

THE GOOD FIGHT - PART 4:
"IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES..."
2 TIMOTHY 3:1-17

Personal Introduction

Good afternoon everyone. I'm Jeff - one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today!

Sermon Series Introduction

We'll be continuing with Part 4 of our sermon series called "The Good Fight" - where we're going through the letter of 2 Timothy together.

The title of today's sermon is "In These Difficult Times..."

Introduction

And maybe that's something that we've said or heard a lot recently - "Man, these are tough times that we're living in..."

And when we say that, we can mean various kinds of difficulties...

- Maybe what we mean is that economically... it's been a difficult time for us; the market is struggling and it's tough to get a job and people are being laid off and our financial investments aren't doing well.
- Or maybe what we mean is that politically... it's been a difficult time with civil unrest happening in our city and in other countries throughout the world.
- Or maybe what we mean is that personally... it's been a difficult time for us - Maybe a difficult season of singleness or it's been a difficult time in our relationships with others.

These are all various kinds of difficulties that we may have today.

But interestingly - in Paul's final letter (which would contain what he deems to be most important)... What he brings up is not economic, political, or personal difficulties, but it's church difficulties.

Isn't that interesting? Maybe that's not what we usually think about, but in Paul's perspective... one of the problems we should be concerned with are problems in the church.

- But now - whether you're here as a Christian or as someone who's exploring Christianity - you may be thinking, "So what? Why does it matter to me if the church is the one having difficulties? How does that impact my life?"

This is what we'll be unpacking today...

So in our passage today, Paul warns Timothy that these times will be difficult. And so more than ever, he needs to persevere in the truth...

The One Thing

In these difficult times, persevere in the truth.

Scripture Introduction

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to 2 Timothy 3:1-17.

For context:

- Apostle Paul is writing to his dear friend Timothy, who's now a pastor at the church in Ephesus.
- In the previous passage, Paul tells Timothy that he's to rightly handle God's Word unlike the false teachers who were wrongly handling God's Word, swerving from the truth.
- And the last thing he says is found in chapter 2, verses 25-26...
 - Paul tells Timothy to not only correct his opponents but to do so with gentleness, hoping that God would work in their hearts and lead some of them to repentance and faith, saving them from the devil's snare.

That's where we're at today. I'll read for us 2 Timothy 3:1-17...

2 Timothy 3:1-17 (ESV)

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, 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, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **5** having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. **6** For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, **7** always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. **8** Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. **9** But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, **11** my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch,

at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. **12** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, **13** while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. **14** But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it **15** and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

This is God's Word.

Overview

Two questions about these last days:

I. How will these times be difficult? (vv. 1-9)

II. How can we persevere in the truth? (vv. 10-17)

A. Follow godly examples

B. Trust God's Word

I. How will these times be difficult? (vv. 1-9)

Let's look at verse 1 - Paul begins by talking about "the last days"...

- We may think that Paul is talking about the far future that's still to come, but that's not the case.
- "The last days" is referring to the days after Jesus' first coming, which are the days leading up to the final day, which is Jesus' second coming.
- Which means that Paul & Timothy (and all of us here today) are already living in these last days.
- And Paul wants us to understand something about these last days that we're living in. And what he emphasizes is that it will be difficult.

Now, if you're Timothy, your next question would be, "Well, how will these times be difficult?" / "What should I expect?"

Paul clarifies this in verses 2-5...

- More specifically, it's in verse 5 - Paul says that these times will be difficult because there will be people who have the appearance of godliness, yet they're actually not; they've denied its power.
- What exactly is this power that they've denied?

- Flip back to Chapter 1, verses 7-8 - The last time Paul was talking about power, he was talking about the power of God & the Spirit that God gave us that's not a Spirit of fear but of power.
- So the power that Paul is talking about here is the power of the Holy Spirit.
- And so what he's warning us about is that there will be some people who seem to be godly on the outside (they appear to be Christians), but they're actually not - because they've actually denied the power of the Holy Spirit and they're not truly regenerate).
 - Meaning that they are false Christians.

The next question is: So what if some people appear to be Christians when they're actually not? Why would this cause difficulty for us?

Well, this really depends on your goals and what you care about...

- Because it may not make things difficult for you if your goal is merely to get promoted or to earn money or to get married.
- But if our goals are aligned with God's purposes, then having false Christians in the church would definitely cause difficulty for us.

Why? Because God's plans and purposes center on the church.

- His design is for church to be the context in which we live out our lives as Christians - It's where we're to encourage one another, disciple one another, and help one another to follow Jesus.
- And consider God's purpose for the church - Ephesians 3:10 - "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."
 - Isn't that amazing? Even the angels in Heaven are amazed at God's wisdom when they look at His church.
 - Because how can it be that sinners who used to hate God are now gathering together to worship Him and to sing Him praise? How can sinners who used to only love themselves can sacrificially love one another as Christ loved his church? How can people of various backgrounds and life experiences and socioeconomic classes be united as one spiritual family, who care for one another so deeply that they're building up one another in love, teaching God's Word to one another and praying for one another, and revealing Jesus to the watching world?
 - The angels look at God's church, and even they are amazed at God's manifold wisdom that's revealed through His people.

But then what happens if there are those in the church who say they're Christians when they're actually not? How would that affect the church's Gospel witness?

- How would that affect our discipling?
- Our evangelism?
- Our relationships with one another?

- How would it affect the kind of counsel we get from these false Christians? Isn't it possible that they'd lead us away from Christ or cause divisiveness or bitterness in our church?

So Paul wants us to see the danger here of false Christians, particularly of false teachers (Take a look back at Chapter 2, verse 17 - we see that Paul has been talking about false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus who've been swerving from the truth, leading people astray).

Look at verses 6-7 - Paul is talking about this same group of false teachers here. And some of them have been creeping into homes (which doesn't mean that they're sneaking into people's homes like robbers), but they've been entering the homes of weak women, taking advantage of their trust.

- This is not to say that women are weak. But this is referring to a specific group of women here who were especially vulnerable because they feel burdened with their past sins (whatever they may be)
- These false teachers know this about them, but instead of pointing them to the Gospel, they exploit their sins.
- We can imagine how they might've done this. Maybe they said something like... *"Hey, don't stop doing the things that I told you to do... Because remember your sin against God... You need to keep doing the things I'm telling you to do because this is how you can please God"* - What these false teachers offer can be packaged as works of righteousness, but what they're really doing is preying on these women).
 - And unfortunately, there's been real stories of men and women being emotionally, physically, sexually, and spiritually abused by false teachers.

Imagine the damage that's being done here...

- You have a fellow human being who's truly in need of help (who is burdened by their sins), but instead of them being led to Jesus, they're being led astray to something else...
 - Imagine how heart-breaking that is if that's happening to one of our brothers or sisters here.
- And then what happens when Non-Christians hear about these kinds of stories of spiritual abuse? They'd be disgusted by Christianity and grossed out by church, and the reputation of Christ is damaged (and sadly, abuse like this is really happening today).
 - And then people are hurt by the church and they walk away from the faith.
 - It's the opposite of showcasing God's manifold wisdom because Gospel witness is tarnished.
 - This is why it's so serious.

But why would someone do something horrible like this? (Especially someone who thinks that they're a Christian - even though that's not the case).

Look at verses 2-4 - Because they're not really lovers of God - they're lovers of self, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure. Their real motives are not God-centered but self-centered.

- And look at the list that Paul gives here - They may seem a little random at first but they're all connected - these are all ungodly characteristics that's rooted in self-love.
 - Those who love themselves more than God tend to love money - because money is their source of power and it can provide them with all they want.
 - For some false teachers, what they want is your money.
 - And these false teachers... they tend to be prideful and arrogant (and swollen with conceit).
 - Abusive, brutal, not loving good, slanderous - not caring about how other people may be harmed as long as it'd benefit them.

But before we condemn these false teachers, we should acknowledge that these very characteristics from verses 2-4 are also in each and everyone of us.

- They may not be fully grown but think of the seed forms of these characteristics...
 - We may not be full-fledged lovers of money or pleasure, but how many times have we made financial or personal decisions without considering whether or not it would please God.
 - We tend to do something as long as it'd be easy or beneficial or pleasurable for us.
 - In a way, what's driving us are the same motivations that are driving these false teachers.
 - So we must also be wary of that.
 - But I don't want us to be discouraged. Because if we've truly put our faith in Christ, then we've received the power of the Holy Spirit who's transforming our hearts and our desires.
 - And now, these sinful desires may still exist in our hearts, but more and more we're being shaped to love God more than ourselves.

Which means that we're to resemble our God more and more, and that's how we're to showcase His heart and His wisdom.

- We're to be distinct from the rest of the world...

That's why to protect the church's Gospel witness, Paul tells Timothy - at the end of verse 5 - to avoid them... Deal with these false teachers seriously...

- This doesn't mean that we should run away from every Non-Christian - remember what Paul told Timothy in Chapter 2, verse 25 - he's to correct his opposition with gentleness, hoping that some will repent and turn to faith.
- But here, Paul is referring to the other group that's not repentant but is continuing to lead people astray.
 - Timothy is to avoid them, meaning that he's to make a distinction between "us" and "them."
 - We're to make a clear division between those who are Christians and those who are not.
 - What Paul has in mind here is excommunication or church discipline...

- It's making it clear to them and to the church that we can no longer affirm that these people give credible profession of faith and that they're truly believers.
- Because look at how they're preying on others - Their lives show that they're lovers of self instead of lovers of God.
 - But our hope in practicing church discipline is that they'll repent in the future and re-join the church, but for now, we cannot affirm them.
 - And we remove their platform to spread false teaching, so that our members will not be led astray.

This is why as a church, we practice church discipline - it's to protect the Gospel & to protect one another.

And on the front-end, this is also why we practice church membership - We don't just allow anyone who say that they're a Christian be a part of our church by merely signing a form.

- But we do our due diligence as a church. We have a membership process...
- We have membership interviews where the pastors check for the prospective member's understanding of the Gospel, ensuring that they understand the Gospel rightly.
- And then we vote on their church membership as an entire church - And when we vote them in what we're doing is that we're declaring that to the best of our knowledge, we affirm that this person gives a credible profession of faith and their lives faithfully reflect the Gospel of Jesus.

We're careful about our church membership because God's Word warns us that there's such a thing as false Christians & false teachers.

<pause>

Now, it may be a bit disheartening for Timothy to hear all these things about these last days. But Paul then points Timothy to an important truth...

- Look at verses 8-9 - At the end of the day, false teaching will be exposed.
- Paul compares these false teachers to Jannes and Jambres, who we know (from historical Jewish writings) were the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses. They were the ones who were able to copy Moses' miracles and turn their staff into serpents and water into blood.
- But at the end of the day, they could not replicate the rest of God's miracles and plagues, and they were exposed as frauds.

In the same way, there will come a time when every false teacher will be exposed for who they are. If not in this lifetime, then in the life to come, but they will not have the final victory.

When Jesus returns, they will be fully exposed. But until that day comes, we're to be aware that these last days will be difficult...

So first, how will these times be difficult? And second...

II. How can we persevere in the truth? (vv. 10-17)

In this second half of the passage, Paul's main instruction can be found in verse 14 - That amidst these false teachers... Timothy is to continue and persevere in what he has learned and firmly believed.

What is Paul referring to here? Look at verse 15 - We see that Paul is referring to the sacred writings (which refer to Scripture)... that teaches us that salvation is possible through faith in Christ Jesus; he's referring to the Gospel of Jesus Christ - this is what Timothy is to continue holding on to.

- He doesn't need a new gospel; what he needs to do is to hold on to the same Gospel again and again...

Because the best way to catch false teaching is not by trying to memorize every false gospel that's out there, but it's to know the one true Gospel really really well.

So church, how well do we know the Gospel? A helpful framework that's been so helpful in helping me remember the true Gospel is this: God-man-Christ-response.

[Which is actually on the back of your service guides]

God, man, Christ, response:

- God - God created us and we're accountable to Him.
- Man - But we have sinned and rebelled against Him and are rightfully deserving of His eternal judgment.
- Christ - But God, in His love, grace, and mercy, gave Himself in the person of Jesus Christ - who took the punishment that his people deserved by dying on the cross as our substitute. And he resurrected in 3 days, defeating sin & death.
- Response - Now all who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Savior will not be punished in Hell, but have eternal life in Heaven.

This is the Good News of Jesus Christ. And so if your faith is not yet in Christ or you still have questions about the Gospel, please talk to me or to anyone around you and we'd love to talk to you more about Jesus.

For those who already put our faith in Christ, the Good News that we believe in is the same Gospel that all Christians - past, present, and future - have believed and will believe in.

So then the question now for Christians is: how can we persevere in this truth even in these difficult times?

- Paul highlights 2 ways:
 - (1) Follow godly examples (vv. 10-15)
 - (2) Trust God's Word (vv. 16-17)

And notice how these two things directly address the difficulties that Paul just mentioned. Because Godly examples can overcome false teachers. And God's Word will overcome false teaching.

- So let's take a closer look at these two things...

A. Follow godly examples

First, Timothy is to follow godly examples. And Paul mentions two groups of godly examples here. He refers to Timothy's mother and grandmother (v. 14) and then he also refers to himself (vv. 10-13)

- Take a look at verse 14 - we're reminded that Timothy learned the Gospel since he was young from his mother Eunice & his grandmother Lois (Paul highlighted this before in Chapter 1, verse 5).
 - So it's interesting how Paul repeatedly refers back to the contribution of Timothy's mom and grandma.
 - Parents, especially mothers, I hope Timothy's testimony is encouraging for you - because he came to know the Gospel because of his mom.
 - As he was growing up, Timothy might've been exposed to the false teachings present during that time. But he ultimately remembered what his mom taught him.
 - So mothers, especially those who've transitioned from a full-time career to now being a full-time mom, don't let the world's standards diminish the work that you're doing at home.
 - Just consider the eternal impact here of Lois and Eunice - By God's grace, Timothy became a believer, and he became a pastor who continued to teach the Gospel to the next generations of Christians. And even thousands of years later, we're blessed by the letter that Paul wrote to him. This all came to be because God worked through Timothy's mom.
 - Now, teaching your children the Gospel doesn't guarantee that they'll be Christians, but you never know the eternal impact that you can have... How God could water & grow that Gospel seed that you've planted in your children's hearts.
- Now, let's look at verses 10-13 - Paul also refers to himself as a godly example to Timothy. Paul has been a faithful mentor to him, exemplifying what it looks like to live out your life as a Christian.

- And Timothy has been following Paul's example.
 - This echoes what Paul has said in 1 Corinthians 11:1 - "Imitate me as I imitate Christ."
 - And that's what Timothy has been doing... He's not just imitating Paul blindly, but he's imitating Paul because he knows that Paul is imitating Christ...
 - Timothy personally knows Paul's character because they've lived life-on-life together - He knows what Paul teaches, how he conducts himself, and how loving and patient and steadfast he is.
 - He knows how Paul has been persecuted and suffered in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra - where he was stoned and left for dead outside of the city (we know that from Acts 13-14).
 - Timothy has seen the evidence that Paul is not a lover of self or a lover of pleasure, but he's a lover of God.
 - His one aim is to please his Lord Jesus as a good soldier of Christ (2:4).
- And this is why he's a worthy example to be imitated.

And I think this is something that we should aim for - As we follow godly examples, we should also strive to be a godly example to others (the Christian life is about imitating and being imitated).

- We all want to be able to say to others what Paul says here in verses 10-11 - "Follow my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness..."
 - Are you able to say this?
 - If not, which aspect do you still need to grow in?
 - That's going to be a good question for self-reflection.
 - And also keep in mind that in order to be able to say this, we need to have people in our lives, so that they'd be able to see us living out our faith.
 - People cannot imitate what they cannot see.
 - So I want to encourage us to open our lives to one another...
 - And hopefully what people will see is that your aim in life and your conduct is not like everyone else's in the world because it's distinctly Christian.

Personally, this is how it was for me...

When I first came to this church, I didn't know what it was supposed to look like to live my life as a Christian.

- How do I do my work as a Christian? How do I spend and save money? How do I view my relationships? How do I resolve conflicts? How do I read the Bible? How do I pray? How do I share the Gospel?
- Over time, I was able to learn by observing other church members...

- I observed brothers and sisters... studying the Bible together and praying at Prayer Gathering, and talking about Jesus almost non-stop. And I observed how brothers and sisters make decisions and how they consider God in their decision-making.
- Church, thank you so much for your faithfulness. Some of you were there when I was baptized and you were a great source of help for me when I was a new Christian. I'm so thankful that I was able to imitate you as you imitate Christ.

Let's continue to be godly examples for one another as a church...

Now, let's take a look at verse 11 - It's interesting that Paul also says, "follow my persecutions and sufferings..."

And yes, you heard that last part correctly... Paul also encourages us to copy godly examples of persecutions and sufferings. Verse 12 - Paul says, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

- Persecution is not unique only to Paul but is what's to be expected of all Christians.
- And depending on our context, the intensity of persecution will be different. But to an extent, we'll at least face some sort of opposition because we're living in a world that's anti-Jesus. Just start talking about the name of Jesus in your conversations with Non-Christians and at the very least you'll have people staring at you weirdly or maybe getting kind of awkward.
- And if we're not facing any level of persecution, then we need to honestly evaluate our lives and consider if it's because we haven't been talking about Jesus - Because no Christian will be persecuted if they don't share about their faith.

Take a look at verse 12 again - "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

- Let's ask ourselves - Is this even what I desire for myself? For my spouse? For my fellow brothers and sisters? That we live a godly life in Christ Jesus?
 - Then if that's the case, then Paul implies that it's going to involve persecution.
 - This doesn't mean that we should seek suffering, but it does mean that we're to open up about our faith, sharing it with others, even though we know that we may be persecuted for it (or at the very least... Will receive weird looks because of it).

If you're unsure how to share the Gospel with your co-workers or family members, ask one another for examples in terms of how they've been doing it. Remember that God has gifted us with brothers and sisters in this church as our Gospel partners and as godly examples for one another, and we can learn from each other's examples.

So how are we to persevere in our faith in these difficult times? First, follow godly examples. And...

B. Trust God's Word

Second, trust God's Word.

- Look at verse 16 - Paul says that all Scripture is breathed out by God...
- Before we continue, let's take a step back just to take in how amazing that is... Because I think we often take this fact for granted... The Bible that we have in our hands is the very Word of God Himself.
 - The very God who created the universe, the heavens and the earth, all of life, and you & me, and who is sovereign and completely in control of time & human history... And is the ultimate authority of final judgment... These are His words...
 - And this is why we refer to Scripture as God's Word.

And look at Paul's logic in verse 16 - Because it's God's Word, then it's going to be profitable for us.

- Sometimes we read God's Word and we can forget that. We can question if it's really going to be beneficial or relevant for us. But it's exactly because it's God's Word, that we can have the confidence that it'll be beneficial for us, and will be relevant for all aspects of our lives.
 - We shouldn't say, "I don't think God's Word is relevant for what I'm currently going through..."
 - It may not tell us exactly which job to take or who to marry, but God's Word is sufficient in equipping us - Because it helps us to have priorities and principles and helps us to understand God's heart and how He thinks.
 - And isn't that also the hope in parenting?
 - That our children will not only learn do's and don'ts but to have the right priorities and principles that will guide them well in life (and hopefully what we've taught them are God's priorities and principles).
 - Once they have that, we pray that they wouldn't be led astray by false teaching.
 - In the same way, God equips His children through His Word. And Paul lists four ways that God's Word will help us:
 - (1) God's Word is going to teach us, clarifying what we should believe in.
 - (2) It will reproof (or rebuke) us, clarifying what we should not believe in.
 - (3) It will correct us, instructing us on what we should not do.
 - (4) And it will train us in righteousness, instructing us on what we should do instead.
 - In other words, God's Word will help us understand doctrine and life (what we should believe in and how we should live).
 - And God does that by giving us both the positive and negative examples: What we should and should not believe or do.

God equips us for a life of righteousness (so that we'll have godly priorities and principles, understanding His heart and being able to discern false teachings that are not of Him). And in that way, we'll be equipped for every good work that He has called us to do.

Conclusion

As we conclude, let's reflect further on that final verse... verse 17 - "that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

For every good work. What does that imply? That implies that there's still good work to be done even in these last days... Though they may be difficult times.

I think sometimes when we think of persevering through a difficult time the image that pops up is like you're hanging on by a thread and you're just barely surviving and waiting for this difficult time to pass by... Barely hanging on...

But that's not the image that I'm getting from these final verses - Being taught & trained for righteousness, equipped for good work. The image is more like what Paul has been describing previously in Chapter 2, verse 3 - Like good soldiers of Christ Jesus being prepared for Gospel mission.

- Being used by God to showcase His manifold wisdom to the world.

Which means that when we put our trust in God's Word, not only do we have what we need to merely survive these last days, but we have what we need to do good work in the midst of it!

And when we put our trust in God's Word, we trust that the Word will do the work... The Word will continue to:

- Teach, reproof, correct...
- Convict hearts.
- Renew the spiritually dead.
- And transform people's lives.

In these last days, we trust that God's Word will do the work till the final day when Christ returns. Until that day, let's be comforted by Jesus' words. He said, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b).

Let's pray...