

The Nature of the “Last Days”

Call to Worship: Psalm 134

Hymn #35- *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*

1st Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

Hymn Insert- *Speak O Lord*

2nd Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1-9

Hymn #772- *Deliver Me From Evil*

Introduction

While many people, sadly, have a shallow taste for doctrine and theology (in general) in our day, there is no shortage of people who get ramped up by discussions that center upon the “end times.” So, so many wish to satisfy their personal curiosity regarding matters of the future and the fulfillment of various prophecies taken from the Scriptures. And there are several writers who have made a small fortune writing exciting “end time” novels, which curious people drink up like water, so as to attempt to satisfy their desire to understand the mysteries surrounding the unfolding of God’s will, in the alleged unlocking of such prophetic texts of Scripture.

And to that end, much confusion has particularly surrounded the Scriptural concept of the “Last Days.” So they say, as they have been saying for hundreds and hundreds of years, “Look, the signs are present. Surely, we are in the last days!” And the newspapers and the unfolding of current events are constantly forced into the texts of Scripture, as a means of affirming their convictions that we must be living in the time of the return of Christ and the end of all things.

Well, if we are going to develop a theology of the “Last Days” (Note: “eschatology” = “the study of the Last Things”), it would do us much good to consider such texts as our present text, allowing the context to help formulate our convictions, before coming to any significant doctrinal conclusions. And we also ought to strive to discover the *divine purpose* for understanding anything that we are meant to understand about the “Last Days,” rather than presuming that God shares our desire to simply satisfy our natural curiosities.

Having exhorted Timothy to properly deal with false teachers, and that, with the right attitude and heart, Paul now moves on to give Timothy a sobering view of the nature of the “Last Days,” so that, Timothy Himself will be better prepared to remain faithful in serving within a context that could easily bring any minister of God to the place where he will grow weary and despair, if he sees not the providence of God, set toward prospering His Gospel within such a

hardened context, full of much wickedness and sorrow. As we have already seen, repeatedly, Timothy must continue to trust, not in his own efforts or in what seems to be a more comfortable and suitable context for the spreading of the Gospel and the building of Christ's Church, but rather, in the power of God, which glorifies God in exhibiting His sovereignty, wisdom and power, in the realm of human impossibility.

Let us then begin, brethren, by considering the nature of the "Last Days."

I. The Nature of the Last Days

Now, as we consider the nature of the Last Days, we will seek to answer two critical and relevant questions: First, within what time frame do the "Last Days" unfold? And then second, what exactly do we expect to find happening within the scope of the Last Days.

1) Within what time frame do the "Last Days" unfold?

"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For 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 of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" [vs. 1-5]

Now, right from the outset, it is critical to note, both, in light of the immediate context, and by the fact that Paul commands Timothy here, "From such people turn away," that the Last Days, which Paul speaks of here, have already begun during the time of Timothy. In other words, Paul is not giving Timothy information about things that will happen, literally, in the last few days of this world's existence. Paul's warning and caution is actually meant for Timothy, first, and has relevance for Timothy, first, before it reaches to the year 2018 and beyond. Now, before I make a few conclusive comments about this first point, let me just further affirm this with a few other texts. [See 2 Peter 3:1-9 (Peter assumes); James 5:1-6 (James assumes); 1 Timothy 4:1-11; Acts 2:17-21 (Luke assumes that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost).

And so, clearly, we see that the "Last Days" were already in progress during the time of the Apostles and the early church. And furthermore, we find that the reference point, to which, the Last Days point back, is the first coming of the Christ and the beginning of the New

Covenant era. Now, what do I mean by this? I mean that the Last Days consist of the entire dispensation and time period following the coming of Christ, who abolished the Old Covenant and replaced it with the New Covenant. And so, in short, the Last Days, make up the entire time period between Christ's first and final comings. To that end, we can say, "Yes, we are in the Last Days." However, so were the First Century Christians. And therefore, we ought to, and we do, find the same descriptive signs of the Last Days, present in both the first and twenty-first centuries, concerning the moral atmosphere that pervades the entire dispensation. And so, when we see such things today, as Paul describes to Timothy (here in our main text), while we ought certainly to recognize these as Last Day evidences, we ought not to do so, in a way, which distinguishes our time from any other time period, following the time of Christ's ascension to the right hand of God. Indeed, the purpose of recognizing these realities is not (as we will soon see), to make specific determinations about where our time specifically fits in the span of prophetic history. And sadly, that is where many (in our day) have gone off track, missing the real emphasis of *why* we are to understand that we are in the Last Days, an emphasis that was as equally important to Timothy and his contemporaries, as it is for us today. [Note: The immoral progression would intensify in the established church, but that such a growing infection would exist, even in seed form already, needed to be understood by Timothy, especially in light of what he was already facing, lest he grow discouraged by that which he, perhaps, never anticipated]

2) What exactly do we expect then, to find happening within the scope of the Last Days? "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For 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 of godliness but denying its power" (vs. 1-5).

Now, this particular list of vices, given by the Apostle Paul, to describe the general nature of the Last Days, is actually pretty self-explanatory and straight forward. That said, I will briefly sum up each term, before leaving you with two essential points that I believe the Apostle Paul would have us take from this list, without getting too lost in each of the individual terms used. In other words, there are, at least, two general principles that Paul is trying to get across here. The

list itself, while important, is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather, it is to give us a well rounded understanding of the times, so that, we can be alert and not caught off guard, enabling us to deal with what we must anticipate, as we seek to serve Christ, in the building of His church.

And so, very briefly, let's consider the descriptive, non-exhaustive, vice list, given here by Paul. For men will be lovers of themselves (that is consumed by their own needs, desires and ambitions, lacking a Christ-like, outward consideration of others), lovers of money (they will be obsessed with wealth and material things), boasters (they will neglect to acknowledge God's gifting and providential blessings, while exalting themselves, using the very gifts and abilities that God has granted to them, to attain their own glory and praise), proud (they will see themselves as higher and better than others, looking down upon and despising others), blasphemers (they will slander God and His Name, by their words and actions), disobedient to parents (they will disrespect and blatantly disobey their parents), unthankful (they will fail to thank God for life, for common grace and for His providential blessings which they continually enjoy, and instead, they will complain and take His common grace for granted), unholy (they will practice the very things that God hates, willfully trampling upon His righteous and holy laws), unloving (they will have no desire to love and serve God, which will spill over into their lack of consideration and concern for the wellbeing and needs of others), unforgiving (they will hold grudges and lack mercy and grace toward others, having little or no concern for their own offenses), slanderers (they will willfully and maliciously speak what is untrue about others, twisting the truth unto their own advantage without regret), without self-control (they will be carelessly impulsive, allowing their emotions to drive them without any conscious restraint), brutal (they will be carelessly harsh and blatantly violent toward others), despisers of good (they will not simply do what is evil, but they will do so, with a conscious, intentional hatred for what is good and right), traitors (they will turn their backs on those who have supported them, willing to go from enemy to friend to enemy to friend, in accordance with that which best suits their own selfish desires and ambitions), headstrong (they will refuse correction and counsel, cementing themselves in their own destructive ways), haughty (they will look down with contempt upon others, always seeing themselves as better and more worthy than anyone else), lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (they will be obsessed with serving and gratifying the desires and gross

pleasures of their fleshly lusts, which spring out of the fallen nature, having no love or concern for God and for that which pleases God), having a form of godliness but denying its power (though unprincipled and wicked on the inside, like the religious leaders and Pharisees of our Lord's time, they will exhibit an outward form of shallow godliness and apparent holiness, aggravating their sins by their attempting to shroud them in the guise of virtue and religiosity. By their actions, they will expose the fact that their religion is mere outward show, powerless rhetoric, doing nothing for the inward man, while making the outward man appear godly and righteous).

And so, that would be a general sense of what Paul intends by this vice list. And as I said, brethren, the main purpose of this list is not so much to focus on every individual vice, as if to check it off on a checklist, to evaluate if we are in the Last Days. We are in the Last Days, and these vices (and more) have been and always will be present until Christ returns, at various levels of progression, at different times, as nations repeatedly reject Christ unto an ever increasing hardness.

Now, the question we might naturally ask then, is this. "Well Paul, how is this different, at all, from before the coming of Christ, during the time of the Old Covenant? Haven't these vices all existed, and at times, with great severity, throughout the entire history of mankind since the fall? I mean, just during the time of Noah, we are told that mankind's thoughts were only evil, continually. How then is this uniquely relevant to the New Covenant age? And brethren, here is where the two main points that I was alluding to earlier, come in. From a contextual and implicative standpoint, this is where the Apostle Paul is driving toward, in his informative, "But know this," exhortation to Timothy.

1) Paul's point is not to highlight the general atmosphere of the world, at large, when he lists these vices. If that were his point, the entire statement would be superfluous and meaningless. To say, "Timothy, know that in the Last Days, the world will be filled with these kinds of vices," would be like Paul saying, "Timothy, know that in the Last Days, there will be times when you will need to drink water and eat food." That is an obvious given. What Paul is saying here is that these are the kinds of vices that will actually infiltrate *the church itself!*

In other words, brethren, as Christ has set the Cornerstone for the church, by His own sacrifice and resurrection, and as the Apostles would lay the foundation of the church, upon the Gospel that erupted out of Christ's glorious ministry, and as His glorious church would be built throughout the whole world, the trajectory for the church, which while including the salvation of every single one of God's elect, would also include a gross infiltration of hypocrisy and all of these kinds of vices, throughout the entirety of its existence. You see, especially at a time when the church was still at its stage of infancy, Timothy and others could easily be surprised and greatly discouraged by witnessing the many difficult and dark providences, out of which, the true church would spring. In other words, it's not all flowers and roses. Much, much hardship and trial and suffering would always surround the church of all ages, from without, yes, but also from within. [The *outside* Jewish and Roman persecutors and Caesars are not the only opposition]

Now, the extent of this infiltration would vary in different places, and at different times. To be sure, there are certainly periods of revival and enormous, evident blessing and growth. But that said, throughout the whole dispensation of the Last Days, there will be progressions of heinous defilement and entrenchment in evil (described by the list of vices that we just walked through) until Christ returns. [Ex: The Dark Ages, the pornocracy of the 1000s...etc]

Perilous times; times of great trial, sorrow and contention with evil *from within* would come. [Affirming the "In the Church" context - 2 Tim. 3:5a & b, 13, overall context - 2:20-26]

2) Paul's main point here is to give Timothy this caution (and us, by way of Scripture), so that, rather than be surprised or led to despair by such a reality, we will anticipate and deal with it accordingly. God did not plant His church in a weedless garden. He planted it in the world. And even as it is our desire to reach the lost for Christ (and we will), in the very process, we will also, inevitably face an intrusion of such vices from hypocrites, even within the very doors, and dare I say, within the very visible membership of the church itself.

To this end, we must be conscious and ever awake. And, as Paul commanded Timothy in verse 5, especially in (but not limited to) the leadership, we must avoid such men. When they are found, we must not dabble with them. We must not entertain them. But, as they express no desire to repent, and as their motives prove to be malicious, we must put them out.

Paul then moves on to give a specific example, followed by an Old Covenant illustration, to accompany this exhortation, so that Timothy will have a well rounded understanding of all that Paul is seeking to convey to him, here in his, “But know this...” exhortation.

1) First, the example: “For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (vs. 6-7).

“For of this sort...” In other words, one example of these types of individuals, who will infiltrate the church, are those who set their sights on churches with the intent of taking advantage of gullible women (women, who are easily flattered and can be swept away by their slick lies). And so, here we find one of the motives of such false brethren, as we might ask, “Why would they seek to infiltrate the church?” They come into the church, as wolves, seeking to devour prone women, to gratify their sexual desires. They speak smooth, flattering and crafty words, appealing to the emotions of vulnerable woman, seeking to lure them captive, into the pit of their promiscuity. Now, this is just one example, of the type of individual, who would infiltrate the church with impure and wicked motives. And because of the ever present reality of sexual perversion in the heart of man, this example is by far not exaggerated in any sense. These kinds of things; gross sins of sexual perversion, are predominant in many churches today.

And to hold the women who are swept away by such deceivers, accountable, affirming their own guilt, Paul adds that those who fall prey to such deception, themselves, never come to the truth, even though they constantly hear it. They never embrace and apply it, evidenced by the fact that they quickly part from it, when they are flattered in accordance with their own lusts and desires. They “welcome the appeal,” as it were, embracing the deception, because they value the personal flattery, over and above, honoring God. [Women desiring a husband]

2) Finally, The illustration: “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was” (vs. 8-9).

Jannes and Jambres are not names that you will find in Scripture (outside of this text), but from what we know in this text (that they opposed Moses) and from documented Jewish tradition/sources, these men were the magicians who contended with Moses, when Moses had

performed the miracles in the sight of Pharaoh. Now, why does Paul use these men as a final illustration of the type of wicked people that will infiltrate the church during the Last Days? Well, for two reasons:

1) Pharaoh's magicians, were those, who rejected the very clear and evident truth, as a means of maintaining their influential hold on Pharaoh. They loved their positions and the great gain that they had obtained by their deceptive arts. They were not real magicians. They were deceivers, who mastered the art of deception. And so, even when presented with the evident truth, they (who alone were aware of their own deceptive ways) rejected it. Their minds were corrupt and their motives were impure. It is the malicious intent of these men (what they did, they did *not* do in ignorance, when at least the Egyptians were fooled in some sense), and such are the type of people who will infiltrate the church throughout the time period of the Last Days. Again, the use of these men, emphasizes the worst form of evil; malicious and conscious rejection of the truth.

2) The guarantee that such deceptive men will ultimately be exposed, is also pictured by these men. At a certain point, the magicians could no longer keep up with Moses, and their lying wonders were exposed as nothing more than "sleight of hand trickery" as it were, when they themselves became objects of the plagues of Moses, as it were. And so, in the whole of this warning, Timothy must be awake and aware, but he must also find comfort in the fact that no one is ultimately getting away with anything. God will ensnare the wicked in their own traps in due time.

And so, brethren, all in all, we ought to get a sobering sense of the atmosphere of the Church age, within which, we presently reside and serve. And we ought not to be surprised by such heinous activities that can be found, even within the life of the local, visible church. And we ought, rather, to remain sober ourselves, awake, and ready to guard ourselves (our own hearts), by avoiding such (perhaps) subtle and deceptive influences, while striving to faithfully preserve the sanctity of Christ's Church, which bears His Name.

Conclusive Thoughts

Brethren, for the sake of time, let me just leave you with one conclusive thought. If these things be true for the whole of the Church age, and if such evil is a consequence of a hardened progression into evil, throughout this dispensation, then when we view the church in our country, today, in what way ought we to prepare ourselves to face these things, should they infiltrate our local church? Will we be ready, even? Or will we be so accommodated to a gradual backsliding that we will hardly know the difference when it's here? How many churches have already grossly compromised? We live in a time, when thousands of children are sacrificed and murdered on the altar of convenience every day, when men can marry men and women women, when people actually deny the existence of God altogether, and when young children are being given the authority to choose their own gender. And churches are compromising left and right. Where are we, on that scale of progression? And who will take that stand, when it is brought to our front door, when your livelihood, your job, your 401K, and the very lives of you and your families, are on the line?

God give us the grace to be a discerning, praying people, who daily walk close with our blessed Savior, so that, His reality will be so powerful and evident to us, that we would gladly walk away from all else (from everything), to remain faithful to Him. God give us the grace! God be our help!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25