

Sunday Morning Message

February 10, 2019

Living for God in Perilous Times

Text – 2 Timothy 3

Congregational Reading – 2 Timothy 3:1 - 5

Introduction

One of the characteristics of these perilous last days is an dramatic increase in atheism:

I heard about an atheist who was walking through the woods, admiring all the “accidents” that evolution had created. “What majestic trees! What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!” he said to himself. As he was walking alongside the river, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. Turning to look, he saw a 7-foot grizzly bear charging towards him. He ran away as fast as he could up the path. He looked over his shoulder and saw the grizzly was closing. Somehow he ran even faster, so scared that tears came to his eyes. He looked again, and the bear was even closer. His heart was pounding, and he tried to run faster. He tripped and fell to the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up, but the bear was right over him, reaching for him with its left paw and raising its right paw to strike him.

At that instant the atheist cried, “Oh God help!” Time stopped. The bear froze. The forest was silent. Even the river stopped moving. As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky, “You deny My existence for all these years, teach others that I don't exist, and even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you expect Me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer?”

The atheist looked directly into the light and said, “I would feel like a hypocrite to become a Christian after all these years, but perhaps you could make the bear a Christian?”

“Very well,” said the voice.

The light went out. The river ran. The sounds of the forest resumed. Then the bear dropped his right paw, brought both paws together, bowed its head, and spoke: “Lord, for this food which I am about to receive, I am truly thankful.”¹

I believe that we are living in the very last of the last days. I believe that the generation that we are living in may very well be the generation that sees the return of Christ. We are truly living in a post-Christian period; and though there are still many believers in our world, it seems that there are many more unbelievers. The world around us has evolved dramatically in my lifetime. I was born at a time when America was still “one nation under God.” We were a nation that still stood on the Bible. However, in my lifetime, we have changed cataclysmically. We have gone completely through a period of relativistic humanism, which is rooted in atheism, and have now entered into an anti-God era, which is nothing less than Satanic. In other words, we went from

¹ <https://www.ministry127.com/resources/illustration/the-atheist-and-the-bear>

living for God and following His principles to loving self and doing what pleases us, and we are now embracing an “anything but God” attitude. If God is for it, many in America are against it. If God is against it, this world we are living in is promoting it to the extent that they are forcing it down our throats.

“Nobody talks so constantly about God as those who insist that there is no God.”—Heywood Brown²

Examples – morality – fornication, homosexuality; abortion; evolution

Unfortunately, these humanistic and godless ideologies are creeping into the churches.

Christians that actually live for the Lord are seen as radical, intolerant, and unenlightened.

The Apostle Paul lived in some pretty radical times, but he told us things were going to continue to progressively get worse.

Read all of 2 Timothy 3

1. The Announcement of the Last Days (v. 1)

The word “perilous” means hard to bear; troublesome; dangerous; fierce; savage

Paul lived in difficult days.

Illustration - The first century was marked by martyrdom for most Christians:

John the Baptist – beheaded by Herod (Matthew 14:3 – 12)

Stephen – stoned to death in Jerusalem in A.D. 34 (Acts 7:59)

James the son of Zebedee – beheaded by Agrippa in A.D. 45

Philip – stoned in Phrygia in A.D. 54

James, the brother of Jesus – beaten to death on the steps of the Temple in A.D. 63.

Barnabus – burned on Cyprus in A.D. 64

John Mark – dragged through the streets of Alexandria in A.D. 64

Simon Peter – crucified (upside down) by Nero in A.D. 69 (Peter’s wife was also crucified.)

Paul – beheaded by Nero in A.D. 69

Additional martyrs of the first century

Aristarchus, Epaphras, Priscilla and Aquilla, Andronicus, and Juna were all martyred by Nero in A.D.70. Silas was beaten to death in Macedonia; Onesiphorus and Porphyrius were dragged to death by horses; Andrew was crucified; Bartholomew was flayed alive; Thomas was burned by hot plates and eventually stabbed to death; Matthew was nailed to the ground and beheaded; Matthias was crucified and beheaded; Luke was hanged in Greece in A.D. 93; Antipas was roasted alive in A.D. 95. Note – John the apostle is said to have been boiled in oil by Emperor Domitian but miraculously survived. He was banished to the penal isle of Patmos where he was given the Revelation by the Lord. Tradition has

² Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 176). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

it that he was eventually released and returned to Ephesus where he was the pastor. He died at the age of 100 being the only apostle that was not martyred.

I am just trying to point out that though it seems that we may be entering into a time when it will be very unpopular to be a Christian, this is nothing new.

2. The Attributes of the Last Days (vs. 2 – 13)

Incontinent – without self-control

Heady – rash or reckless

See also Romans 1:18 – 32

These attributes of fallen man have always been there, but they become more apparent and acceptable as society moves away from God.

3. The Answer for Christians living in the Last Days (vs. 14 – 17)

Paul admonishes Timothy (and us) to keep going. Don't veer off course; don't change the plan. Stay in the Word of God – that will give us everything we need in order to know what to do in these very dark and perilous times.

Question – Did you spend time in the Bible today? How about this week?

Conclusion – What Can We Do?

What Does God Want Us To Do?

How can we continue when things are looking so bleak in the world around us?

I Be Encouraged

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

A Christ will take home to Heaven those who belong to Him before things get really bad here on the earth.

B God will be with us every step of the way as we go through the beginnings of sorrows.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Hebrews 13:5)

C God will give you the grace that you need to endure any suffering that He wills for your life.

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in

persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

"If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." (Proverbs 24:10)

If your strength is small you need to increase your faith, and your faith is increased through the Word of God:

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

D God will never give you more than you can handle:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

By the way – this world was never supposed to be our home anyway. This is not Heaven. You should try to make your home as much like Heaven as you can, but this world will never be like Heaven. We were spoiled for many years. In America, we have had many years of prosperous living without persecution. But, things are about to get tougher.

Illustration - John Wesley was riding along a road one day when it dawned on him that three whole days had passed in which he had suffered no persecution. Not a brick or an egg had been thrown at him for three days.

Alarmed, he stopped his horse, and exclaimed, "Can it be that I have sinned, and am backslidden?"

Slipping from his horse, Wesley went down on his knees and began interceding with God to show him where, if any, there had been a fault.

A rough fellow, on the other side of the hedge, hearing the prayer, looked across and recognized the preacher. "I'll fix that Methodist preacher," he said, picking up a brick and tossing it over at him. It missed its mark, and fell harmlessly beside John. Whereupon Wesley leaped to his feet joyfully exclaiming, "Thank God, it's all right. I still have His presence."³

II Be Engaged (Busy)

Turn to Luke 19:11 – 27 – "occupy til I come"

Occupy - Don't hide in a bunker with pallets of food and water – live for God. Continue going to church; continue searching the Scriptures; continue tithing, continue loving people, including your enemies; continue telling anyone who will listen about the Lord. God's plan for the church as recorded in the Scripture does not change until the Lord takes us up out of here. Don't get distracted from your mission. Let's be busy doing what He has called us to do until He calls us home. I believe that the crazier the world gets, the more there will be people turning to Christ. We have to be strong, and ready to help these people.

³ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 995). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

We cannot be sure when our last day on earth will come, so we had better be busy; and, we also need to make sure that we are right with the people we love. We don't have time to hold grudges. If you are at odds with someone, swallow your pride and forgive them and move on.

III Be Excited

These truly are perilous days, but they are also exciting days. We are very likely living on the earth at the time of return of Christ. But, let me warn you. We are soldiers, and we are engaging in spiritual battle. It's truly not for the faint of heart. You will need to be strong. But, these days are also very exciting.

I would have liked to live on the earth during the time of Christ, but the days we are living in are just as exciting, and there is even more opportunity now to see God do some pretty awesome things. Get out on the front lines. Time is truly running out. Christ is coming back soon.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

Turn to 2 Peter 3

Christ is coming back – the evidence is clear. Let's stay busy serving Him until He takes us up out of here. Be excited!