

Understanding the Times

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Good morning. It's good to see you guys here today. What a delightful place. Eastern Oregon is the dry side of the state, and when we go back, we have family back in the Midwest and we'll go back and we'll talk to them and they'll say, oh, you guys live in Oregon. That's beautiful. We say you haven't been to our side. There is a beautiful side, but it's not our side. We have, we're considered high desert and so we get about nine inches of rain every year. Every year. And yeah, you guys, I think you guys got that last night. I was listening. I was listening.

We're staying in our RV up in the kind of, I don't know what you guys call that area up there, the upper lot, and we could hear it coming down. So, we, as Brett said, we've known them for a long time since I think we met them in the eighties.

You guys remember the eighties? Big hair, weird clothes. And we were living up in the Pacific Northwest here. In fact, we lived up in Mount Lake Terrace and Edmonds, and for a few years while we were hanging out trying to do the Lord's will, and then the Lord called us down to Ontario, Oregon. Anyway, we just love Brett and Kathleen and we're really happy to be here.

I want you to start off by joining me, if you would, in 2 Timothy chapter 3. We're going to start there, so, open your Bible, please there. 2 Timothy chapter 3. The apostle Paul never seemed to speak of himself as being gifted in the prophetic, and yet in some of Paul's letters, particularly here, in 2 Timothy and also in Thessalonians we have some of the most amazing prophetic insights, particularly as it relates to the last days.

The first 5 verses of this chapter are among them, and I'm going to read those here with you. Just to let you know, I'm reading out of the ESV okay? So, it's probably not going to be perfect with maybe what you're looking at, but it's going to be pretty close.

The first 5 verses of 2 Timothy 3 go like this, *“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, (isn't this pride month?) arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous,*

without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, (that's an incredible phrase) lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people." (ESV)

Let's start with prayer. Can we?

Father God, we just open our hearts to You this morning and we pray that You would fill us with insight and understanding because Lord, as we approach the Word we recognize that apart from You, these are just words on a page. And we need, Lord, the illuminating work of Your Holy Spirit to bring to life the message that is here.

And we believe, Lord, that that's a desire of Yours to fill us with insight and understanding. And so, we're looking to you this morning to do that. And we look to no other. You are the teacher, Lord, here today. We are the receivers. So, we open our hearts to receive from You. In the name of Jesus our Savior, amen. Amen.

Reading through these first 5 verses of chapter 3 and 2 Timothy is almost like the Lord allowed Paul to tune in on the nightly news from what's going on today, and then just write about it because it's absolutely eerie how spot on these descriptions of evil are. And we recognize that this is the world that we're living in today, and I'm old enough to remember when things were different.

I remember when Mayberry wasn't that far off. I mean, it was always a little idealized, granted, but it wasn't that far off. And Leave it to Beaver, that was kind of like, gee Wally, it was kind of like the way life was. Well, it's not that way anymore. The days of Mayberry and Leave it to Beaver are gone, and although we've seen this coming for a long time, I don't know if you noticed this. I was mentioning this last night over dinner with Brett and Kathleen that I think that the pandemic has somehow escalated the attitudes that we have seen in the world that have been on a slow boil for some time.

But there's just been this movement, this fast rapid movement or escalation of the attitude of the world, which interestingly enough, I have both experienced this myself, and I've seen it in others. It has caused a grieving in people. I see this in believers. I see that they're grieved. And whenever you look at the world you're going to be grieved somewhat; but there's this heightened sort of escalated grieving that's going on, particularly pronounced here in the United States of America related to the many freedoms that we have seen just vanishing from our country one by one.

And the result of all of that, I find that people are either becoming discouraged to the point of depression or they're getting angry. And those who are discouraged, it just, that disappointment and depression, it just becomes overwhelming. It becomes paralyzing. And for those who get angry, it often eventuates into a militant attitude where everything they seem to say or post online becomes just full of criticism and very toxic, and it seems like that's like the two responses that we've seen people have related to this escalation of the attitude of worldliness and evil that has had darkness that is just really taking hold of the world.

And both of those attitudes, whether it's depression or whether it's this toxic, militant, angry, critical attitude, both of them render those individuals unable to share the hope and love of Jesus to a lost and dying world that desperately is seeking answers, and that desperately needs the message of the cross of Jesus Christ. And yet we find that many people are unable to share it because they've been overcome. Just overcome with either a paralyzing depression or a militant kind of toxicity of their hearts.

I want to talk to you a little bit about what's happening in the world and at the same time, pass along what I hope is a biblical worldview, because I think understanding this thing from a biblical standpoint is critical. Otherwise, we're just going to get, we're going to fall into one of those categories that I mentioned and I'm not suggesting that the evil that we're experiencing here today is so much different from the evil that has always existed. I mean, the ancient Romans were known for their immorality.

We know biblically that the city of Corinth was a hotbed of sexual perversion to the point where if you wanted to call somebody a mean name, you'd call them a Corinthian. Whether they'd ever set foot there or not, didn't matter. That was literally a way of calling somebody a sexual deviant. These things are not new. I'm just saying that there's an escalation. But when you think even about what was going on in those cultures back then, there's something that we have today that they didn't have. And that is a pervasive mechanism for immorality and deception to spread.

We can spread it much faster than they could. They were limited by their day and by the movement of populations by boat or camel or something like that. Today it's instant. We have this, being that we're in the information age, we have this instantaneous ability to allow the ideologies and opinions of the world to spread like gangrene. Just like a wildfire, just whoosh. It's everywhere. And that's something that hasn't existed before movies. When I was a kid, there were

religious people that wouldn't let their kids go to movies, and we always thought that was pretty weird.

And now I look at movies and I think, goodness gracious. They're not just entertainment anymore. I mean, they are preaching to this generation that is being systematically indoctrinated, with the worldly messages that movies are passing along. I mean, movies were never all that great. You had to pick and choose. You had to be careful. But, oh today, I mean, just the message that the woke message is just everywhere. It has permeated all of these things to the point where even just watching a movie these days is just, you feel like you need a shower after you're done. It's just terrible.

In the passage that we opened up with here from Second Timothy chapter three, Paul, the apostle Paul did a pretty good job of describing the evil that would be part of the last days which we are today living in. But you know, you'll notice that Paul really didn't describe the root of the problem. He just simply described the problem. He said, this is the way it's going to be, but in order to understand better the root of all these things that are blossoming today, and I don't say blossoming in a good way; we have to go elsewhere in Scripture. And of course, one of the best ways to do that is to study the Book of Origins.

I love teaching through the Book of Genesis because we see there not only the beginning of how sin entered the human equation, but we see also how it progressed into the full posture of defiance against the Word and the will of God that we are now experiencing in our world.

So now that we've read Paul's description in 2 Timothy, we're going to go over to Genesis. So, would you follow me there? And just as we were in second Timothy 3, we're going to be in Genesis 3. Genesis chapter 3.

And it begins in verse 1 by saying, *“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?’”*² *And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,*³ *but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”*⁴ *But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die.*

*’*⁵ *For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*⁶ *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave*

some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

I'm going to have you stop there because we note in this section of Genesis three that there are two specific questions at the end of these verses. And we have to remember something about questions when it comes to God, who's the one posing the question. God never poses a question for which He needs an answer. All right? So, if God is asking a question He's doing it for our benefit, not His. And so, there's some particularly important questions that He asks here. And the first one He asks of Adam, is, I believe, one of the most unrecognized statements in the whole of the Bible.

And it's the simple question, who told you were naked? Who told you that? And you'll also notice that Adam gave no reply. He didn't answer the question. And the reason is because no one told him he was naked. Nobody had to because he figured it out for himself. And what we see here is that one of the effects of sin upon mankind is that it has caused us to be self-aware. And we consider self-awareness frankly today, usually a good thing. He's very self-aware, we'll say, and we often say it in a very positive sort of a light, but God created us to be God aware, to have our sensibilities and our focus on Him.

But sin turned all that inward. It all became focused and fixated on us. And this inward turning to self has made us the center of our own universe. And it literally has become the reason for our living. Whereas we were created to live for God as the reason to be, we now have been turned inward. And this self-awareness, this self-focus has now just completely just enveloped our lives. And all of this self-directed attention that we're born with, is the root of everything that Paul talks about in second Timothy chapter three. It is the root, it is the foundation of all of the evil, all of the worldliness that we experience in our culture today.

And you can imagine with self, when self became man's highest objective. Pleasing me. I was created to please God. But now it's all turned inward. And so

now it's me that I am seeking and striving to please at all costs. And with that as the focal point of my life, the idea of bowing to the will of God has become offensive to us. It has become odious to the extreme. So, therefore, the unregenerate man responds to God with a very natural expression of defiance. That's where defiance comes from. I am my own God, and I don't need you telling me what to do, and I defy you. We say to God, this is pre-Christ, all right, I defy you.

And this is the attitude of worldly man. The natural man. The man as the NIV says, without the Spirit, there is an attitude of defiance that has just taken over. I've always felt like teaching the third chapter of Genesis is one of the most depressing things I've ever had to do. I hate it.

Everything's great up until that point, and then you keep going on in Genesis and it just unravels. This self-directed, self-centered emphasis of life just causes life just to unravel. And we don't need to, we're not going to get into all the details of that unraveling here in this, but frankly, this attitude is clearly defined for us in one of the most incredible Psalms, and for this one, I'm going to put it up on the screen for you. It's from Psalm chapter 2. Check out this. This is amazing.

Psalm 2:1-3 (ESV)

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

Why do the nations rage (the psalmist asks) and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

Fascinating passage is it not? Very interesting aspects to this passage, not the least of which is that before the New Testament revelation of the Trinitarian idea of the nature of God, we see here in this Psalm that the vitriol and the hatred for submission is aimed at the Lord and against His anointed. Isn't that interesting?

In the Greek version of the Old Testament, of course you know the Old Testament was written originally in Hebrew, but it was translated into Greek about four centuries before the time of Christ. And in that particular translation, it would literally say, "*Against the LORD and against His Christ.*"

We can see that this is the focal point of man's defiance against the Lord and against His anointed. But the two points I want to bring out about this passage on the screen are these, number one, the focus of man's defiance is against what he perceives to be his own liberation from the constraints of God's Law. That is the essence of it right there.

The world sees God's Law as bonds, at least as it's given in there in Psalm 2 or chords, those words describe something that restrains or constrains, right? In fact, the Hebrew could be translated chains or fetters, right? Shackles. That's what man is wanting to throw off. The shackles that he perceives that God has put on him through His Law.

The second point that's interesting, that I want to bring out from that passage, is that the rebellion comes down from the top. Can we put the passage back on there again? In fact, I'm just going to have you go ahead and just leave those up until we get to the next one so that people can keep looking at them. But you'll notice here something interesting about this is that it is the kings of the earth and the rulers. Did you catch that? Who take counsel and have set themselves up against the Lord and are doing all this.

Psalm 2:1-3 (ESV)

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

Notice it's the kings and the rulers. Now that may or may not have political overtones because in our culture, kings and rulers aren't necessarily those who are taking up a position of elected office. They're simply the ones with the loudest voice. And we know all about public opinion today.

We know that if you want to really change society, get their ear. Right. It doesn't necessarily mean that somebody who has an elected office is going to have the capability of doing that. It could just be somebody else. It could be Joe anybody who just happens to have a big microphone.

And the internet's given many people a big microphone today to influence society. And so, the kings and the rulers are now those who are dominating public opinion. And make no mistake about it, they are advocating defiance against the Lord and against His anointed one. And it's been going on for thousands of years, as I mentioned. But we've seen it, we see it in the early

pages of the Bible, the biblical account of the Tower of Babel or Babel, however you decide to pronounce it.

But it's a fascinating story, but it's one that few Christians actually recognize in terms of its implications related to the defiance that mankind projects against the Lord. Because you'll remember that what God said to Noah was, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, right? Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.

Now, let me show you on the screen from Genesis chapter 11. What happens? It says that:

Genesis 11:3-4 (ESV)

And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, (and check out this last area) and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

And you see, God said, fill the earth. And they said, no. We're going to stay right here. We defy that message of the Lord God. We will not, we are not going to bow to you. We are not going to honor you. We're going to, in fact, make a name for ourselves, right? And we're going to stay put right here. Why? Because we want to. That's it. That's it. Right there.

And that passage right there, it's just a declaration of man's heart toward God. Let us make a name for ourselves. It's all about me. It's not about God anymore. It's all about me. The heart of man desires autonomy, independence. He wants to be his own master, and he wants to define right and wrong for himself as well, and he's done that through the years. Check this out from Judges. We see this same sort of an attitude.

Judges 21:25 (ESV)

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Isn't that a great description of today? Nothing's changed, nothing's changed. The defiance of man. Nothing has changed. We've found some new ways to communicate it but nothing ultimately has changed. In fact, I just read this past Friday. A news item that said that California, I don't know if you saw this, they ruled that bees are a type of fish. Did you guys check that out? Yeah. Yeah.

They ruled that bees are a type of fish in order to protect them under the Endangered Species Act. Okay. It's just, we're going to make up our own rules. It's hey, don't worry about it. I mean, today we even see this in areas involving gender.

God said, I will make them male and female. There are two genders. There's male and female, but man says, no. I defy that. Not only do I say that there are multiple genders, but I have the freedom to decide my own gender regardless of what biology might say. I am my own master. I say what goes. You don't tell me anything. Right? It's like a child.

The Bible may say that you were made male or you were made female, but the defiance of man says that he will not be limited by God's rules. Our situation is very much like Isaiah described in ancient Judah. Let me put this also on the screen from Isaiah chapter 59. It says:

Isaiah 59:14-15 (NIV84)

So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter nowhere. Truth is nowhere to be found, whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice.

“So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; (And I'm quoting this out of the NIV cause I like it. It says, and this is the incredible phrase) truth has stumbled in the streets, (Or I think as the ESV might say, in the public squares. Truth has stumbled. Truth has stumbled. Isn't that amazing?) honesty (he says) cannot enter nowhere. Truth is nowhere to be found, (In fact) whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. (They become hated because they don't want the same attitude of worldliness, in their lives and so forth) The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice.”

And this was, and frankly, this is one of the ways that we know that because truth is being so perverted and so twisted this is one of the ways we know that we're in the end times. Let me show you also 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2. It says,

2 Thessalonians 2:9-11 (ESV)

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused (Past tense. Before the lawless one even comes on the scene, they refused) to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ Therefore (what happens?) God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,"

You see, the kings and the rulers have echoed their defiance, but the people underneath them are just being caught up and swept away in it. Swept away in a wave of delusion. They're literally diluted. Diluted into believing that you can be a different gender than what you were born with. That's a delusion you guys. Right. And it's sad. I mean, it grieves us. These are some of the things that grieves us about what's going on in the world today. And of course, the stage is being set for the coming of the lawless one.

He's not here yet, by the way. Lawlessness is here, but the lawless one is not here yet, but the stage is being set for the mother of all deceptions, and we see that happening. Alright, so if I haven't just totally depressed you up to this point, and I hope I haven't, I want to turn a little bit now and share just a word of encouragement. What does God's Word have to say for those, the saints living in the final days? Well, there's much encouragement, and the first is from Proverbs 23, which I'll put on the screen for you as well. I love this.

Proverbs 23:23 (ESV)

Buy truth and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

Buy truth and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

And thankfully, there's no purchase necessary for these things, but what this passage is saying to you and me, is emphasizing that we need to have our focus and our aim on laying hold of the truth and not letting go. Because you have to

understand Christians, that that is the heart, that is the emphasis, that is the aim of the enemy in these last days is to get believers who have, up to this point, known the truth and held to the truth, to let go of it and just say, well. Then we waffle a little bit. It's not that big of a deal. It's a big deal.

Letting go of truth is a big deal, and that's one of the reasons the Bible tells us to hang on with all we're worth. And one of the things God's Word help us to understand is that the world, being lost in darkness, has no ability to lay hold of the light of God's truth apart from the Holy Spirit. Guys, do you realize that? You've got unsafe people you work with; you've got unsafe neighbors and friends. They can't know what you know apart from the Spirit. Paul tells us this First Corinthians chapter two, the man with, I like to quote this out of the NIV again.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV84)

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The man without the spirit. (And what it literally means in the Greek is the natural man) does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for (because) they are (utter) foolishness to him, and (look it this) he cannot understand them (he cannot understand them) because they are spiritually discerned.

The truths that we embrace, the things that we hang on to were given to us as a gift through the Spirit. We lay hold of them through the Spirit. We hang on to them through the Spirit, right? We know them to be true through the Spirit but listen, you can't expect your unsaved neighbors to do that. You can't expect your unsaved friends, relatives, or whatever to embrace the wisdom and the order of God's Word apart from a genuine work of the Spirit. So, you see, it doesn't do any good to rail against the sin of mankind. Getting angry isn't the answer. I can shake my fist all day long. That's not going to help.

They need the Spirit of God. It's not going to happen without the Spirit of God. So, there's no use, you know what I mean? It, you can't just get all angry when your governor, just like our governor, does, and I'm not political. God told me years ago, don't Paul, just stay out of politics. But you know, it doesn't do any good to get mad. What good is it going to do? Oh, these idiots. Let them call bees birds, because people, our job is not to correct the thinking of the world, okay? Our job is not to correct their thinking.

It is rather to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ, what He did there, what He accomplished there; so that they may be saved. Bottom line, that's our job. Don't get depressed. Don't get angry. Share the Gospel. Matthew 28:19. This is the commission that still is enforced.

Matthew 28:19 (ESV)

“Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

“Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Guys, do you understand you cannot instruct unsaved people on how to observe the Word of God? Because all you're going to do is give them the Law. And guess what the Law does? It kills. Remember? The Law puts to death. The Law is like your bathroom scale.

All it can tell you is how much work you have ahead of you. It can't change your weight. The Law is like that. It can only tell you how far short you fall of God's standard of righteousness. It is only through the Spirit. So, we can't instruct people in the righteousness of God.

They must be born again in order for them to make that jump and that Commission that Jesus gives us; that has to be our primary focus. And by the way, we're given an end date on this thing, and it's not yet. What's the end date? What's the expiration date on this Commission? The end of the age. There it is right there.

So, it's still enforced today. And we can't afford to let ourselves get distracted by all of the nonsense swirling around us. And as defiant as the world is, and as much as they say no to the Lord and to His Word and stuff, we must be equally steadfast. As defiant as they are, we must be equally steadfast.

We must match their defiance. Not with defiance, not with anger, not with depression, but with steadfastness related to the Word of God, related to our determination to preach the cross of Jesus Christ, amen? Let's pray.

Father, we love You. We don't say it nearly enough and we know, Lord, that Your Word is true. And the truth sets people free. And we know, Lord God, that we're living in a world of intense darkness. And the need today is for us to show the love of Jesus Christ and to share about the cross of Christ to a lost and dying world that's seeking answers.

So, Father God, forgive us for our discouragement. And forgive us, Lord, we pray, for our anger. Because as Your Word tells us, the anger of man does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

But we pray, Lord, that You would empower us to keep going with the Commission. The greatest Commission man has ever received. Go in to all the world, every neighborhood, every workplace, every home, every school, and make disciples. And then, teach them to obey, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Father, we want to just renew our determination, our steadfastness, to carry out that Commission today. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and King, amen.