Standing Firm in These Last Days (Isaiah 55:8-11 and 2 Timothy 3:1-15)

01-Nov-26

Isaiah 55:8-11

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the Lord.
9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
10 As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

2 Timothy 3:1-17

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.
6 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, 7 always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. 8 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. 9 But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

A Final Charge to Timothy

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

There are **Bibles** in front of you

And a sermon **outline**

I encourage you to have your **Bibles opened** at **2 Timothy chapter 3.**

Let's pray…

Intro/Last Days (v1)

The Apostle Paul is writing from prison in Rome to his protégé Timothy - a minister in the church in Ephesus

And so far Paul has been encouraging Timothy to hang in there – even though Timothy faces severe opposition and false teaching.

Now Paul describes what lies ahead

V1 – he says "***there will be terrible times in the last days***"

The Greek Word used for "***terrible***" here means perilous or fierce or savage or dangerous!

This word is only used in one other place in the New Testament (NT) – in Matthew 8:28 – to describe two men who are demon-possessed and fierce!

Paul is saying these last days will be perilous/fierce/savage/dangerous times!

But when are these last days?

Well – from other parts of the NT – we know that the last days are the days between Jesus' first coming (His birth, death, resurrection and ascension) and Jesus' second coming! (Acts 2:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-2)

So Paul and Timothy were living in the last days and we are also living in the last days!

[Slide-1st Point]

And **Paul's first point** is for Timothy and us – **to recognize the danger of ungodliness in these last days** (vv2-9)

Recognize the Danger of Ungodliness in These Last Days (vv2-9)

And so Paul gives a **list** in vv2-5 of what this ungodliness is like – which we will explore in a moment.

But first – this list shows us 3 things

1. 1st - **Jesus IS coming back**. We don't know exactly when (Mark 13:32; Matthew 24:36). So we live like He is coming back tomorrow. It might be in 100 years. But - I'm not prepared to take that chance – I want to be ready for Him in case He comes tomorrow!
2. 2nd – From that list – **we can deduce things are getting worse in the world - not better**. In recent times here in Australia – we have had the Bondi massacre of Jewish people and what happened to the MP - Helen Haines. Also, in the last 100 years we have had mass genocide; nuclear weapons; world wars; persecutions; terrorism and government polices across the world

that are not biblical. Yet many think we are improving – we have better technology, electric vehicles; we've conquered space – and we even have artificial intelligent. We are so smart – how could things not be getting better. But the Bible says and of course it's God's word - so it's right - ***The human heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*** (Jeremiah 17:9) – so without us turning away from sin and repenting and coming to Jesus – we remain beyond cure!

3. So the 3rd thing we get from this **list of ungodliness** is that - **There is a harvest field of godless unbelievers ripe for harvesting – but the labourers are few** (Matthew 9:37-38)

Let's quickly go through this list of ungodliness in vv2-5

- **People will be lovers of themselves** – the biggest problem I encounter in society is selfishness – people often focus on what they want – no thought for God or for others
- **Lovers of money** – people strive for more and more wealth – within a year or so of marriage couples want a 4-bedroomed house – double garage – pool – 4WD – caravan – and they want it NOW!
- **Boastful and proud** – people constantly promoting their achievements – and they are always right and refuse to admit their mistakes
- **Abusive** – we have seen a huge increase in domestic violence in our nation
- **Disobedient to their parents** – children openly disregarding and disrespecting their parents' authority
- **Ungrateful** – this has to be the most entitled generation of all time

- **Unholy** – the number of Christians in our nation is declining – Christians are a minority. Our governments blatantly implement policies that disobey God's Law
- **Without love** – too many are ready to cut off their family – and don't care about the heartache they cause
- **Unforgiving** – I have lost count of how many situations I have encountered where parents and adult children are not talking – harbouring grudges and too stubborn to say sorry or to forgive
- **Slanderous** – all over social media – keyboard warriors slander one another and wreck people's reputations – being very brave behind a keyboard
- **Without self-control** – we live in a culture where we can do anything that makes us happy even if it's harmful – alcohol, drugs, sex, gender reassignment
- **Brutal and not lovers of good and treacherous** – recently we've seen the demonstrations and riots across Europe – the kidnap and persecution of girls in Nigeria and so on
- **Rash** – people making decisions based on their feelings and not based on right or wrong
- **Conceited** – many want that 15 minutes of fame – and often full of their own importance – so many wanting to be influencers!
- **Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God** – there are many people whose life revolves around entertainment, sport and personal enjoyment – party, party, party – and no room for God!

- **Having a form of godliness but denying its power** – what Paul means here is people who attend church and know Christian jargon – but their lives don't match their talk or the Bible!

Paul is warning Timothy and us that this ungodliness can infiltrate our church community unless we recognize it and stand firm.

What are Timothy and us to do with this ungodliness? Paul tells us in v5 – ***we are to have nothing to do with it***

Paul's not finished with the warning though.

V6 – He says that these people can worm their way into homes and catch gullible women off guard.

Paul's not picking on women here – he's just saying in the culture he lived in – if men are out working and women are at home looking after the household – they are in a more vulnerable position to be tricked.

In our culture – we have lots of things worming our way into our homes that can be an evil influence.

We have to be very careful what we watch on TV? There are no restrictions on unsavoury content these days like there used to be say 40 years ago!

We've now also got – streaming services like Netflix, Stan, Paramount etc. – and again – we can watch something uplifting or watch horror movies and sexually immoral content – no restrictions!

Then there's access to the internet. We can use it to look up lots of godly biblical commentaries and listen to godly preachers – or we can use to watch horrific violent movies and pornography.

What are we allowing into our homes?

(pause)

Then Paul says v7 – these godless people are – ***always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth***

Paul is describing people who are constantly taking in information, listening to teachers and perhaps showing an interest in religious ideas. They are always learning something new, but they never arrive at a genuine understanding or acceptance of God's truth.

There is a difference between **knowing <u>about</u> God's truth** and **knowing and <u>following</u> God's truth.**

An example of this today might be:

Someone who:

- Regularly listens to podcasts about Christianity.
- Reads books about spirituality and religion.
- Attends Bible studies and enjoys theological discussion.
- Is always looking for a new interpretation or fresh spiritual experience.

But they <u>never</u> come to repentance, or faith in Jesus or submit to God's Word.

Their knowledge increases, but their lives remain unchanged.

It is possible to be constantly exposed to God's Word without ever being <u>transformed</u> by God's Word.

Paul then gives an example of this sort of corrupt human condition by referring to two men **Jannes and Jambres** from the Old Testament [OT] (vv7-8) who opposed Moses (Exodus 7:8-13; 7:19-23; 8:5-7, 16-19).

Even though these two men were not mentioned by name in the Bible – Jewish tradition tells us they were two Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses and Aaron when Moses went to Pharoah to ask Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

Jannes and Jambres were able to work *real miracles* — but by the power of darkness and not the power of God. When Moses and Aaron threw down Aaron's staff in front of Pharaoh it turned into a snake. Jannes and Jambres could do the same. When Moses turned water into blood, they could do the same. When Moses brought forth a plague of frogs, Jannes and Jambres could do the same. Yet eventually they could not match God miracle-for-miracle, and their occult powers were shown to be inferior to God's power.

In these last days - just like Jannes and Jambres' power had limits, so also Satan's power is limited and the power of godless people is limited — God is still in control.

That's why Paul can say – v9 - these godless people in the last days – ***will not get very far*** – and ***their folly will be clear to everyone***!

And the reason that ungodliness cannot prevail is because of God's Word.

You see - God sent His Word to become flesh – 2000 years ago – and the Word of God became a prefect God/Man in the birth of Jesus!

Jesus' power is stronger than the power of evil.

Jesus conquered Satan's power and conquered sin on the cross

And Jesus conquered the power of death through His resurrection

[Slide-2nd Point]

So having given the warning **– Paul's second point** is – **what should we do about this ungodliness** (vv10-17)

What Should We Do About This Ungodliness (vv10-17)

And Paul gives us three things

[Slide-mentors]

1. 1st thing we need to do about this ungodliness is - **Follow the best mentors who are imitating Jesus** (vv10-11)

   Paul reminds Timothy that Timothy knows all about Paul's life, his purpose, his faith, patience, love and endurance; the persecutions and sufferings Paul had in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. In 1 Cor 11:1 – Paul told the Corinthians "***Imitate me, as I imitate Jesus***". That's what Timothy is to do – and Timothy is to understand that imitating Paul and following Jesus doesn't mean avoiding suffering; it means remaining faithful to Jesus even when suffering comes.

   The point is the Lord rescued Paul from his suffering [including 3 shipwrecks, several beatings and many imprisonments) because Paul remained faithful and still had more of the Lord's work to do!

   Who are we imitating as they imitate Jesus?

   Who will we mentor as we imitate Jesus?

[Slide-realistic]

2. **2nd thing we need to do about this ungodliness** is - **Be realistic about the world we live** (vv12-13)

V12 – Paul makes it very clear **everyone who is a genuine Christian will be persecuted**. It might not be the same persecution as in Paul's day – or the same as the Christians that are persecuted in Nigeria or Yemen or North Korea today. It might simply be rejection from our family or friends – or harsh words – or ridicule – or people thinking we are weird? We must expect this – Paul says!

V13 – Likewise we will encounter evildoers and imposters who will go from bad to worse **– who will continue to deceive others and be deceived themselves.** A simple example of this is: A person who repeatedly tells lies. Eventually, they become so accustomed to their own version of events that they actually believe their own lies – and so they have not only deceived others, but they've also deceived themselves!

[Slide-committed to God's Word]

3. **3rd thing we can do about this ungodliness and the most important thing is** – to **Remain committed to God's Word** (vv14-17)

This is where our OT Reading comes in.

God tells Isaiah how important God's Word is and he uses an example from nature – of how rain works.

[Explain Hydrological Cycle]

And that's how God's Word works – it goes out from His mouth – using mouth pieces like prophets – like disciples – like us – and as we proclaim God's Word – God promises it won't come back to Him empty – it will achieve exactly the desire and purpose He has planned.

Personal example

In the last 4 years of my RC Primary School – every Friday we had a mass – and we sang "***The Lord's my shepherd***" and "***Faith of our Fathers***".

Then when I was age 33 – and finally picked up the Bible to read it for myself – I came to Psalm 23 – The Lord's my shepherd.

God's Word came to me in primary school and didn't return to Him empty – but achieved its purpose decades later – when I read Psalm 23 – and Jesus became **my personal shepherd**.

That's how important God's Word is!

Yesterday was **Reformation Day** – 509 years ago in 1517 – a German Monk called **Martin Luther** – took God's Word very seriously and nailed 95 complaints to a church door in Guttenberg – complaining against the church's false teaching of God's Word. This brought about the Protestant Reformation and the beginning of Protestant churches and the printing of the Bible in people's own language!

Here in 2 Timothy 3 - Vv14-15 - Paul tells Timothy he must continue with what he learnt from God's Word as a child.

Because Paul says

V15 – God's word is "***able to make you wise for salvation***"

In other words – **God's Word teaches us how to be saved for Heaven!**

You see – we can look at the stars and planets at night – and deduce pretty quickly (unless we're really dumb) that there is a God – who created all things and He is an ordered God.

But looking at God's creation won't tell us how to get to Heaven!

Only God's Word can do that!

You see - God's Word tells us – the bad news – we all sin and we all will die. But God's Word also tells us the good news – the Gospel – God sent His Son to die for the punishment for our sin – and if we repent and believe Jesus died for our sins – He gives us forgiveness – and if we believe Jesus rose from the dead 3 days after He died – then we have the gift of eternal life in Heaven.

Only God's Word – not humans' word - can teach us how to be right with God and get to Heaven!

Then v16 – Paul says ***All Scripture is God-breathed***.

Which literally means "God-spirited" and it's God's Spirit that inspired the Biblical authors to write down God's words in the Bible!

But Paul is not finished though…

He says - God's Word is "***useful for teaching***" – for example – the Bible teaches us how God created everything – how sin and death came into the World – why we need a Saviour – and why God sent His Son Jesus!

And Paul says God's Word is also "***useful for rebuking***" – for example when King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah

'conveniently' killed in battle – God's word – through the prophet Nathan - came to rebuke King David (2 Samuel 12:1-13)

And Paul says God's Word is also "***useful for correcting***" – for example – when someone steals – then they read the 8th commandment which says ***"do not to steal***" and they read the 10th commandment which says "***do not covet or want what belongs to someone else***" – God's word corrects their behaviour so that from that point forward, they don't steal!

And Paul says God's word is also "***useful for training in righteousness***" – for example – the Bible teaches that when we become a Christian we receive the Holy Spirit – and the Bible teaches we are to ***keep in step with the Holy Spirit*** (Gal 5:26) – and when we do that we produce the **fruit of the Holy Spirit** in our lives – ***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – against such things there is no law***. (Gal 5:22-23)

When we produce the fruit of the Spirit – we bring glory and honour to God and others reap the benefit of this fruit.

But why should we bother taking God's Word so seriously?

Paul tells us in V17 – ***so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work***

And the great thing about that is Paul tell us in Ephesians 2:10 "***We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do!***" (Eph 2:10)

God has a plan for each of us to do good works. For example: The Elders, Jenny, Lina, Lorraine, Heather, Judith, PWA and Kitchen ladies, Sunday Jaffa teachers, Friday Jaffa teachers, SRE teachers; and David and his team in Evangelism… and so on.

But note: **- We are not saved BY these good works, we are saved FOR the purpose of doing these good works which God has prepared for us!**

One of those good works is something we are ALL called to do and that is: ***go and make more disciples of Jesus*** (Matthew 28:19-20)

Application for us

We can't recognize ungodly behaviour – we can't be taught, rebuked, corrected or trained in righteousness - we can't make more disciples of Jesus - if we don't know God's Word!

Therefore I encourage us all to:

- Read the Bible daily
- Mediate on God's Word – daily – have daily devotions and quiet times
- Join a Bible Study Group
- Study, meditate and apply God's Word to our lives

That's how we stand firm in these last days!

Let me finish then, with Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 16:13

[Slide-1 Cor 16:13]

Conclusion (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Be on your guard; stand* firm *in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Amen.