the second cut. Coach Staley said, "Come back next year."

But I showed him. I never went back.

Schools where I come from are not like they are here.

In Jessamine County, we have one public district split into East and West.

In the county I'm from in Ohio, we had eleven separate school districts: Beaver Local, East Liverpool City, Wellsville City, Crestview Local, Columbiana Village, Lisbon City, Leetonia City, East Palestine City, Salem City, United Local and Southern Local.

And we all played each other, but Beaver Local's true rival – especially in basketball in those days – was Wellsville City, and they typically beat us, not only on the court, but also in the fights in the parking lot afterward.

But not this night – this one night.

For some unexplainable reason, our team was winning – and winning big.

Wellsville was not used to losing, and especially not at basketball, and especially not to Beaver Local. And so, throughout the game, they got more and more upset and angry, and when they came out to play that last period, their anger overtook them, and things got ugly.

Flagrant fouls, loss of control, outbursts, rage, the disregard of rules. It was the end of sportsmanship. You who follow sports, well, you know how that can go.

It's how, unfortunately, a beaten team can come to behave: if they can't make themselves happy by winning the game, then they resort to making themselves happy by making the other team miserable.

Well, it's just that sort of thing that the Apostle Paul describes here in this letter to Timothy: a beaten team's reaction to loss.

First, he wants Timothy, and us, since we're reading his mail, to understand why the world is like it is.

And then second, Paul wants us to know how best to respond to it.

So, who is the losing team?

The losing team is the devil and all those he has "taken captive to do his will." That is exactly how Paul refers to this losing team at the end of Chapter Two, immediately preceding today's text.

Now, to continue our analogy, I don't know if the devil himself should be considered the team *owner* or *coach* or *captain*, but in any case, he's certainly a player and the leader in the game. And even now, just as in Timothy's day, he is leading the charge of revenge in our world because of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

That's why times like these in which we live are as they are.

You see, for a very long while, the devil had the world by the throat. God was still present and active, don't get me wrong, but the devil became very used to winning. He got so used to winning, you might say, he forgot that his team could ever be beaten.

But about 2,000 years ago, along came Jesus, and in two acts (Jesus' crucifixion for the sins of the world and His resurrection, which provides opportunity for

forgiveness and life to all who will seek Him), God has beaten the devil and all his plans for destruction.

So, the devil knows how the game is going to end; he can see the writing on the wall.

But in this interim time between Jesus' resurrection and His return to earth to establish His kingdom in its fullness (called "last days" in Scripture), the devil, on his way out, is committed to making as big a mess here as he possibly can. He is an angry, sore loser with no sense of propriety or fairness or good sportsmanship – or *any* good quality, really.

And so, Paul describes, in verses 2 through 9, what we can expect to see from the devil's tirade. Most of it is self-explanatory, and nearly all of it is due to what Paul states at the very first there, "*People will be lovers of themselves.*"

The devil succeeds wildly when he can convince people to follow the philosophy, "self above all else." That's what happened with Eve and Adam in the garden, and it still works on people today. And that's where nearly all the trouble comes from. We are inward-focused instead of God-focused.

That's why people, when they are apart from Jesus and thus apart from the purifying work of God's Spirit, become, with the devil's strong encouragement, all these other things that Paul lists: lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, disobedient to their parents. And on and on Paul goes.

We all recognize these dispositions when we see them. We know what they look like, so I'll not comment on them, except to mention to you young people that Paul includes in this list of really terrible things, "disobedient to their parents."

You may think that dissing your parents from time to time is not such a big thing, but the Apostle Paul would mightily disagree with you.

I think that is something that should be kept in mind.

Let me also quickly mention that the specific reason Paul brings all this up here in his letter to Timothy is that Timothy is apparently encountering people like this in the church he's helping to lead.

That is an unfortunate reality of the visible church: there are people in it – even at times in leadership of it – who are doing what they do entirely for their own benefit. They are not at all followers of Jesus. They are unrepentant, unholy members of the devil's team, but they have infiltrated God's people for their own gain.

And Paul describes what they do: they take advantage of people, vulnerable people, for their own benefit. That's verse 6.

Paul says they talk religious talk, but it's all based in dishonesty. That's verse 7: always supposedly learning but never arriving – never settling on truth. That can be particularly true in academic communities: people like to sound smart. They want other people to think they're

smart, so they do a lot of talking and asking questions, but they're never willing to receive any real answers.

Some even perform what looks like works of grace, but that are counterfeit. That's the whole Jannes and Jambres thing in verse 8.

The names, Jannes and Jambres, are not actually in the Moses accounts. These are the names Hebrew tradition gives to the two main magicians that Pharaoh called upon to replicate the miracles Moses performed leading up to the Exodus event.

Paul's point is that they (and those that walk in their ways even today) are on the devil's team, because they stand in opposition to what God wants to do in His world, you see?

And Paul concludes there in verse 5, "*these sorts of people: have nothing to do with them.*"

Now, on the surface, that statement pushes against our evangelistic spirit, doesn't it?

And beyond that, at times, we simply cannot "have nothing to do with them" because *they* are our boss, our co-workers, our neighbors and others with whom we must interact.

My sense of Paul's point is that we must learn to recognize these sorts of people for who they are, and though we may well engage them and share what we can of Christ with them, we should not allow ourselves to go into deep relationship with them.

We cannot link ourselves meaningfully to them.

We do not take counsel in large life issues from people like this, because, you see, we are on fundamentally different teams.

This is the idea of being "unequally yoked" with another that Paul speaks of to the Corinthian church.<sup>1</sup>

It would be destructive to share team secrets and strategies with committed members of the opposing team.

It is evident that Paul writes all this because of a specific instance that Timothy was facing. Just the same though, all this applies to us because this is still the general state of our world today. We are in the same "time" that Paul and Timothy were in, only further along.

Other descriptions of this "time" we are in can be found in First John and in Romans 1. The point of it all is that in this interval, this 2,000-years-plus "moment" between Jesus' resurrection and Jesus' return, just as a sore loser often does on the court or on the field, the losing team is throwing a fit, and so we can fully expect evil to increase and intensify.

That "Team Jesus" faces an opponent that goes down kicking and screaming should not surprise us, and so we have to brace ourselves and expect things like all of this to come.

Satan is evil, after all.

Paul even goes so far as to say, there in verse 12, that "*everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,*" using himself and his own hardships (verses 10 and 11) as examples.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:14

It is simply the fact that in the spiritual realm there are these temporary (repeat: *temporary*) disadvantages of being on the ultimately winning team.

But, beyond just bracing ourselves and expecting behavior like this, Paul also assures Timothy and us today, that there is a victory we can know in times like these.

Our victory arises from knowing the truth of God, revealed, Paul says very clearly, in the Scriptures.

You want to experience victory, peace, joy and assurance when the devil throws a fit? The path to those runs through this book. If we will not take this book seriously, we will not really know the extent of peace and assurance that is possible.

Paul points Timothy back to the training he'd had in the Scriptures (obviously, what we know as the Old Testament), the training he had received from his mother and grandmother.

Timothy's Scriptural education began at an early age, and he's known the truth of God for essentially his whole life.

So, please hear this, parents, you who make time for family Bible reading and study and prayer.

Hear this, you who teach Sunday school and CLC and Children's Worship week after week, wondering if what you're doing is making any difference at all.

It is! You are! Who knows what a "Timothy" or a "Timothyette" you are investing in?

You are the Loises and the Eunices of tomorrow. You are giving children nothing less than the foundation for salvation and peace in a troubled world, because the central point and purpose of all the Old Testament, and of course the New, is to make people aware of God's way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, as verse 15 there says.

The confidence we can have, even in troubled times, arises directly from the Scriptures: from their explanation and description of why the world is the way it is today, to then realizing and embracing what God has done, is doing, and has yet to do through Jesus.

The more thoroughly we embrace the Christ that the Bible speaks of, the more thoroughly we will be equipped, as verse 17 says, for *the day*: for what the day brings, for the hardships we face, and for every good work.

We don't have to live in a constant state of wondering why the world is like it is, why people are so nasty sometimes, why accidents and mistakes happen, and why our world—our culture especially—seems to be getting worse instead of better.

All of this the Bible clearly explains.

But neither do we have to live in a constant state of worry about it or fear of it, because Scripture also gives us the solution, the way to peace in even the most troubled times.

The way forward—the *only* way—is to embrace Jesus, the One the Bible predicts and describes and holds up as the savior.

He is not only the way home to God our Maker, but He is the way to peace, both now and forever.

Paul knew that Timothy was facing difficulties, and Paul knew that he could not, himself, rush to Timothy's side to uphold and help him.

Paul was imprisoned, after all.

But Paul also knew that, even more than his own visit and presence, the assurance of the Scripture could help Timothy.

Back in Chapter 2, Paul admitted that though he himself may be chained, God's Word was not, and so the truth of Scripture itself would uphold Timothy and those after Timothy: those like us who suffer hard things in our world and who sometimes take an unfair beating in the fourth period of this great cosmic contest.

That may well happen, but we need not fear.

When error and evil run rampant, as they do in times like these, there is no better corrective than the truth of Scripture. With Biblical truth in our minds and hearts, we can keep on going, continuing in what we have learned and have become convinced of.

Others may change with the seasons or turn with the tide, but we hold our course, because as our course follows the God-breathed and useful Scripture that Paul describes here, our course is right and good.

A remarkable gift, this passage is. It is not only a parting gift from the imprisoned Paul to Timothy, but also, of course, a gift to us: to help and encourage us, to keep us grounded, and to keep us in right perspective when the world gets wonky, as it has and will again, in times like these.

Followers of Christ, don't fear the abuse of the opposing team. They know their days are numbered. They know who wins in the end, and they can do nothing about it. They may do things here and there designed to provoke or rattle us, but they can do nothing of any eternal consequence to us if we will, in the face of their fouls, embrace the word of God and the Savior to whom it points.

In Jesus, we will absolutely survive, and even thrive, even in times like these, as we look forward to the win at the end.

Prayer:

Father, we thank you for providing for us Jesus, Your living word and Your way of salvation.

We thank you for giving us this written word, that lights our path.

And we thank you for giving us Your Spirit, who brings to mind and heart all that You've done for us and said to us about the days in which we live.

We open ourselves to all You have already done and to all You want to do in us even today, so that even as the devil rages, as the cosmic loser faces his loss, we will be joyful, hopeful witnesses for you, pointing others to the winning team. Amen.

Closing Song: *In Times Like These* (vv. 1,2)

Benediction:

No matter what the enemy is trying to do in our lives in these days, the truth of God's word and way will prevail.

Just as Moses and Aaron's snake ate the snakes that Pharaoh's magicians conjured up, in the end truth will destroy the enemy and all that is his, and all the trouble he causes.

In times like these, we have a savior. In times like these we have an anchor. So, we can be very sure that our anchor holds and grips the solid rock.