

Discerning the Signs of the Times

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References: 2 Timothy, Matthew 16:1-3; Genesis 3:1; Ephesians 6:14; Acts 2:42; Proverbs 23:23; Jude 1:3; Jude 1:20; Hebrews 10:25

Introduction

Good evening. I see so many names. I see faces from different parts of the world. I was telling Harold earlier that if Paul had this technology, I'm sure he would have used it. Yeah, he would have been very happy with this. Thank you for your prayers. Thank you for your love, your care for us.

Harold was saying earlier that we're friends of this assembly. We're not here very often. I've been ministering sometimes via Zoom to you as well. But over the years, you've been very, very gracious and loving to us. So thank you.

So, one other thing I want to—I'm going to maybe make an absolute fool of myself. Roy, correct me if I'm wrong here, but Jesus, I mean—am I right? Yes. Yeah, and it means, "Jesus loves you."

All right, just open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 16 for a start. Matthew chapter 16 and verse 1. Matthew 16, verse 1. Just read a few verses. It says:

[Matthew 16:1-3 NKJV]

¹ Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; ³ and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.

And then turn to 2 Timothy. Please, 2 Timothy. And this is where we'll stay for the remainder of our time together. 2 Timothy.

The Prairie Sky and the Storms of Life

Now, it's probably been said already, and many of you maybe know already, that we come from the prairies. We live in Manitoba. There's wide-open, flat land all around us. We live in a little town, which is actually designated a city, but sometimes we'll drive out, you know, to a different destination, whatever. But we'll drive out, and I'll pull over to the side of the road—and it's, of course, a bullet-straight road, and there's no need to turn or curve or anything—but I'll pull over, and I'll do a 360 with my camera on the phone. It's flat as far as you can see in every direction.

Everyone smiles. "Oh, yeah, that's probably a tree out there, or a building." I'm not kidding you.

But one thing we do have an advantage of is we have sky, and it's alive and moving, and it's a changing landscape all the time. But the other thing—why I'm saying that—is when you stand out there, or in really any place around where we live, if there's a storm coming, you can see it for a long way away. And of course, knowing where you live and where your storms are coming from, storms always seem to track the same way, so you know if that storm's actually going to go by or if it is coming right for you. And yet, quite often, you have a lot of time to react, unless there's something blocking your view, like you are actually in some woods or you're on the wrong side of a building or something of that sort; then you don't see the storm. I think quite often it happens in the mountains too, you know. All of a sudden, the storm is just on top of you.

But I think from Matthew chapter 16, the Lord says, "You can discern the sky, but you can't discern the signs of the times."

Now, 2 Timothy is Paul's last words—his last will and testament, however you want to say it. And I don't want to speak for everyone, but I know for myself, I've been at the bedside of people that have been dying, and sometimes their last words are very profound. Sometimes their last words are a bit of a head-scratch.

So, Timothy—Paul talking to Timothy—he warns us in chapter 3, so we'll start there. Like I said, I'm going to be staying in 2 Timothy right through the rest of the evening. So in chapter 3, verse 1, he's giving us a little bit of a warning. He says:

[2 Timothy 3:1-5 NKJV]

¹ But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to

parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Signs of the Soon Coming Savior

We—I think it was prayed already in the prayers, but the days that we live in, I think all of us, I don't even need to really talk too much about it, but we all realize that there's a change in our world right now that is not a good change. Things are happening in our world right now that are very much signs, you might say, of the soon coming of our Savior for us.

Israel is a prime example right now, with the wars that are going on there and around with their neighbors and everything. Israel is God's timepiece. If you want to know where we are on God's prophetic clock, Israel is the hour hand. Jerusalem is the minute hand, and the temple is the second hand. And we are close because of all the things that are going on, and that's just one—Israel.

Paul talks here and other places, he talks about an apostate church—the falling away from the faith, the falling away from the truth. You don't have to go very far, you don't have to look too far on the web, and you find lots of it. I'm not going to go into any real details.

Our technological boom that we have going on right now, it's exponentially increasing, faster and faster. The whole thing with AI—it's concerning to many people. But there's a fellow named John Lennox, he's online, and he reminds us, he says, "Artificial intelligence—just don't forget what the first word is: it's artificial." So yes, it's something to be concerned with, but it's a technology that will probably end up in the wrong hands and be used for very dangerous global issues.

As in the days of Noah, as in the days of Lot. Again, I don't want to expound too much on these, but if you really think about it and we look into our society, it's very, very evident.

Wars and rumors of wars—I was just mentioning that with Israel. And, of course, all kinds of anomalies in nature. There are hurricanes and earthquakes and volcanoes and all kinds of things, and the polar shift is happening on the planet. So the Bible warns us several times of these things in the last days.

So then I was thinking about 2 Timothy. And I was trying to not necessarily outline it, but just considering that these are the words from Paul, and they are his last words to Timothy,

but of course to us. And I'm like, what is he trying to tell him? And I think we should look at it as Paul telling us what to really consider in the days that we live.

So I grouped it up, and this is not exhaustive. This is not a full study of 2 Timothy for tonight; the time won't allow it. But I'm just going to kind of scan quickly through some verses. You can follow me through. I'm going to put them in order so that you don't have to flip around too much.

1. Hold Fast the Truth

The very first thing that Paul talks about in 2 Timothy that I noticed, and I put at the top of the list, is truth. Truth. The first attack of the devil in Scripture is in Genesis chapter 3. When he comes and approaches Eve, the first thing he says is:

[Genesis 3:1 NKJV]

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

He was questioning the Word of God. When apostasy or departure happens with us or within a gathering, whatever, the first thing to go is truth—the first attack. And here in 2 Timothy, Paul emphasizes the word and the truth several times. Look at chapter 1, verse 13. Paul says:

[2 Timothy 1:13 NKJV]

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

Just a little further ahead, chapter 2, verse 15:

[2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV]

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Chapter 3, verse 14:

[2 Timothy 3:14-17 NKJV]

¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And chapter 4, verse 2:

[2 Timothy 4:2 NKJV]

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

And I think we could put in the word "truth" there for doctrine.

Consider—I'm going to assume that everybody knows Ephesians chapter 6, the armor of God, right? What's the first item that Paul lists for the soldier to put on?

[Ephesians 6:14 NKJV]

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

The belt of truth. The belt of truth. And that belt—I've heard different descriptions of it, but the one I like is that it was a fairly wide leather belt and somehow protected a little bit of, you know, some sensitive parts. And it was what he would hang his sword on and other things, but it was the main structure of his armor. The first thing to put on was the belt of truth. I find it interesting that that's the first item.

Acts chapter 2, verse 42—the birth of the church. The Holy Spirit has just come. And then in Acts 2, yeah, I'm sorry. If you want to turn there, you can, but I'll just quote it for you. Acts 2:42:

[Acts 2:42 NKJV]

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

What's the first one? Doctrine, truth. It's the foundation.

Philip Yancey and Paul Brand wrote a book on how our bodies are, you know, very representative of many spiritual truths. And one chapter is on the skeletal structure. And he related it to truth, to doctrine. It's the structure. It's the framework of even who we are. Truth is incredibly important, and we need to hold on to it and fight for it. It's foundational, bedrock—a fortress is what I've written here. Without it, we'll be swallowed up by the world, with all the influence that we have now at our disposal, and we'll be open targets for false teachers. So, Paul emphasizes truth.

Now I want to show that there's actually a way to move away from truth—a digression. Back to chapter 1 and verse 8. Paul says to Timothy, chapter 1, verse 8:

[2 Timothy 1:8 NKJV]

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,

People become ashamed of the truth. Chapter 2, verse 15:

[2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV]

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

And then just a couple of verses down, verse 17:

[2 Timothy 2:17-18 NKJV]

¹⁷ And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, ¹⁸ who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

After being ashamed of the truth, one begins to err in the truth, and then overthrows the faith of themselves and others.

Chapter 3, verse 7. These people that are letting go of the truth, chapter 3, verse 7 says they are:

[2 Timothy 3:7 NKJV]

always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Slipping away, slipping away.

And last, chapter 4, verse 3:

[2 Timothy 4:3-4 NKJV]

³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Brothers and sisters, we need to see the urgency of this. Prepare now. Pray now. Study now. And I'll say this too: get yourself a hard copy. Because with all this technology that's out there—I don't have it—but these devices that we hold, and it's not wrong to have a Bible on your phone or anything like that, but the technology is there where they can, I think they can sneak in there and they can start changing words. But they can't do it on your physical Bible. I use my phone for the Bible quite often as well, but just be careful. That's all I'm saying.

So the battle lines are there. Truth is the target. And we see the storm coming. Is there anything blocking our view? Hope not. Let's keep looking for the truth and stand by it. Even Proverbs 23, I think:

[Proverbs 23:23 NKJV] - Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding.

Yeah. And it's going to get harder and harder as the days go by, should the Lord not come.

2. The Urgent Need for Discipling

So now we have the truth. We have the foundation. What do we do with it? My next item that I, in the process of my thinking, focused on is discipling. We need to express this truth. So back to chapter 1, verse 5. Paul says to Timothy in chapter 1, verse 5:

[2 Timothy 1:5 NKJV]

when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.

Grandma, Mom, and Timothy. Discipling, I think, is what's happened right there. Teaching the children, teaching people that need to be taught or brought into the truth.

Chapter 2, verse 2:

[2 Timothy 2:2 NKJV]

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Note there's four generations in that verse. Paul says, "the things that you heard from me." So he's talking to Timothy. So it's Paul, Timothy. He says to Timothy, "you commit that to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Discipling.

Chapter 3 and verse 14. We've looked at these already, but we need to look again. Chapter 3, verse 14:

[2 Timothy 3:14-15 NKJV]

¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Discipling. I've learned over the years, and I think many that will hear what I just say now will agree with me 100%: the best way to learn something is to prepare to teach it. Amen?

Amen. Amen. Yeah. I love doing Bible study because I'm the one that gets the most out of it. I do. It's just—I get such a thrill. I like to share it as best I can.

So it's an urgent need. We need to stand for truth, and we need to share it and disciple people, generation to another generation to another generation. So my question is then, are you discipling someone?

You're probably thinking, "Well, I really don't know that much. I can't really, you know, I'm not good at teaching." And that may very well be true. But there's probably somebody in your life that knows less than you do. So that person needs to be talked to and loved and brought into the truth. There's probably people that know way more than you do. There's a lot of people that know way more than I do. I like to listen to them. I like to be with them and glean from them. I'm really grateful when they correct me. I want to be corrected. I don't mind it.

Let's aim for that edge, that truth that has been presented to us so faithfully through the Word. Jude, you don't have to turn there, but Jude exhorts us in his little letter. He says:

[Jude 1:3 NKJV]

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

And:

[Jude 1:20 NKJV]

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

Dear brothers and sisters, we need each other so, so, so much.

3. Stir Up the Gift Within

So then you're discipling. You've got the truth, and you're discipling. The next one of my little categories is stir up the gift within. And the first one is in chapter 1, verse 6:

[2 Timothy 1:6 NKJV]

Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

Work those smoldering little embers. Get them on fire. Get them red hot. It's a gift. All of us have gifts. And it may be something very, very—what you would expect or suspect to be somewhat minuscule or not noticeable. But we do all have gifts. The Bible does tell us that.

And I like how J. Nicholson puts it. He says there's the gift of teaching, which we've talked about. Well, you don't have to be the one sitting behind—I'm very grateful to be sitting tonight, thank you. But you don't have to be the one sitting here and doing the teaching. You can be teaching people in the circle of your life. Amen. Sunday school, you're teaching. Children, you're teaching. The gift of teaching is wide.

I don't know, it seems—and I've heard this from J. Nicholson as well—it seems that the two square feet behind the pulpit is the most sought-after gift. But that's just one of them. So teach, teach and be teachable. Stir up the gift that is within.

4. Watch, Endure, and Work

Next one is watch, endure, and work. This kind of lines up a little bit more with the hymn that I chose earlier. Be alert, be wise, be sober, be awake. Again, these are very deceptively dangerous times. Tune up your spiritual radar to recognize error. And how do you do that? To know the truth.

Chapter 2, verse 3. 2 Timothy 2:3, Paul says:

[2 Timothy 2:3 NKJV]

³ You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3, verse 12:

[2 Timothy 3:12 NKJV]

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Watch, endure, work. Back to chapter 2, verse 4. We just read verse 3, it says, "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Verse 4:

[2 Timothy 2:3-4 NKJV]

³ You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

Soldiers have no time for worldly pleasures. They're commissioned, they obey orders, and they know they go out into danger. Those that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Am I a soldier of the cross? Soldiers have to train. They train hard. They train the basics all the time. I was thinking about that the other day with Norma. We'll know this as a piano player, and there's maybe other piano players in here—I am not—but even the most gifted concert pianist will practice the scales regularly. So we need to be, as soldiers, always in the truth, absorbing it, rehearsing it, and keeping it so that it's just absolutely part of our being as soldiers of the cross.

Consider the sacrifices of a soldier, right? All they give up, even just to prepare for the battle, and how much they give up in the battle.

And chapter 4, verse 5, Paul says:

[2 Timothy 4:5 NKJV]

But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Do the work of an evangelist. Now, again, sometimes when we hear these things, we think, "Oh, you know, I'm not really good at going out on the street and talking to people," or, "you know, I'm a little shy maybe at work," or, you know, and I relate to that.

So my question then is: those would be people we would say would be on the front line. And they are people. I mean, I think all of us maybe know someone—they're just diehard evangelists. I mean, they can't wait to go talk to people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there's others where we have the evangelistic thinking, maybe, or the desire. We can be behind the scenes and praying for those people. So am I on the front line? Am I part of the

support group? Do the work of an evangelist in whatever part that may be so that we can present the truth of the gospel to people. Watch, endure, and work.

5. What Not to Do

Just a few more. What not to do. What not to do. Chapter 2, verse 16:

[2 Timothy 2:16 NKJV]

But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

Soiled, empty, fruitless babblings. Easy to get caught up in.

Same chapter, verse 19, the second half:

[2 Timothy 2:19 NKJV]

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Separate yourself from unrighteousness.

Same chapter, verse 22:

[2 Timothy 2:22 NKJV]

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Flee youthful lusts.

And one more, verse 23, one verse down:

[2 Timothy 2:23 NKJV]

But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

Again, I think I speak for all, and we've all experienced it probably: you're trying to explain the gospel, and it gets into an argument. Let it go. Arguments don't help. Just show love, proclaim the truth, and let the Holy Spirit do it. You start getting into an argument—and maybe it's just me—but I don't have a leg to stand on sometimes when I'm in an argument, so I get lost pretty quick.

6. Consider the Savior and His Calling

Another item: consider the Savior and his calling. Chapter 1, verse 9, Lord Jesus Christ:

[2 Timothy 1:9 NKJV]

⁹ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

It is He that has saved us and called us, and it's with a holy calling, and it is according to His own purpose and grace.

Next verse down, verse 10:

[2 Timothy 1:10 NKJV]

¹⁰ but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

What have we to fear? So is this not enough to motivate? Do you know what that means, what I have just read about Jesus Christ? These guarantees that He proclaims—and there are many guarantees in the rest of Scripture—they should be enough to spur us on into action. Stand for truth, disciple, watch, endure, stir up the gift within. Am I not a soldier of the cross?

7. Be Not Ashamed

Be not ashamed. That's my last point. Don't be ashamed. Chapter 1, verse 7:

[2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV]

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

And that verse rings kind of special in my heart. When COVID started, people were afraid. People were scared. My wife and I went into a store, and the young clerk taking our money to cash us out or whatever, I could tell that that young lady was scared. So I quoted this verse:

[2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV]

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

It was all she could do to control herself from weeping. She said, "Thank you. I so needed that." Amen. Amen. We are not given a spirit of fear. The devil would like to give you fear. The devil would like to tell you that that won't work, or this won't work, or, you know, you're wasting your time, that person doesn't want to hear the gospel, and on and on and on. If he can keep us silent, if he can keep us distracted, he's winning the battle. Am I a soldier of the cross?

Chapter 1, verse 12 says:

[2 Timothy 1:12 NKJV]

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

Amen. And a couple of verses down, verse 16:

[2 Timothy 1:16 NKJV]

The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain;

Don't be ashamed. Stand for what's right, even if you stand alone.

Chapter 4, verse 16. Paul's in prison. He knows his time is up. He's writing a letter to Timothy. But in chapter 4, verse 16, he says:

[2 Timothy 4:16 NKJV]

¹⁶ At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

The time may come for any one of us to be standing alone in the battle, all by ourselves. As we draw closer to the end of this day and age, as departure from truth gets stronger, we may very well be called upon to stand alone. But that's not the end. Look at chapter 4, verse 17:

[2 Timothy 4:17 NKJV]

¹⁷ But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me.

Conclusion

So in conclusion, we do see storm clouds. If you ever do come out to the prairies, check the weather and look for storms. It's just the most amazing thing to watch. It really is. But we see storm clouds happening in our world right now. Let's not ignore them. Let's not be afraid, either. Let's not be given a spirit of fear.

Am I a soldier of the cross? Am I keeping my sword nice and sharp? Am I practicing with my sword? Do I know how to use it really well? Am I training? Am I training someone?

"Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together," it says in Hebrews 10, verse 25:

[Hebrews 10:25 NKJV]

not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

I think of that verse every once in a while, and I don't think that verse means just show up at the meeting. "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together." I think it goes deeper. Not just show up, but show up—attend, be part of it, whatever. Again, we need each other. If you think you're the weaker one of the group, that's okay too. We need you. You need me, I need you. Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together.

I don't have it in my notes here, but in the armor of God, Paul talks about the shield of faith. And my understanding is—and I mean, maybe I'm wrong—but the Roman shield was fairly large, and they had some kind of mechanism on the outer edge. Somehow they could interlock their shields together to a point where they would make almost like a turtle shell. So what does that tell us with our shield of faith? Let's lock it together with each other. Let's stand together in the battle. Let's encourage each other in the faith, so much more as you see the day approaching.

Let's pray.

Closing Prayer

So, Father, we do recognize—maybe not as well as we should—but we do recognize the days that we live in. And we do say very often to each other, "Maranatha, come Lord Jesus." We long to be with You. We're so looking forward to the rapture.

But we also know, Father, that our beloved Savior said, "Occupy till I come." So may we not just be focused on what's happening in the world. May we be focused on what we need to do in these times to strengthen our understanding of the truth, to sharpen it, to stand firm in the truth. Not just hearers of the word, but doers also, obedient to our beloved Savior.

So, Father, we pray and ask that You give us courage, wisdom, strength, and discernment according to each and every one's needs. Help us to know the perilous times that we live in and to act accordingly.

We say, worthy is the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, and glory, and blessing. In His precious name we say, in thanksgiving, amen.