

2Timothy 24-11-17a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is the 17th of November, 2024. We are in 2 Timothy 3, looking at the perilous times that will come.

There are many references here to repeating themes, and anytime something is mentioned more than once in a short space, it generally is something we should pay attention to. So we're going to sail through this description in the first nine verses, and then move forward into one of the most fruitful and applicable sections in all of the Word of God, which is the man of God and the Word of God in verses 10 through 17. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on us as we spend this time in fellowship and study, and we'll begin.

Father, we are so grateful for this time where we can catch up with one another. We can learn the details and the circumstances and pray more intelligently as we intercede on one another's behalf. We thank you for your grace and faithfulness in providing for our needs, in enabling us to come together at this place and in this time to receive strength, encouragement, and understanding from your Word.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will be directly involved in ministering these truths to our heart in an effective way, so that we can see how we ought to think and speak and live in the days ahead. We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified. We ask it in his name.

Amen. Looking once again at our passage, Paul tells Timothy, and through Timothy tells us, every congregation from those early days in Ephesus down to the present, know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form or appearance of godliness but denying its power, and from such people turn away.

We've looked first and foremost at the emphasis in the structure here, and if you have your trusty number two pencil, as I do, you will have circled the measure of Christian life, what will be the ultimate standard by which we are evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ, and that is, what do we love? What is the target of our love? We've seen that compared to faith, the merit of faith is in the object, but in love, the merit of love is in the subject, the one expressing love, and we cannot be loving, we cannot be a blessing to others if God has not been able to shed his love abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit by the power of his word. When that calling, when that opportunity fails, when we come short, when we don't learn to love God and love one another, love our neighbor, love those who are outside, even love our enemies, which is not a human strength that

has to be done through God's grace and God's power. When we don't do that, this is what you have.

Instead, love because of the lack of integrity and the lack of character and the lack of understanding, lack of orientation to God's grace and God's provision, God's plan, God's purpose, most importantly to God's son, we will instead be lovers of ourselves. And this is the title page, if you will, for all of these descriptions. This is the condition or the characteristic that enables all of these others to take place.

So being a lover of ourselves, and if you've got that circled, lovers of themselves, lovers of money, then down in verse four at the end of this list, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. And right in the center at the beginning of verse three, you have unloving. Obviously, if they are loving money, loving themselves, loving pleasure, not loving in verse three is related to the rather than lovers of God.

All of these other things, notice how many things it takes to fill the space that is built for and should be occupied by love of God. When these other conditions prevail, the love of many grows cold, as the Lord Jesus said back in his description of these latter days in Matthew 24 and 25, the love of many grows cold. Remember in the letters to the seven churches, and you get to this very same church.

I'm turning over to Revelation chapter two and chapter three, the church in Ephesus, very first one in chapter two. These things says, he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamp I know your works, your labor, your patience. You cannot bear those who are evil.

You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. We like to believe this about ourselves. If we have been endeavoring to live a productive and fruitful Christian life, if we've exposed ourselves to the teaching of the word of God, we have tried to identify and separate from bad teaching, false teaching, misdirected teaching, misunderstanding, misinterpretation of the scriptures.

We've departed from that. This would be a wonderful evaluation at the judgment, wouldn't it? That the Lord Jesus will say, I know your works. I've seen your labor.

I know your patience. You have persevered. You have endured.

You cannot bear those who are evil. You've identified them and you don't tolerate them. You've expunged evil from the people you listen to, the people you fellowship with, the people that you spend time with.

You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not. You have discerned the difference between genuine inspired scripture, New Testament scripture in particular, that was delivered through the apostles to pastors and teachers who communicated its ultimate source is God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ to the apostles who were

inspired to write it down and to those who have been gifted down through the centuries to be communicators, pastors and teachers. And if they are faithful and so do, you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found the deceit.

You've identified the lie. Good job. You way to go.

All of that is approval. Be diligent. Bend every effort.

Paul has just said in our previous chapter to present yourself approved to God. So here's approval. Verse three, you have persevered and have patience.

Notice how patience has been repeated now. I know your patience. You have patience.

You have labored. You've got that word labor, both the noun and the verb here for my name's sake. And you've not become weary.

You haven't slowed down. You haven't flagged. You haven't given up.

You haven't taken a back seat and stopped. Nevertheless, after all of that, wouldn't it be great for there just to be a period at the end of the paragraph and to him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life. But there is still a failure.

What is the failure? I have this against you. You have left your first love. You have left your first love.

The measure is not how patient am I? How laboriously have I endeavored? How much effort have I put in? How much truth have I identified? How much falsehood have I identified and separated from and refused to listen to? These are wonderful things, but what is the measure? It's love. You can do these things and have not love. We reviewed this last time in first Corinthians 13.

I hope you have first Corinthians 13. You know, the abbreviation in the old books is CF with a period and it's from Latin. I think it's related to the word confer.

And it means to compare. So in the margin of my Bible, next to our passage, I have CF first Corinthians 13 next to second Timothy chapter three, where we have all of these failures in love. I have this against you in revelation two, four, you have left your initial love, the love you had at first.

Do you notice that we have references to the latter days and we think, well, those are the end times that's eschatology and prophecy and looking at the setup for the tribulation and the beast and the false prophet and the mark and all of the other things that are detailed in the fifth through the 19th chapter of the revelation. But remember, these are put for things that are applicable to each one of us. We have early days, we have first days and we have latter days.

The longer we persist as believers, the more we are entering into latter days. What happens after the new wears off? What happens after the and the new car smell of our faith begins to fade? And we've got a little bit of peeling and a little bit of damage and a little bit of grime and some scrapes and scratches and pits. You see this when you look at a car, it's new or like new.

And over time, just by reason of use, it's like a pair of shoes. They look great at the beginning, but pretty soon they've got marks and stains that don't quite come out. Well, what about our faith? Here, the Lord Jesus says, you have lost the love you had at first.

The measure that proves out the depth of your hope and the depth of your faith. You've left your first love. Notice it doesn't say your first love left you.

It just, where did the love go? There used to be a song when I was a kid on the old AM radio, where is the love? You said was mine, all mine till the end of time. Where's the love? Well, the love didn't leave. Notice who left whom? The bumper sticker I've referred to many times over the years.

I've used to see, if God seems far away, who moved? And we leave our love. It isn't, I don't know what happened. The love just kind of packed its suitcase and got on the bus.

No, we have left. It's our choices. So you have left your at first love.

First love sounds like, oh, who was my first crush? What was my first infatuation? What was the first thing I fell in love with? No, this is at first, the initial defining love that came into us and flooded into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, through the first things we learned from the word of truth. So what is the solution? If we say, you know, I think I'm probably pretty good at spotting error and deceit. I know what a false apostle is.

I'm working hard. I've got patience. I've done all of these things in this initial description, but I do think maybe the love is somewhere else.

I seem to have turned a corner and it doesn't seem to be like it was at first. So what's the solution? Verse five, remember, remember, this is go back and refresh. This is the antidote for a lot of relationship problems.

You can get crosswise with someone, especially someone with whom you have close relationship. And when you're around them, when they come to mind, you think, oh, you rascal. I can't believe you did that or didn't do this or said what you said or didn't say what you didn't say, or you forgot this or you omitted that or you were callous and indifferent.

You weren't sensitive. And we start to fall into that trap of having a grudge and not separating someone's failings as far as the East is from the West, the way God does with our failings. We're like the servant that's been forgiven the great debt, but there's

someone in our periphery and we're having a tough time forgiving.

The solution to both of these is the same. If we have lost our first love, whether it is the love we had at first for God and for the Lord Jesus and those to whom we are closely, intimately related, what is the solution? Remember when. Remember therefore from where you have fallen.

Remember how you got to where you are. Remember what occurred and what existed at first. Go back and think about it.

We are our memory. This is the tragedy of memory loss in old age. We see it more now because we are able to extend life and remedy disease and the things that used to take people out.

The average life span, life expectancy on the actuarial tables over the last few centuries has gone up and up and up because we can fight infections. We can help people get through viruses and other maladies, cancers and failures of organs and broken bones. There's all kinds of things that can be fixed.

We last longer body-wise. What we discover is that we can't always extend the life of the brain. We see a lot more incidences.

They've had to come up with new names for memory failure and so on. The loss of that, the tragedy of those who lose their loved ones to memory failure in these severe cases is tragic. The place I used to work years ago, Buckner had a facility down at Tahlequah.

Go Ye Village has a facility for those who their memories of the past are good, but their memory of the present just doesn't print anymore. It's like the old impact printers that had a ribbon or a typewriter that had a ribbon. As the ink went out of the printer, you can type and type, but it doesn't leave an impression on the paper anymore.

What is the tragedy of that? Our memories define us. It makes us who we are. People who forget where they came from, who forget their humble upbringing, who forget the people who aided them in getting a start in a successful career, and who no longer want to associate with those who were instrumental in giving them a boost and a leg up and a hand and those who invested and who supported them.

It's tragic to not remember those things. When it comes to spiritual truth, we have a choice because our memory of spiritual truth doesn't depend on our brain. This is the interesting workaround.

We have jumper cables. We have wiring. I knew a good friend in days gone by that ended up having a heart attack, but it didn't kill him.

The doctor said, you have 100% blockage in these arteries, but it came on so slowly that

your body has enlarged other blood vessels that have taken up the slack for this blockage, and you've had this mild heart attack, but it didn't kill you because these other vessels have worked around the block and your blood is still able to access your heart tissue and keep it healthy. It has worked around the problem area and can compensate it. We as believers have a precious gift.

It is the ongoing seal of the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Holy Spirit. Even if we become forgetful, even if we should fall into the grip of tragic memory loss, which thankfully none of us have, but we know people that have. We've cared for people that have, but you will notice that those who have cultivated their relationship with God across the years, even if they can no longer print current memories, they have love and joy and peace and patience because what they have learned from the Word of God is not stored in their brain, it is stored in their soul.

And God the Holy Spirit will bring it to their mind, and they may not know exactly where they are or who they're talking to, but they will still have the peace of God that passes understanding. It's not based on understanding, it is based on the presence of God. And they will still be loving, they will still be concerned about the person they're talking to.

And this is the treasure that we store in our souls and that we carry forward regardless of the slings and arrows of our circumstances. So notice what it says here, remember from where you have fallen. Notice you left your first love, you fell.

And this is something that is preventable. We don't have to leave, and we don't have to fall. The focus has to be on love, and we don't have to generate it, we don't have to create it, we don't have to expend a lot of effort in trying to be loving or act loving.

This love comes from God, and we reflect it back to Him and to one another. This is Romans 5.5 and other passages. Love is sourced in God.

One of the shorter memory verses, God is love. Read the epistles of John, 1 John especially, the descriptions of love. And to remember God's love, the love of God that sent the Lord Jesus Christ, to remember the love that has forgiven our sins and cleansed us from all unrighteousness.

The love that the Lord Jesus expressed toward His Father in overruling His own will and accomplishing the Father's will in our salvation. Remember from where you have fallen, change your mind and do the first works. The Lord Jesus has just commended those in Ephesus for their works.

I know your labor, I know your works, I know you have patience, you have labored for my namesake, but they're not the same works. You're doing the same things, there is an appearance of godliness, there is a form of godliness, but it lacks the power. There's a form of godliness lacking the power that's in our 2 Timothy chapter 3 section.

Remember, what is the solution? Think back. This takes time. We've got to shut off the technology, we have to stop the human intercommunications and constant alarms that say someone has texted me, someone's sent a tweet, someone has emailed, someone has something to say.

There's someone talking somewhere to shut all that off and spend time in communion with our Heavenly Father via the Holy Spirit, appreciating the Lord Jesus and remember the love that characterized us at first. Remember, you can't find a command in scripture that is impossible. If we couldn't do it, it wouldn't be a command.

To remember in the spiritual realm is always possible. It doesn't say remember where you left your keys or remember where you set your glasses down, but you can remember from where you have fallen. You can trace out what happened in the process whereby we left that first love.

So, what is required to fix this problem? I don't want to be the Ephesian church where I've done a good job but the Lord Jesus has something against me in the love department. You don't want that, I don't want that. How do we fix it? First of all is to remember that there is a better way, a better place, there is an environment of love, there is the expression of love, the existence of love, that power that comes from love that transforms what we do into something that is pleasing and acceptable in God's sight.

It will be favorably evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ. There are works and then there are works that are done in and characterized by love and this makes them distinct, this puts them in a separate category. So, step one, remember that that is the evaluation.

Remember that it is possible to look around and say, well look, I go to a good church, I pray, I have a little devotional, I look out for others, I am patient, I am enduring, I have identified falsehood and kept it out of my periphery. But we've got to remember the love that we understood, that we experienced and that we were able to express in the beginning. And then secondly, change our mind.

Repent. Metanoeo, change your mind. Change of mind, change of heart.

Remembering how it used to be, remembering and we have all experienced the love of God and the appreciation we have for Him, the self-sacrificial love of the Lord Jesus, remembering that and noticing that there is a distance because we have left that love and fallen from it. To get back to it, we have to change our mind. First of all, we have to remember it's there.

Then secondly, we have to say, I want to go back, I want to follow this exhortation of the Lord Jesus. I've got to get back there. Stephen Stills had a song way back in the days of

the Vietnam protests and so on.

He had a song and I think Joni Mitchell actually wrote it. But it says, we've got to get back to the garden. You don't have to get back to the garden.

You can't get back to the garden. You can go to the gate and there's going to be a whirling sword cherub there that's going to slice you and dice you and worse than the old vegematic. You can't go back to the garden.

What you can do is go back to the love that was expressed in the garden. The love that is going to define the future kingdoms of the son and of the father that is the qualifying characteristic for approval at the judgment seat. So number one, remember.

Number two, change our mind. How is it that we left that love? How is it that we tripped and fell? We've got to get back up and get back, not back to the garden. We've got to get back to the initial love that is the measure of our faith and our hope.

And in many cases to rebuild that love, we revisit the ground and the quality of our faith. We revisit the ground and the quality of our hope. Hope is based on God's promises.

Hope is based on God's dealing with his people in the past and our expectation of what he's going to do in the future. We get our eyes off of ourselves, off of our work, off of patting ourselves on the back and change our minds. That is the second.

So the Lord Jesus says, remember from where you have fallen, change your mind and do the first works. Keep doing what you're doing, but it has to be characterized by love. Otherwise, I will come to you suddenly and remove your lampstand from its place.

If you do not avail yourself of the opportunity that I have given you, you will be removed from that place of opportunity. But notice the emphasis, unless you repent, repentance is given twice. This requires a change of mind.

This is something we can do. We are able, whatever the circumstance, whatever the situation, however old we get, however forgetful we get, however limited we get, however constrained by requirements and tasks and circumstances and the expectations of others, whatever maelstrom society can go to Hades in a handbasket, Sheol in Abaddon can cloud the skies and quake the earth. If the Lord Jesus gives us an exhortation, if he delivers a command, it is something we are able to do.

So repent. We change our mind, but we have to remember that the option exists. We have to remember how to do it and what it looks like to change our mind.

It isn't, oh, okay, this is like saying, I look in the mirror, I need to lose some weight. Okay, I'm going to lose some weight. I've changed my mind.

I'm not going to be heavy. I'm going to lose this weight. My clothes will fit better.

That doesn't make the weight go away, does it? To change our mind means to change our priorities and change our goals and change our values, implement change based on our changed mind. A changed mind will change the works and the way we do them. You do hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans and I hate them as well.

That's good. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches, to him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life. Wow.

This is not a privilege for all believers or even most believers. This is for overcomer believers. You have to want it.

We have to exercise the change of mind that makes it possible. This is a qualification. It doesn't say just wait, wait long enough and I'll be leading you up to tree of life to those who overcome.

What does it mean to overcome? This is faith and hope and love. I don't know about you, but I can't think of anything better than partaking of the tree of life. This is what Adam lost when he and Eve partook of the fruit and were expelled from the garden, lest he take out to stretch forth his hand and eat from the tree of life.

And God didn't even finish the sentence. He drove them out of the garden. If you want to get back to the garden, that's where the tree of life is.

This is the way. Remember, repent. I will give to eat from the tree of life.

Grant the privilege, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. This is what's on the line in our passage. Don't want to be a lover of self.

Don't want to be a lover of material security. What does my retirement look like? What does my bank balance look like? What does my income and expense picture look like? What's my profit and loss statement? What do I have in my domicile? What am I driving? What am I wearing? That can't be the measure. Men will be lovers of themselves.

Men will be unloving in verse three of what they should love. They will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. The outside bracket here is, are you a lover of self or are you a lover of God? That's the outside bracket here in verses two through four.

And you can have a form of godliness. You can have the appearance. You can have patience.

You can discern and identify and call out evil and separate from those who are deceiving and false apostles. That's the form of godliness, but you've lost its power. It doesn't have the power to please God anymore.

It doesn't have the power to be used by God and woven into his plan for blessing, for benefit, for preparation, for future work of service and function in the coming kingdoms.

It loses its power. So this is why the description of the latter days is characterized by its relationship to love or the lack thereof.

It's very interesting here in the first verse of chapter three of second Timothy. Know this that in the last days perilous times will come. That is the word that is used in the description of the garrison, not the garrison, the two demoniacs who live among the tombs.

Remember they tried to bind them. They tried to shackle them and they would break the bonds and harass people. And the legion of demons that characterized those guys, this is Matthew chapter eight, verse 28.

Jesus came to the other side of the sea of Galilee to the country of the Gergesenes. And he met two demon possessed men coming out of the tombs exceedingly fierce so that no one could pass that way. The word fierce is our word perilous.

That's how menacing, that's how path diverting, how dangerous these characteristics infiltrating our souls and our periphery are. It is as dangerous as the two men possessed by the legion of demons. Same word is used to describe them both.

You can put Matthew eight 28 out there in the margin, perilous, menacing, dangerous, path diverting. It will stop you in the road. You can't make any progress.

Well, we've seen the relationship to love here, both in first Corinthians chapter 13 and Revelation chapter two verses one and following written to Ephesus by the way. Where is pastor Timothy ministering? Where is he teaching? Ephesus, this is the place. You get it from both ends.

Paul the apostle through Timothy, the Lord Jesus through John talking to Ephesus first and foremost, the first letter out of the box emphasizes love. And we should look at that ourselves, change our minds where necessary and remember from where we might have fallen. Remember what we have departed from.

And it's not just the garden. It is the tree of life itself that is on the line. We'll pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we will pick up here in second Timothy and we're going to look at some interesting parallels that will shine light on how to identify these things beginning to crop up in our own soul and our own life so that we can change our mind and depart from them. See that when we come back.