

Good Morning:

If you knew that you had one moment in time to share with someone very important to you, what types of things would you discuss? Would you spend time discussing the last hockey game, or who won the grey Cup three years ago? Perhaps the last movie you attended?

Or would you take this last opportunity to share what is on your heart. Would you desire to pass on some wisdom, some warning, or a piece of advice that would add value or prevent that person from experiencing something painful? I personally would choose the latter and spend the time left trying to make a difference in that person's life.

Our text this morning is 2 Timothy: 3. 2 Timothy is a letter written by Paul to his Beloved son in the faith Timothy. Timothy was leading the church in Ephesus at the time and was experiences many challenges with those who called themselves believers in Chroist. It is the final letter that Paul wrote and he knew that his time was very short as he was writing it. Paul writes in 2Timothy 4-

"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. ⁹ Do your best to come to me soon.

This makes it clear that Paul is aware that his time on earth is coming to an end. He was in a Roman prison under Nero which was one of the most intense persecution period in Roman history. In the summer of 64, Rome suffered a terrible fire that burned for six days and seven nights consuming almost three quarters of the city. The people accused the Emperor Nero for the devastation claiming he set the fire for his own amusement. In order to deflect these accusations and placate the people, Nero laid blame for the fire on the Christians. The emperor ordered the arrest of a few members of the sect who, under torture, accused others until the entire Christian populace was implicated and became fair game for retribution. Paul was arrested for a second time in Rome in 66 AD and was subsequently martyred in around 67AD.

It is recognized then that this letter is one that contains powerful and impactful wisdom, warnings and encouragement from Paul to Timothy and this morning I wanted to take this opportunity to share with you some of this powerful piece of Scripture.

Why? Why 2 Timothy 3

Well, because this is likely my last opportunity to speak to you from this podium as an Elder. Some of you may already know but I wanted to share with you all that Ruth and I will be moving in July back to the Grande Prairie region. This is a personal choice for us as a family and I want to stress that this is in no way is a reflection of our feeling towards this body. To the contrary, we have been so blessed by all of you over the past years and have grown spiritually, and personally because of your influences in our

lives. We have grown to love this body and all of you as brothers and sisters in the Lord. I want to say thank you for being such a big part of this phase of our lives.

I also want to share with you something that I feel is very important and to encourage you to stand firm.

Our church just finished celebrating it's 40th anniversary and while it was a wonderful celebration packed full of friend, stories, and praises to God for His faithfulness, I often found myself wondering what SVBC will be like in another 40 years.

My concern for the future of this and many churches in North America is based on what I am seeing or perhaps perceiving of the impact and influence that the world is having on Churches everywhere, and so before we enter into the scripture in 2 Timothy I would like to establish one over-arching truth this morning ... that is, that the World Hates the God of the Bible and is openly hostile to the Christian church and message. I believe with little doubt that this is the truth of our world today.

Let me show you an example of this:

Slide one: This is a commonly understood symbol of Christianity. Tradition has it that this was used during the persecution of Christians in Rome as a means of identifying one Christian to another. A common practice of scratching in the dirt was used as one individual scratched part of this symbol into the dirt. Another person who was there would complete the symbol, thereby identifying themselves as brothers in the Lord and the symbol was then scratched out. It soon became synonymous with Christianity and is often referred to as the "Jesus Fish", or Ichthys signifying fishers of men.

Slide 2: I saw this actually on the back of a black volkswagon here in St Albert a few weeks ago and it made me realize how acceptable it has become openly bash or in this case threaten Christians. At first I questioned that maybe I was being too sensitive but this is a really harsh statement and to some degree a harsh reality. The church is being attacked on every front today. Our message is being drowned out by fear mongering and ill-informed people with personal and societal agendas. I watch as the world erodes morally faster and faster and, while I believe it is our responsibility and privilege to stand up for our faith in the Lord and to provide some hope in an otherwise messed up world we should not be surprised when we encounter resistance. Jesus warned us of a time when we would face unimaginable trials and persecution but encouraged us to stand fast.

Turn if you will to Matthew 24: 9-28:

That doesn't sound like a lot of fun to me. Frankly that sounds horrible but we need to know that there is a cost of following Christ. Almost every apostle paid with their lives. Throughout the world today we are hearing stories of Christians persecuted and murdered all too frequently for their faith as they live lives worthy of their calling. We need to continually be in prayer for these saints. The world says that Christianity is dead. Are the Vultures circling?

There is one statement that catches my eye every time I read this scripture and that is verse 24:

“For False christs and prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect”.

Is it possible? Even the very elect could be deceived and led astray. How can that be?

Turn with me please to 2 Timothy chapter 3;

And Paul writes:

I have titled this sermon Apostolic or Apostate

Apostolic:.

According to the doctrines of the apostles; delivered or taught by the apostles; as, apostolic faith or practice

Apostate: One who has forsaken the faith, principles, or party, to which he before adhered; esp., one who has forsaken his religion for another;

As we read Paul's letter to Timothy it starts to become clear that the description that Paul is using to describe those behaviors in the last days are talking about people in the church. Vs 6 having the appearance of godliness'. Those who profess to be Christians and they were causing significant issues in the Church in Ephesus. Paul was warning Timothy to be on the look-out for these heretical, false teachers that were worming their way into the church at the time.

Now before I go any further I want to be very clear. If you hear nothing else I say this morning please hear this. I am not talking about anyone in this church, nor am I identifying any issue that we as a church need to address. I want to be clear just as Paul was clear to Timothy to be on the look-out for these types worming their way into this body.

What does this look like? How do we recognize them?

Vs 1-4:

Paul states that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. What or when are these last days?

The term last days describes the epoch of time, an age that in this case extends over a period of time. There are many references using the term last days in scripture and the predominant thought of New testament scholars would identify this as the time from the appearance of Christ in body to his glorified second coming. At Pentecost when Peter began his sermon in Chapter two he spoke of the last days as being when the Holy Spirit will be poured out onto his people. In Hebrews 1: 1-2 the author writes that the last days are since the coming of Christ So in this context Paul is writing that the last days are now. It

is the span of time that we are currently living in the time from the appearance of Christ to the time of his second coming.

From a cultural perspective Albert Mohler, the president of the southern Baptist seminary relates the following.

And I quote:

In the first age, associated with pre modern age (the time of Christ to around 1500 AD) of antiquity and the medieval synthesis, it was impossible to not believe. There was simply no intellectual alternative to theism in the west. There was no alternative set of explanations for the world and its operations, or for moral order. All that changed with modernity. In the Modern age it became possible to not believe. A secular alternative to Christian theism, primarily evolution, emerged as a real choice to humanity. Presented as a matter of fact, choice now ruled the intellectual elite and made its way into the academic system of the age. As Peter Berger noted decades ago, this is the heretical imperative, the imperative to choose ones worldview.

The third set of intellectual conditions is identified with late or post modernity and the rise of our own intellectual epoch. For most people living in the context of self-conscious post modernity, it is now impossible to believe. This means, especially in the terms of the intellectual elites and the formative culture sectors of society, theism of a belief in God is not an available worldview, if not personally, then at least culturally". End Quote

The post modern movement of today states that truth is completely subjective. It can be whatever you want it to be. There is no ultimate authority except yourself and your own world view. You can be and do basically whatever you want to do as it pleases you. This can only end badly. Without a moral compass we will be left to our own carnal desires and personal opinions. God cannot exist in this age and any discussion of ultimate authority and an external moral authority will be and is met with ridicule, outrage and violence. I believe that we are specifically living in a post-modern age within the last days.

As we continue on in Vs 2-4 we really begin to see the prophetic implications of this scripture:

John MacArthur states that Self Love is the sewer pipe from which all of the rest of this section flows. If one thinks about it, when we become lovers of self, nothing and no one else matters. We become Proud arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents (obviously because they want to exercise a level of authority over us and that is just unacceptable), not loving good, treacherous, reckless and swollen with conceit and here is the crux of it... **lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.**

I believe our society started to unravel in the late 60 and into the early 70's when the psychologists of the time pinned all of Mankind's ills onto low self esteem. We needed to encourage everyone to focus on themselves and to feel good about themselves. Not I am not proposing that we beat ourselves down at every chance as a means of finding or generating humility because frankly that just becomes a self-deprecating false humility. I am saying that we need to have a proper self image as believers. We need

to understand that without the grace and ongoing intercession of our Lord we would sink into a self-loving carnal existence. We need to lean on him daily to keep ourselves from falling.

Jesus said that if anyone would come after him they need to deny themselves and take up their cross daily. That type of thinking is so foreign in our world today, given that self is everything. Why would you deny yourself anything?

So how is that manifesting itself in the churches of today?

Vs 5:

“Having the appearance of godliness but denying it’s power; AVOID SUCH PEOPLE!!!”

The single largest church in North America is led by Joel and Victoria Osteen in Dallas Texas. Every week over 46,000 people flock to their church in 5 services to hear them speak. I say that carefully when I say hear them speak. I come to this place to hear God speak. This may sound harsh but I cannot bear to listen to their teaching and see it masked by using God to reconcile their message.

Let me give you an example of what 46,000 people are hearing every week and then leaving that churches to face a world diametrically opposed to the message of the Gospel of Christ.

READ THE ARTICLE: Victoria and JOEL (pg2) comments;

I would be much happier if they were the only ones peddling this drivel but unfortunately this is a huge problem in the world around us from the Osteens to Oprah. Self help, and self grandisment are everywhere because it is what the people want. As we are told that we are the single most important people in the world, is it any wonder that those who peddle a message that squares with this thought are hugely successful?

According to Gods will, doesn’t enter into the conversation very often. Our will is what really matters and God becomes a vending machine from which the pedantic child demands wealth and riches.

I have always maintained that the most insidious forms of child abuse is to give your kids whatever they want. They become spoiled narcissistic brats who demand that the world gives them everything. Harsh? Maybe but that seems to be what is happening in many churches today.

READ the REST OF THE ARTICLE.

We are told to avoid such people

Vs 6-9

Those who are openly heretical to Gods word are also gaining ground in our culture: Paul continues by describing them as ones who creep into households and capture weak women burdened with sin and led astray by various passions:

This is important to note that they CREEP around similar to the description of the serpent. Their intent is to openly deceive and pull people from their faith to another gospel, again diametrically opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is clear that the person who taken in by these false prophets is weak and burdened by sins. I find this particularly interesting in that they understand that they are sinful and it requires some external truth and process to suppress or unburden themselves from it. The issue at hand is described in vs 7- that they are always looking and learning but never able to arrive at the truth. These are the ones who are spiritual in nature but always looking in the wrong places. They are full of new age philosophies, Reiki, divination, witchcraft, Yoga, mysticism, etc. Eastern religions such as Taoist, Buddhist, Hindu.

Additionally in North America we see the rise in adherents to a more subtle form of deception and twisting of the gospel message in Mormonism, Jehovah's witness etc.

Paul references Jannes and Jambres in vs 8 and 9; Who were these men?

This is the only place in Scripture that they are mentioned and they are presented as opposing Moses. Jewish tradition places these two as magicians in Pharaoh's household and were likely witness to or even complicit in trying to defend Pharaoh or discredit God and Moses. Further to this they were identified as having become Jewish proselytes and were with the Israel nation as it fled when Pharaoh let them go. When Moses went to the mountain to receive the commandments of God it is said that these men were instrumental in bringing discontent into the camp at Mount Sinai and led to the creation of the Golden Calf. Just three months after their release from captivity, wherein they witnessed miracle after miracle, these men were able to turn Israel away from God and to create idols. In Exodus 32 God said to Moses:

Go down, for your people, whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way I have commanded them.

Their names do not show up in scripture because they were destroyed by God. I am sure that our God will not tolerate anything but to follow him and his ways, as we are obligated and privileged to hear and study.

These are dangerous times as Paul says; Our world is ripe with the humanist wealth and prosperity gospel, outright heresy, occultic activity and many other faiths proclaiming to solve all of mankind's issues.

We have seen and are living in apostasy and sadly will continue to see it until Christ's return. Many claim to be Christians and followers of Christ but sadly, not displaying the qualities, character or devotion to the supremacy of his teachings through his word.

Now let's focus on Apostolic:

Next Paul shifts from warning to encouragement and while the first part of this chapter has been a little weighty I am also hoping that we can find some encouragement in these last few verses.

Vs 10-17:

If you recall the definition of Apostolic is to: Live according to the doctrines of the apostles; delivered or taught by the apostles; as, apostolic faith or practice;

Here Paul continues by reminding Timothy that he has had an apostolic example of what a life of an apostle is like. And while Paul starts by recognizing that Timothy has followed his life and watched his conduct, his aim in life, his patience, his faith, his love and his steadfastness Paul can't deny that Timothy also saw that Paul was persecuted for his faith.

"My Persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch and at Iconium and at Lystra- which persecutions I endured".

It should be noted that Paul only mentions these three places as it recognizes that Timothy, having being raised in Lystra also was close enough to see or hear of the persecutions that happened to Paul in Iconium and Antioch. He wasn't trying to hide anything from Timothy. He needed Timothy to understand the whole picture of what it means to follow Christ. I thank God for Paul's words here.

Clearly if one was only trying to encourage anyone in the faith you would be likely to overlook or omit the whole story but we have to be realistic. I believe that the last statement is the most encouraging that one can hear as a believer:

Yet through them all God rescued me: Timothy did and we can find comfort that through all of our trials we will be rescued. Keep in mind here, Paul is fairly confident that his life is coming to an end, and as we have seen, he doesn't hide that fact either but the sweet realization of his final deliverance to receiving a crown of righteousness is his ultimate prize for the faithful life he has led. Wow, what an example!!

So with the promise of God's deliverance fresh in Timothy's mind Paul makes it very clear that we will face persecution.

Read vs 12-14

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. And it will only get worse as the evil people that Paul talked about earlier will go from bad to worse. Deceiving and being deceived. They not only will get worse and worse in deceiving other people, they will begin to believe their own lies and deceptions, making them more and more dangerous!!

A question:... Why are you here? Have you ever considered why you come to SVBC week after week, month after month and year after year.

Do you want to come here for the fellowship of believers?

Do you want to come here for the worship time, and raise your voices to God in Praise?

Do you want to come here to hear Gods word and learn?

I sure hope you don't want to come here at all!!

I hope that after living a life worthy of the calling of Christ that you absolutely NEED to come here every week. I don't wish any ill towards you at all but as Paul writes, those who desire to follow Christ will face persecutions and in our present world I can't imagine you not having opposition to your life in some way.

This church is a bastion in an otherwise hostile world. The last parts of this chapter has Paul reminding and encouraging Timothy to continue to in what you have learned and have firmly believed. Referencing Timothy's past and reminding him of what he has learned from a child would imply a lifetime of exposure to the truth. This would square with the reality of growing up in a church and home that was focused on delivering and staying true to Gods' word. Teaching from the youngest to the oldest to make them wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

M*A*S*H*- 1972-1983 one of the most successful series of all time; The term stands for Mobile army surgical hospital and it was a place where victims of war were taken to receive care and hopefully return them to the battle once they have healed.

This place is a M*A*S*H unit as well.

Must Attend Spiritual Hospital- In order to survive you must have a place to go to receive the care you need. We need to be strengthened, encouraged, edified, educated in order to step into the world and fight the battles that we will invariably fight. This must be a safe place where you can come in from the battle, re arming yourselves as in Ephesians 6 (once again the church that Timothy was leading) so that you can go out there and fight the fight that is here now and getting worse.

What good is a hospital that has a life threatening infection coursing through it? Likewise how effective can a church be if it is full of heresy and ineffective teaching. When we try to become relevant to the world we will become irrelevant to deliver the truth of the Gospel, which the world truly needs.

We have everything we need. First and foremost we have Gods word, we have each other, and we have the security of his promises to deliver us. We must realize that we have to stand firm and protect that with our very lives if necessary so that our children and grandchildren will have a place to go. Hold fast Sturgeon Valley. The battle is beyond these doors and you must guard that tenaciously. This is where the wounded can find peace, comfort and a place that will honor God, honor his word and protect one another as a family.

Let's Pray: