

2Timothy 24-11-04b

Let's continue our study now in 2 Timothy and having done as much justice as we are going to do to the vessels of honor, vessels of wrath concept, the bottom line of that is don't let anyone succeed in perpetrating the satanic plan to to corrupt and make deceptive remarks about the character of God. This is the first big lie. God's intentions aren't what you think they are.

The serpent says to Eve in the garden, he doesn't want you to eat this fruit because if you do, he knows that you will become wise and knowing good and evil. God is a self-interested God. He's not interested in your well-being.

He's interested in his own. This is the kind of accusation that gains traction with people who are not really interested in truth as they should be or who are easily swayed and deceived. This argument is used against political candidates on either side.

They are only self-interested. They have a personal agenda. They don't care about you.

They just want power. They're not working for your benefit. They are working to expand their own agenda and so on.

And there is a part of the human soul that responds to this kind of accusation, this kind of insinuation, this kind of undermining of confidence in a third party. And it is nowhere worse than misrepresenting God the Father, that he has a plan all of his own, and he's moving pawns around on the table just to aggrandize his own glory and his own power. He wants to show how wrathful he can be.

He's just interested in impressing. It's all about God. Atheists and agnostics will say, well, this Christian God, he seems to want people to grovel, and they've got to worship him, or he's going to blast them into destruction and into eternal damnation.

And he's just a glory hound God, and it's his way or the highway. And misrepresenting the character of God is the satanic lie. And we can be tempted down that road when we ourselves are facing difficulty.

We are persecuted. It is as though the devil begins to in our ear, well, God doesn't care about you. Look at your situation.

Look at your difficulties. Why aren't things better? Why is this happening? Why is that happening? There can't be an all powerful God, or these terrible things wouldn't happen to others, much less to you. And he's not the God you think he is.

That would really sum it up. The God that you have come to know through scripture and in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ isn't who he claims to be. He isn't who you think he is.

It is the devil's own lie. We claim the promises of God for God's revelation of himself. God wants us to know him.

He is not giving commands of prohibition to be inscrutable, to be distant, to be so other that we can't relate to him and he doesn't relate to us. God wants to make known Romans 9, 22 and 23. God wants to make himself known and that we can come to our senses and come to knowledge.

That was the end of chapter two. So now in 2 Timothy, we are in chapter three. By the way, on any subject of scripture, if it is a concern, if you have doubt, if you have uncertainty, if it is a drag on your joy and your peace and your confidence, take it to God.

You can ask fellow believers. You can send a query to the pastor. You can research online.

You can go to commentaries. You can go to the word of God. Get your new treasury of scripture knowledge on which we are going to be leaning for our look at chapter three here just for convenience and because it is such an excellent resource.

I've said before and I'll say it again. If I were Tom Hanks stranded on a desert island and all I could have is my Bible and one other book, that other book would be the new treasury of scripture knowledge. There is nothing better for letting scripture comment on scripture and you'll see it here in a few moments.

When we start looking at the description of men, the new treasury will let scripture explain what these descriptions mean. But we want to come to our senses where we need to. We want to have confidence.

We want to rest in assurance. We want to be optimistic. We want to be proactive.

We want to be good servants. We want to bend every effort to present ourselves approved to God. It isn't that God has to somehow prove himself to us.

God has demonstrated his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The Lord Jesus is the fullness of deity in bodily form. God has made himself known.

It is now up to us to grasp that knowledge and to live in the light of that knowledge. So part of that is operating in gentleness and humility. We saw that in 224.

If we are going to express a different point of view, hopefully a better and more scripturally accurate point of view, we must always absolutely do it in gentleness and humility. We offer correction so that God may perhaps be able to grant the blessings that are conditioned on repentance. That brings us to chapter 3. Take a look at this, but know

this, that in the last days perilous times will come.

In the last days. Before we even look at this description, and we've seen it before, we're going to look at it in a bit of depth, but we've visited this many times. What does it mean the last days? In the last days? Well, many times in scripture, the latter days or the last days is a description of the kingdom.

It is used, for example, in Jeremiah 48, 47. God says, I will bring back the captives of Moab in the latter days. Isaiah chapter two, verse two, in the latter days, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow to it.

This of course is a Hebrew reference to the latter days or the last days. In Daniel chapter 10, verse 14, the events that lead up to the kingdom age are referred to Daniel 10, 14. I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, in the last days.

For the vision refers to many days yet to come. In Hosea chapter three, verse five, afterward, the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord, their God, and David, their king. They shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.

That is a still future time. Israel as a nation, whatever you think of them in terms of their national actions in seeking to defend themselves or to prosecute their enemies in Gaza or in southern Lebanon, the Hezbollah and so on that they are fighting, that is a national entity. They are not the Israel that returns and seeks the Lord, their God, and David, their king.

David's greater son, of course, the Lord Jesus is in view as well. But that's the latter days. Micah chapter four, verse one, it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains.

This is very similar to what you see in Jeremiah. The Lord Jesus talks about the latter days in Matthew chapter 24. And this is closer to our understanding of what Paul is going to describe Jesus in Matthew 24, 10.

In that day, many will be offended, will betray one another and will hate one another. It is something to watch that the level of division and hatred within what claims to be the church of God, the church of Christ, not the denomination, but the church, the visible church, those who claim to be believers in the Lord Jesus, the level of animosity and hatred and vitriol, vituperative, bitter commentary and condemnation of fellow believers is rising to a level that I have not before seen in my lifetime. Cordial disagreement and respectful difference of understanding seems to be going by the wayside.

But when the Lord Jesus describes in Matthew chapter 24, verses 10 through 12, many false prophets rising up and deceiving many and because lawlessness will abound, the

love of many will grow cold. Note that reference to love that is going to come up in our passage. The love of many grows cold.

This is an often overlooked description. And it's one of the first times that I have really seen it clearly in second Timothy chapter three, but the Lord Jesus anticipates it here in Matthew chapter 24, verse 12. In Acts chapter two, verse 17, it shall come to pass in the last days, says God that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

Your sons and daughters shall prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men shall dream dreams.

So what does this tell you about the term last days? It depends on the context. Are you talking about the kingdom age? Are you talking about the time of the great tribulation? Are you talking about days that are after the time we are speaking, days that are later than at present? It is determined by context. We saw this in first Timothy chapter four, verse one, that apostasy will come.

Paul says to Timothy in his first letter, the spirit expressly says that in latter times, some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and so on. And Paul says, instruct the brethren down in verse six of that same chapter, instruct the brethren in these things, warn the brethren. So these latter times, you could say, that is right before the return of the Lord Jesus.

That's right before the tribulation or even during the tribulation. If you are warning and instructing the brethren about these things, they need to know during their own lifetime. And note in our context here in second Timothy chapter three, Paul says that you've got to be warned and be careful about these people now.

It isn't, well, since you're not in the last days, don't worry about it. There is a sense in which you make application. We make application of Old Testament truth, even though it's in the historical past.

We make application of future truth, the description of conditions and situations in the revelation now, because they are helpful. All of the things in scripture are written for our instruction to make application now. It doesn't matter if the Lord Jesus doesn't come for 200 more years.

There is a sense in which we are always in the latter days. There is a sense in which we always have to be on guard for the spirit of antichrist that John says is already in the world and is already at work. Although there is a formal antichrist or first great beast described in the revelation, the spirit, the concept, the ploys, the deceptions, the strategies are already at work.

So by looking at these, we don't say, I'm sure glad I'm not in the tribulation and we're

going to leave in the rapture. I don't have to know about that. It is in scripture for our instruction because we do need to know about that.

So when Paul says, know this in the last days, perilous times will come. This is the two edged sword of the word of God. It cuts for certain in the genuine last days, the last days of the church age, the last days before the great standing away, the rapture, it will be more true than ever.

But there is an always present truth in these descriptions. And to an extent, these descriptions are always pertinent. And these are the latter days of our life as we grow in grace in our enhanced comprehension, in our better discernment.

We will see these things in ways that we did not in the early days. The more we grow in grace and knowledge, the more we come to the standard of a mature man, the more we become accomplished workmen that need not to be ashamed. The more clearly we will discern these patterns and these behaviors and these descriptions where we didn't see them when we were young.

Ask a child on the playground about the issues in the election. They are present, but children don't see them. They don't understand them.

They may hear their parents say one thing or another in conversation at home, but they don't grasp and they don't perceive for themselves the truths of social movements and political issues and international conflicts and so on. They're too young. They are in the world where these exist, but they don't grasp them as they will in the latter days of their life.

So my suggestion is when you come to verse one here and you circle the phrase in the last days, these are the days that remain to us in our Christian life. We have studied the scriptures. Our senses have been sharpened to discern and to comprehend, to have wisdom, to parse out what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, and at the same time to see through the deceits and the cunning schemes of Satan and those who are in his service.

So as we grow, we will more clearly see what is behind action, what is behind the words of people around us, both prominent and in our immediate circle. So know this. In the last days, perilous times will come.

It's interesting that the further we advance as believers, the more perilous the times are. Why is that? Satan, it doesn't waste his time on believers that have augured themselves into the ground like a pilot without a compass or an altimeter. Believers that have taken themselves out by apathy and indifference, by failure, by disobedience.

Satan doesn't need to work on them. Why was Job the target of Satan's efforts in that great book of the Old Testament? God said, have you considered my servant Job and

how obedient and righteous he is? And Satan says, I can take him down. I will get him to deny you.

But Job reflects the glory of God, has done ever since he was alive on this earth because of his faithfulness. What a privilege. In order that God might make known his power.

There is no book of the Bible that is a greater demonstration of God's power than Job, especially in the context of the life of a believer who is faithful and obedient and endures, despite not understanding why things are happening. Like Abraham, in both cases, life or death, Abraham is willing to raise the knife and plunge it into the body of his son, Isaac, the child of promise, because he knows the promise of God that in Isaac, his seed will be called. And in some way, shape or form, Isaac is going to survive this experience because God has promised that Isaac will be the source of Abraham's blessed descendants.

So he can't die and be gone on top of that mountain. It can't happen. The promise of God is more real than the knife.

For Job, he tells his wife, she says, curse God and die. Look at everything you've lost. Job says, though he slay me, yet I will trust him.

Life and death may be on the line, suffering and hardship and loss and bereavement and grief may be on the line, but I will trust the promise of God. Abraham and Job, Daniel refusing to cease his life of prayer. You think about this with the COVID restrictions and you can't go to church on Sunday, you might spread a germ.

Daniel went to the lion's den rather than give up his public affirmation of God through prayer three times a day. Throw me in the lion's den. I'm still going to pray to my God.

And there is a time when we have to stand up for our faith, even at the risk of our life. Look at the Christian martyrs down through the centuries. So here, know this in the last days, perilous times will come.

The more faithful and mature and obedient and therefore effective as a workman who needs not to be ashamed, the better we are at presenting ourselves approved unto God. The man of God must be mature and thoroughly furnished unto all good works. When we reach that opportunity, perilous times will come.

These are the ones that are going to be the object of advanced scrutiny and more potent attack. And what an opportunity. If it relied on our strength, we just had Reformation Day.

This is why I was thinking about things reformed and it corresponded to our passage. But October 31st is Reformation Day. That's the day that Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the Wittenberg door.

And he called out the Catholic church for its excesses and its perpetration of indulgences and other non-scriptural and abusive practices and tactics. So Reformation Day. But to suffer the effects of skylighting yourself in that way, he's hailed before the Catholic authorities and many before and since have been persecuted for refusing to abandon faith, refusing to abandon the testimony of a faithful believer.

Regardless, we seldom face that kind of physical danger as believers in this life. So when a small challenge arises, why would we fade? Why would we fail? Why would we not acknowledge who we are and why we're here at whatever peril to ourselves? Today for us, it's mostly social peril or loss of a relationship or being ostracized or ignored or pushed to a distance by people who don't appreciate our Christian faith and our scriptural convictions. And someone says, well, if you believe that, I can't have any truck with you.

You're a fascist. You're a Nazi. You support things that I think are horrible.

So I have nothing to do with you. And we say, my beliefs and my opinions are based on my best understanding of the word of God, because I am a believer in Jesus Christ. And I can't blow with the winds of social and political opportunism and this political correctness and wokeness or whatever else it may be.

I endeavor to represent the values that the Bible teaches. That's why I'm here, so that God can make known His righteousness and His justice, His glory and His judgment. That's what the Holy Spirit reveals, sin and righteousness and judgment between the two.

We are here as vessels of the Holy Spirit, enabled and empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. How can we not similarly reflect in our lives an understanding of what is sin and what is righteousness, what is right and what is wrong? Well, to the extent that we do that, by God's grace and in God's strength, strengthened with might in the inner man, strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, perilous times will come. It's not just the time of the end and by God's grace, maybe I won't be here.

I want to be there. I want to be present. I want to be used by God as a vessel of honor, fitted for the good use of displaying God's glory and God's grace and God's power and even God's wrath, God's separation of that which is evil, God's judgment of that which fails to comport and fails to respond to His offers of grace and love in the blood of Jesus Christ.

It doesn't get any more sacrificial in terms of an expression of love than laying down life. That's what God has done. How could we possibly compromise, deny, soft pedal, push into the background God's love and God's grace and compromise it by not also communicating the other side? God with great patience is enduring vessels of wrath fitted for destruction so that He can manifest His love and His grace and His glory.

You don't get one without the other. It's not love without discrimination, without condition, without judgment. God's love is not unconditional.

The offer to receive the benefits of God's love is made to all without condition, but to receive the fruits, to receive the blessing requires responding in faith, in repentance, in obedience. We decide if we are a vessel of wrath or a vessel of dishonor, if we by God's grace and through God's cleansing power in the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin by confessing our sins, we are cleansed. If we cleanse ourselves from these in the blood of Christ, by the grace of God, we will be vessels of honor.

That is the issue, not just in salvation, but every single day. How do I redeem the time? How do I invest this portion of my life in the eternal future? I endeavor with every effort to present myself to God approved, not ashamed. Approved and not ashamed.

In my conversations, in my priorities, in my efforts, in what I choose to pursue, I reflect. Whether I want God's approval or I'm looking to impress, to go along to get along, to compromise and hold back so that I won't be expunged from the fellowship and the circle. So what does it mean, latter days? What does it mean perilous times will come? Everything you understand about the last days is true.

And worldwide in human culture, in civilization, in society, these things will never have been more true than they are in those actual last days before the rapture and the tribulation and the return of the Lord Jesus. But remember, all these things are written for our instructions and we're not waiting for the last days to worry about this. You are a growing believer.

You love the Lord Jesus and you are endeavoring to grow and to be pleasing in his sight. So these are the last days. You're as far along as you have ever been in your Christian life.

And as you grow, perilous times will come. This is not to scare us. This isn't to discourage us.

Well, I wish I hadn't grown because now I'm making myself a target. No, that's nonsense. You train and become capable and skillful at something as an athlete, as a soldier, as a farmer, because you're ready for the contest.

You want to show, you want to demonstrate, you want to employ these skills. You want to exploit these opportunities. You've put in the work.

Now here's the chance to show what the grace of God and the strength of God can do in a human being. God will make known in my life, his character, his love, his grace, and his judgment. So if you don't remember anything else from this morning, for us, these are the latter days.

Carly Simon had a song where she used to sing and the chorus was, these are the good old days. These are the good old days. Well, these are the latter days.

Don't be daunted. Don't be sobered to the point of concern. Be excited.

Every generation of believers has hoped that they were in the last days, that they would see the return of the Lord Jesus. Listen, in the spiritual realm, when it comes to exploiting our opportunities and availing ourselves of God's presence and God's grace, God's power, these are the last days. And there is a sense in which the Lord Jesus is going to manifest himself in us and through us like the rapture, but you don't have to wait for the rapture.

He will come and make his home with us now. We don't have to wait for him to take us to the place that he has prepared. He will come to this place.

God the Father will come with him. The Holy Spirit's already here. This is sort of rapture now theology.

In the latter days, when we have grown, when we're in our greater level of maturity as believers, the Lord Jesus comes to us. Now that's the rapture, in a sense, to enjoy the presence of Jesus Christ, now to have him manifest his glory as he will at the second coming where every eye will see him. Wouldn't it be great if every eye that looks at us sees the Lord Jesus? Every eye will see him.

Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Wouldn't it be something if people looking at us in our lives and our faith and confidence in the promises of God, despite what happens to us, have to acknowledge there is something there.

There is a divine presence and a divine power, and I have to acknowledge it. I have to bow the knee. I have to say that for that person right there, the presence of the Lord Jesus is as real and powerful and effective as it gets.

I've never seen anyone more transformed, more enabled and empowered in the face of adversity or hardship or persecution or the potential for ostracism and cancellation and so on. I've never seen anyone more joyful, more peaceful, more optimistic, more fully reflective of the presence of Jesus Christ than fill in your name here. That's the latter days.

That's succeeding in perilous times. The peril is that we will fail the grace of God, that we will come short of the glory of God by failing to exploit being strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. So these are the perilous times.

So what is it we need to watch for? What is the peril that we want to avoid as growing believers? What are we in danger of? What is the peril? Look at the next verse. Men will

be lovers of themselves. You know this is a long list.

Just glance down through it. Lovers of themselves, money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving. A lot of uns there.

Slanderers, self-controlled, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, and so on. I want to show you something here to summarize this as we conclude for this morning. In verse two, circle the first two terms, the first two descriptions.

Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money. Circle it. If you don't have your Bible or you don't have a pencil, circle it mentally.

When you come back to 2 Timothy 3, the perilous times, why are they perilous? Because men will be lovers of themselves, people will be lovers of themselves, and lovers of money. Now go down to verse four, the other end of this list. Traitors, headstrong, haughty, what? Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

This list, this set of descriptions begins and ends with what you love. Remember what we saw in Matthew? Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. Matthew 24, 12, write it in the margin here.

Lawlessness will abound. What is the law? The law is the Word of God. The law is the standards, the promises, and the principles, and the doctrine of God.

Lack of that, lack of the Word of God, lack of understanding of what God requires, what God blesses, what God promises, lack of God's Word will abound, and the love of many will grow cold. It's cause and effect. You abandon the Word, the Holy Spirit cannot shed God's love abroad in our hearts.

Romans 5, 5. The love of God is shed in our hearts, shed abroad, distributed by the Holy Spirit. Lawlessness will abound, love grows cold. Love in every category, love for spouse, love for children, love for parents, love for one another, love for neighbor, love for enemy.

Why does love grow cold? Especially in the latter days. Remember in Hebrews chapter 5 toward the end, at such time as you ought to be teachers, you need one to teach you again what? The Word of God, the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. At such time as you ought to be metabolizing, chewing, and swallowing solid food, you need milk.

You've got to go back to the first principles. You shouldn't have to lay again the foundation of change of mind away from dead works and faith. That ought to be at the core.

It's the solid foundation of truth. How can you have lost that? And that's the milk. That's what builds the bones.

That's how babies grow and get bigger and stronger and more capable. It's about love. It is about love.

Look at it. In the latter days, why is it perilous? Because men will become lovers of themselves, lovers of money, go down to the end, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Do you see it? Love of self, love of money, love of pleasure, that takes the place of love of God.

I'm more interested in my satisfaction, my happiness, my approval in the eyes of others, my pursuit of what I like, what I want. Lovers of pleasure, lovers of money, lovers of self rather than lovers of God. And the Lord Jesus nailed it in Matthew 24, 12.

The love of many will grow cold because being without the law of God will abound. That's what's wrong with Christian faith and practice at large in the church in general today. Love.

What's the first and greatest commandment? Love the Lord your God. You lose that love. You talk about perilous times.

All of these other descriptions are encapsulated in that loss of love, misdirected love, misapplied love, love without applying a condition or a standard, loving the wrong things. Dr. Criswell has a sermon called Loving the Wrong World. You don't love the world of God.

You love the world of man. You love the world of the cosmos. Well, something to dwell on.

We'll pick up here and look at this description in detail. We'll see what the word of God has to say about each of these conditions that are a peril, a danger to your soul and to my soul right now. Because for you and me, regardless of the chronology of God's plan, these are the latter days and we are to be warned against them now.

Otherwise, some scripture is only for the people that live in the rapture generation or come to faith in the tribulation. Every word of God is profitable to us. All scripture has been written for our instruction, for our benefit, so that we can apply it.

None more than right here. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for preserving it, for presenting it, for giving us your Holy Spirit to understand it, to use it as a light to shine on our path so that we can walk the way of righteousness, the narrow road that leads to the straight gate of life.

We pray that as we reflect on these truths and try to understand how they pertain to our individual particular circumstances and situations, that God the Holy Spirit will strengthen us with the grace that is in Christ Jesus so that we will be thoroughly furnished for every good work. We will be fit representatives of the Lord Jesus from now

until the day that he gathers us to himself. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.