



## 2 Timothy 3:1-15 Power for Saints in Perilous Times

**Summary:** Christians have been given powerful resources to stand with joy in a dark world.

It's strange when you read the Bible and feel like you're just scrolling through your feed online, but that's exactly what we see when we read 2 Timothy.

As a reminder, the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Timothy who was going through a difficult time in life and ministry. The letter is meant to encourage him - to say, yes, things are hard, but that doesn't mean you're doing it wrong.

It's a fitting message for us today as we look out on the madness of our world. I hope you're finding encouragement in it, because that's my goal today - to bring you encouragement.

To do that we have to be realistic, we have to recognize that yes, the world is dark. Yes, the headlines are disappointing. Yes, there are all kinds of things to be upset and depressed and angry and suspicious and disappointed about in this world. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the negativity of it all. But I don't want to camp out there - I want to recognize all of that, and then move on to say something we've already said before: that just because life is hard doesn't mean you're doing it wrong.

The answer is not to withdraw, or wimper, or move to a red state. Paul says, yes, things are hard. Yes, you're being opposed. You're being singled out. It's not fair. But stick with it. Stand firm. Because, you're on the winning team!

You're shining the light in the darkness where it needs to shine. No one needs a flashlight on the beach, at noon, in August. But that's not where you are Timothy, you're in a cultural winter and it's the middle of the night - so shine, like a piercing light, like a warmth-producing fire. Let them see the difference in you. Some will hate it, but others will be drawn in and find hope and refuge with you.

Church, I think the same thing is true for us today. Yes, the world is crazy. Yes, evil is everywhere. Yes, it's dark and dangerous out there - but Jesus wants to shine *in* you and *through* you! Your life, your home, this church, can be filled with peace, love, joy, truth, and spiritual power *because you're plugged into Jesus*. You *have* hope. You *have* strength. You *have* promises that are always true - even in the darkest mid-winter. Read with me:

**2 Timothy 3:1** 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!

Paul says these things will happen **in the last days**, which is a way of describing everything since the resurrection of Jesus. When God poured out the Holy Spirit on the early Church at Pentecost Peter got up and explained what was happening – it was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel (2:28-32),

**Acts 2:17** *'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams.  
18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;  
And they shall prophesy.*

Again, Peter used this passage to explain what was happening in the early church. Then, the book of Hebrews opens with the words

**Hebrews 1:1** God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*,

The point is: don't think that somehow the 21<sup>st</sup> century is **the last days**. We're certainly in the latter days, it is later than it's ever been – but **the last days** is everything after the coming of Christ. His life, and specifically His death and resurrection, are the turning point of all human history. Everything before Jesus came is considered the former days, everything after are **the last days**.

And notice, these **last days** are described as **perilous times**. That's a word used in ancient Greek literature to describe the danger posed by wild animals or a raging sea. It's used in the New Testament to describe the Gadarene demoniacs who were so fierce that no one could chain them until Jesus showed up and cast out the demons who possessed them. In perilous times there's always the potential of trouble, of danger, of disaster. You're always aware of it. You're always thinking about it to some degree. You're always on alert for it.

OK, but, what's the source of the danger? What are you watching out for? Well, I find it interesting that nothing is said about war, or famine, or natural disaster. There's nothing said about plagues or pandemics or economic downturns. Those things are real, and we certainly should be aware of them. But notice: *people* are behind everything here that makes the world fall apart. Disordered people with disordered desires produce a disordered world. Notice:

**2 Timothy 3:1** ... in the last days perilous times will come: **2 For men will be** lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers,

And on the list goes. So, if you're taking notes this morning, you might want to note that:

**1. The world is dark because people love themselves.**

Notice this whole list starts with – [men will be lovers of themselves](#). The self-love is the root of most of the destruction we see in the world today. I've walked through refugee camps on four continents and I'm always struck by the same thought – so much of this human suffering is caused by a handful of people in power whose actions then affect whole populations.

How much destruction of the environment is caused by corporate greed because people love money and will do whatever it takes to turn a profit? How much human trafficking is driven by the same motivation? I'll use another human being, whether for sex or for labor, so that I can make a little cash. I love myself, so I'm fine using you.

The same thing happens in the workplace – you've probably had that boss who constantly demanded more from you, or would never come through for you, because they loved themselves more than you. What about the landlord who suddenly decides to sell the place you've been renting with minimal notice – your life is turned upside down but they're going to take care of themselves.

How many of you have been hurt by someone who was [disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, \[or\] unforgiving](#)? Why would anyone be that way? Because they love themselves more than they love you.

Notice, these behaviors are all the opposite of what should have been. Flip them around and ask: would you like to be around someone who is thankful, holy, loving and forgiving? I want more of that person in my life, don't you? These are the kinds of behaviors that *build* relationships. But the absence of them *destroys* relationships and makes the world a miserable place to live.

Of course, it's not really anything personal about you – self-love is always grounded in this: they are (vs 4) [lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power](#).

Ironically, it's possible to be very spiritual or religious and have very little connection to God. It is possible to have spiritual practices for your own purposes. It's possible to wear a cross necklace, have a Bible, even go to a church and sit through a worship service, and do it all for yourself. You engage God on your own terms in a very safe, sterile, and controlled way. You might even feel a little proud of it. You're not a total heathen or pagan, you have some respect for the Almighty. But you aren't intimate with Jesus. You don't feel comfortable in prayer. You don't really connect in worship. You want religion on your own terms.

The problem is, that kind of religion doesn't have any **power**. True religion, a true relationship with God, is vibrant, alive, transformative, and *real*. You either know it, or you do not.

But here's the good news for *you* this morning church. You know that the world is a mess. I don't need to convince you that we live in **perilous times**, you see and know it – you're grieved by it, your heart is heavy with the state of the world and the people you know, you're annoyed and distressed by the things you see and hear.

That's why I want to help you see something good here – I want to flip this around and remind you of what you have. *You have the opposite of what we see here*. You have **a form of godliness** that is *full of power*.

## 2. **But, the saints have power**

*You* have **a form of godliness** that has set you free from the things that used to hold you down and hold you back.

The problem is, it may have been a long time for you. On the one hand, that's good – praise God for the growth you've seen over the years. You have been transformed. But the downside of that means you might not remember everything He set you free from. Can you still appreciate how God saved you? Can you see and appreciate the change in your life?

And for those of you who were not *radically* transformed, can you look at your peers and see the difference between who you are and who they are? You see the stupid and dangerous things they're doing with their lives and in their relationships, *and God is keeping you from that*. You don't have anywhere near the regrets they have or will have. You're not worried about the same things they're worried about. In fact, sometimes they actually call you freaking about what could happen or what's going to happen because of what they said or did. *But that's not your life* – you have **a form of godliness** and experience it's **power** shielding you from the kind of things that make lives and relationships implode.

If you are in Christ there's real **power** at work inside of you *and you know it*. You have experienced it. You have felt it. It has moved in you and come out of you. You have felt led, stirred inside. You have heard the voice of God. You have felt His hand leading and guiding you. You have experienced things coming out of you: wisdom, discernment, knowledge, prophetic understandings, generosity, administrative ability, prayer languages, worship, love. The Bible calls them spiritual gifts.

Church when you look out at the world and see the darkness, remember the **power of the form of godliness** that is in you. Remember, **greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world**.

Remember, God is with you and He'll never forsake you. Remember, He has not abandoned you and will not leave you as orphans. Remember, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Remember, you are held in the hand of the Father and no one can pluck you out. Remember, there is **power in you** and even more available *to you*. There is a difference between your religion and those who have an **empty form with no power**.

So now, notice this: **from such people turn away!**

Why would God say that? Is it because He doesn't want them saved? Absolutely not. Jesus was, and is, a friend of sinners. He's not telling you to keep a distance from the lost and hurting. He's saying avoid people who are content with their empty, powerless, **form** of religion and spirituality. Turn away from people who are content with just a little bit of religion. Turn away from people who **love pleasure rather than loving God**. Don't let them lure you into finding satisfaction, excitement, release, or pleasure in something less than the power of God that is available to you.

Notice what he goes on to say

**6 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, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; 9 but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.**

According to tradition, Jannes and Jambres were magicians in the court of Pharaoh who replicated some of the early miracles Moses performed. They told Pharaoh, there's no need to listen to Moses, look – we can do powerful tricks too. And they could... until they couldn't.

Well, so too, there are people, voices, influencers, forces, and products that will claim they can make your life better. And they can, to a degree... until they can't. They progress a certain amount, but then, they will progress no further. Their methods and their message are not built on eternal wisdom, but on folly.

If they really wanted to improve their lives and the lives of others, they would turn to the author of life. But, they don't want to do that, because again, they **love pleasure more than they love God**. So, they keep looking for a better way, they learn and learn, study, explore, and discover, but it never produces real, true, durable, lasting change, because they consistently deny the Truth that would point them to God and away from self.

So, notice what Paul is saying here, because it's similar to what he said last week. He says to watch out for desires that arise *within you*, tendencies within you, the pull to love self over all else, *and* watch out for people, voices, forces, and ideologies, in this world that would try to win you over – that would try to influence you.

There is both an insider and an outsider threat. But there is also both internal and external support. Instead of listening to the people and impulses pulling you away from God, remember the ones pushing you closer to Him. Paul writes:

10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.

Paul says, Timothy, listen up! Yes, life is hard in Ephesus right now. But you know me. You know what I've been through. You know what I believe and what I teach and you know the difference it makes. You've seen the evidence in my life.

Consider the contrast here. First, we saw what happens in the lives of people who love themselves – they suffocate, strangle, and sever relationships with their attitudes, actions, and words. But look at what happens in Paul's life when he surrenders to Jesus. He has meaning and purpose, direction and faith. He's longsuffering, or patient. He's loving. Even when life is hard. It's one thing to live like this when everything is going well, but Paul has a ruggedized, durable, weatherproof, shock-absorbing approach to life that enables him to maintain all of this even when he's enduring persecution and affliction. Remember, after all, he's writing this from a jail!

### **3. The saints have companions and confidence**

Paul says *God delivered me out of all my troubles*. Now that doesn't mean there weren't any wounds or scars. He still took some blows. Suffering was involved. But Paul lists all he's been through and says, *with confidence, God delivered me from it all*. Or maybe a better way to say it is, God delivered me through it all. You know the famous last section of the twenty-third Psalm – and yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me.

Christian I want to remind you that you have the example of the saints who have gone before you. Last week we said you need people in your life who are more mature than you – both physically and spiritually, you need people who can tell you – I remember what it was like to be there – and here's what I learned. I remember when that happened to me and here's what I wish I had done differently. I remember going through that and here's what the Lord showed me.

You also need peers in your life who can say, yeah, me too. And here's what I'm learning from the Lord through it. Or, I'll pray for you as I pray for myself. You need people whose *doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, [and] afflictions* you can identify with, follow, and learn from. And you can find those people in the church. This is one of the greatest benefits of getting into a small group – whether it's a Turn Aside group, a home group, or even the softball team.

Find some way to get alongside people and let them alongside you – you both have stories to share of how God delivered you, and those stories are going to be fuel for endurance in the trials of life.

I need to mention the value of good Christian books here too. You can read about the saints of old and discover their stories. It's a good way to remember, life has always been hard, but God has always delivered His people. I can provide a long list of recommendations, but let me highlight just one – if you have not read *The Pilgrim's Progress*, you need to make it happen. It's actually fiction, an allegory of the Christian life as a journey to heaven and all that has to be overcome and avoided along the way.

It's a Christian classic. It's almost 350 years old and has never been out of print. It will be a source of inspiration and instruction to you just like thinking about Paul and his life was for Timothy. And we need that inspiration, look what Paul writes next

12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 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.

OK, the final thing to point out here this morning:

#### **4. The saints have been prepared and promised**

Once again, Paul recognizes the world is dark, dangerous, and depressing. He even says it's going to go from *worse to worse*. And there's a way to look at that as a Christian and just get even more depressed or angry. There's a way to look at that and only focus on the bad. But I don't think that's what God wants. That's not the theme of what Paul is saying.

The theme of this letter is both objectively real and relentlessly confident. So Paul says, yes things are bad, but Timothy, you were made for this. You were equipped in advance for this.

There are three different perspectives you can take on this moment, make sure you consider all of them. The first, and most obvious, is the present. When that's all you look at, things can feel overwhelming, they're going from *worse to worse*. But remember the past – *look at everything God has done to prepare you for this.*

You were raised in a home that taught you the Scriptures. You've been shown how they point you to Christ. You were introduced to Paul and saw his example and received his mentoring. *Look back and see all God has done to prepare you for this moment.*

Christian, what has God done to prepare you for this moment, whatever you face? Whether it's the general condition of the world or some specific circumstance or circumstances - you're not alone and you're not ignorant. You might be disoriented, you might be disorganized, you might be confused, but you're not alone. You're not without resources, you're not completely unprepared. Remember what you already know and bring it to bear on your situation.

And then, remember the promise of the future – you have received salvation in Christ Jesus. The only thing ahead of you is victory. There may be pain along the path, but your ultimate destiny is eternal salvation and a place in your Father's house. Christian, bring both the past and future to bear on your understanding of the present and find strength.

Yes, the world is dark. How could it be anything else when Jesus is the light and people are wandering and lost without Him? There are wounds and death and decay all around you. How could there be anything else when Jesus is the author of life and people intentionally or ignorantly avoid Him?

But you, Christian – *in the darkness*, you have **a form of godliness** that is full of **power**.

You have the fellowship of Christ Himself and the fellowship of the saints, you have people you can look to who set an example for you, care for you, and at times even carry you through the hard spots and then you get to be that example and provide that strength to others.

And, you've been prepared for this. God knows what lays ahead in your life – there is no such thing as an ambush from God's perspective – no one and nothing surprises Him.

He knows what's coming up in your life and works to get you ready. Whatever you're facing, it could have been worse if He hadn't given you all that He has in advance and if He hadn't promised you all that He has lying ahead. So, don't just look at the present, consider the past and the future too.

We're going to prepare to receive communion now and it's a great time to find a fresh perspective on the challenges of your life as you see all God has done and is doing for you.

It's also a great time to invite the **power** of God into the **form** of your self-made religion. If you've designed your own spirituality and find that it can't quite keep up with the demands and pressures of your life, talk to God about that and ask Him to come into your life with supernatural strength and reality. Ask Him to forgive you for all the ways you do your own thing and tell Him you want to live according to His direction from this day forward – you want to experience godliness and power that you were not able to find on your own.

Let's pray.





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### 2 Timothy 3:1-15 Power for Saints in Perilous Times

**Summary:** Christians have been given powerful resources to stand with joy in a dark world.

- What are some of the things that disappoint you about the condition of the world today?
  - o Do you think things were better or worse in Timothy's time? Why?
- What would be the outcome if this sermon only focused on amplifying all the bad things that Paul predicts or that Timothy is enduring?
  - o Was that Paul's point?
  - o Why is it important to both recognize the difficulties of our situation AND the resources we have received in Christ?
- What is the benefit of recognizing and considering the peril of our times? What are the negative consequences?
- Which three markers in verses 2-5 do you see the most of in the world today?
  - o Which do you see the most of in yourself?
- How have you experienced the power of God in your life?
  - o Was there ever a time when you had a form of godliness without power? What brought the change?
- Timothy was able to look to Paul's example and draw encouragement. Who do you look to?
- How has God prepared you in the past for the things you're presently facing?
  - o How does the promise of the future affect your experiences today?