

Defense Against Darkness
2nd Timothy 3:10-17

Ephesians 6:1-20

Hebrews 4

Responsive Ecclesiastes 8:1-8

This morning we are going to be looking at the last half of chapter 3. Last week in the first half of this chapter Paul was giving a warning both to Timothy and to other fellow believers so that they would be informed and prepared for what lies ahead. The gist of what Paul is saying here, is that as time progresses the world is only going to become more and more dark as society and mankind turns all the more away from God. And we see some of this today in even within our own life time. When I was a kid, though many other kids and their parents that I knew were not church going people, there was a level of respect for those who were, but today we see a rising hatred toward everything that a Christian might stand for. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, there seems to be a rise in violence against any who would name the name of Christ individuals breaking in and shooting up a church is an event you never heard about, but now it seems we hear about a few a year.

This has become a reality of the world we live in, just like how before the 90's you never heard of school shootings, now since Columbine again...it seems there are a few every year. As society drifts further from God, such things will become more and more a reality, for a life without God is without hope, it is empty, and full of despair. Paul describes these people in verse 2-4, a empty, hopeless life breeds envy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers without self-control, brutal and despisers of good. So Paul is warning here, this is the reality that Timothy is living in, and this is the reality that we are living in today. And I think that it is important to be aware and to know this. But the reality of our lives as believers should not change, in many ways we are unaffected by these societal changes for no matter the season, we believe, no matter the changing tides, we rest in God through what Christ has done on our behalf.

So though this chapter seems to paint a world of doom and gloom, with an ever progressing slide toward darkness and ungodliness, the silver lining is that God has his people, and God has his people who have not yet come to him, and in times of darkness is when the hope of God shines brightest. As Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The darkness of the world is God's operating room, the darker the world becomes the more stark the contrast is between that darkness and the light. We should not have a sense of despair nor defeat as we look at this world around us, but rather compassion, and sorrow for those lost, for those caught up in it. We have been given this gospel message of hope, not to keep to ourselves but to share, and spread, and shine into that darkness. In all things Christ is our hope, he is our light, and it is he who gives purpose and meaning in this dark and meaningless world.

So what are we to do as believers, how are we to handle this darkness? Well, through prayer, through the reading of God's word, through fellowship with one another, and through standing strong on this gospel message of hope, for it is not only hope for the lost, but it is our hope as God's children as well. Paul uses himself as an example here as he writes to Timothy who has observed his life, who has traveled with him, who has endured some of these same things with Paul, Paul says, starting in verse 10 this morning (read 10-17)

Timothy knew all too well of Paul's afflictions, of the persecutions against him, of his own struggles and hardships but as Paul said in verse 11, "And out of them all the Lord delivered me." I want to let that sink in for a minute, Paul was ridiculed, mocked, imprisoned, stoned, left for dead, kicked out of cities, despised and hated by many, yet through it all he says, "the Lord delivered me." Our God is a gracious, sovereign God, while we may not have suffered in the same sense that Paul has, we have all suffered affliction in our own lives, challenges with health, loss of loved ones, loss of jobs, it seems in this life there is always just another challenge looming around the corner, but I think we can all say that God has been faithful in our own lives through all of these things we have each had to endure, he has provided, he has delivered, and he has encouraged each of us in various ways at various times throughout our lives.

I think it is important to not lose sight of what God has done, as the song writer, Johnson Oatman wrote, in that famous classic hymn we all know, "count your blessings, name them one by one, count your blessings and see what God has done." This isn't just a song we sing, but a good practice for us as believers to look back at God's provision, look back at God's grace, and the mercy that he has shown us throughout various times and trials and hardships in our lives. Doing so acts as a great encouragement for the trials of the day, as God has seen you through this life more and more you learn all the more to rest in him through various hardships, looking back at how he provided and cared for you before, knowing and believing that he will likewise do the same. With the culmination of that deliverance being the day we meet him face to face. For that is the ultimate deliverance, to be in the very presence of our Lord and Savior having what he accomplished for us fully realized and complete.

The picture that Paul lays out here in this chapter is not a pretty one, in these "last days" there will be suffering, there will be persecution, there will be difficulties, and there is no hope in this world for escape for as Paul says in verse 13, "but evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." False faith, deception, and blasphemy will continue to grow not only in society at large, but in religion, as false teachers, present a false faith, leading people astray. The tool of these false teachers, is the same that Satan used in the garden, asking the question..Did God really say that? They reinterpret the bible, twist it, change it, manipulate the word of God to make people believe lies and falsehoods. Therefore those of us who stand upon the truth of scripture, we are labeled as bigots, as extremists, as haters simply because we call what the bible calls sin, sin and preach one must be born again which is a spiritual act of God in the lives of his children.

We need to accept this reality, and be prepared to stand and not turn from our faith, for it is only our faith through Christ which brings hope. As Paul wrote in verse 12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." An inevitable reality of our spiritual state versus the world. The world hates believers because our lives stand in opposition to their desires, it sheds light upon their sin and rebellion, and instead of reacting in conviction and repentance, the world reacts defensively and aggressively....that is unless, and until God grants an individual the ability to see his glory, and experience his mercy as he calls them to be his. Throughout history there are many stories like Paul's, but that I mean, many who have sought to oppress the word of God, and many who have in their war against God, turned and repented. That is what God is all about, giving mercy to the undeserved, and seeking those who were not seeking him, because it is all about him, and his work, and not about us and our ability.

We couldn't stand in this faith, we couldn't stand through the various trials this life brings, without Christ. That was a reality yesterday, it is a reality today, and it will be a reality tomorrow. As we muddle through each day, we don't even realize God's intricate care for us, we are all merely one breath away from dying, but he gives us that breath ever day, we can all be one step from financial ruin and homelessness, and God provides, we worry, we fret, we become anxious..but does not God provide in all things? Has not God provided in all things? Has he not already given you the greatest gift which is a relationship with him, the untouchable, unreachable God has become touchable, reachable, because he stretched out his hand, and grabbed us as we were drowning in our sin and self pity. The mindset of Paul in writing all this, is that through Christ, though all of these things maybe true, though the world may spiral further from God, though persecutions and hardships may arise, though we may suffer, and though we may even die, through it all, and in it all God is in control, and he provides, so that even in our eventual death, the thing feared most by mankind..we can have peace knowing that our souls are in the hands of he who made them.

Verse 14, knowing that the world is evil, knowing that the trajectory of that world is more darkness, as corruption and manipulation grows not only in society around us, but within those who claim Christ, Paul writes to Timothy, "You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of." We have one constant, one unchanging guide in the holy spirit, and the vehicle for encouragement, for strength, is the word of God. As we read God's word and meditate upon his promises, we can see how he has worked throughout the lives of all of those who have come before us and it shows us his eternal care and provision for his people....even when they turn aside, God is always faithful to call them back. We as believers need the bible as Paul writes in verse 16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Our lives are intrinsically connected with the scriptures, its is God's word by which he speaks to us, by which we grow in our faith and understanding, by which we can find encouragement, and instruction, it is by the scriptures that we come to know Jesus, it is by the gospel message of Christ that we are reconciled to God, this book is not just a a collection of stories, and wisdoms, but is the living word of God which cuts to the heart of man, reaches the unreachable, and changes the world.

It is through the word of God, by the holy spirit that we can know God, it is through the word of God, and by the holy spirit that we can know the Son. It is through the lives of the prophets and Apostles that we can see God's redemptive work in the lives of his people. All of this is given to us so that we may know him, that we may believe on him, and that through all things we may trust him. As Paul says, All of scripture is given to us, there is not a piece or a part that is more relevant today then before for all of scripture from genesis, to revelation speaks of Christ, speaks of the one whom we must know to be redeemed before God. We rob ourselves of the beauty of God's revelation to us if we do not take the time to read, if we do not take the time to meditate upon his word. Speaking for myself, but I am sure this is true of many Christians, we aren't in the word as much as we should be, and we aren't in prayer as much as we should be, and it is both of these things that God has chosen as ways for us to connect with him. If we neglect these things, we create for ourselves a separation from God. Now of course I am not speaking in an ultimate sense, but in a general.

God has designed this faith, and this salvation to be fed through his word, and he has designed prayer as a way for us to reach out to him. If we neglect these 2 things, then we are ignoring our source of strength in him, and missing out on the peace which comes from knowing him more and more.

Paul said to Timothy, continue in these things which you know, from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, and it is God who works through his word to instruct, encourage, and even rebuke us when it is needed. A christian life without the bible, isn't much of a life at all, such as a christian life without prayer isn't much of a life either. It is through the reading of God's word, and through prayer that we are nourished and fed, with out both of these things we can not grow, we rob ourselves of knowing God more and strengthening our faith. Paul has been warning about false teachers, false faith, and the attacks of Satan on the church and God's people. It is the ignorant, and weak who fall for Satan's ploys, one of the best ways to protect ourselves from the dangers of false teaching is to know the bible ourselves, and the best way to know the bible is to spend time reading it, and to spend time in prayer.

Before John Wycliff the bible was taught almost exclusively by the church, there was no way for the common man to have access without a formal education in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The church body was subject to the teachings and understandings of its leader, with no balances or reproof and it is by such that the Roman Catholic church gained control not only over the populous, but over governments and kings. But this is not true today, scripture is readily available to almost all peoples all across the world in their own languages. No longer is there that barrier for access, we live in a time where we have not only direct access to God through prayer, but we have direct access of his word through the bible, not through some scholar or teachers interpretation of it. God promised Abraham that he would make for himself a nation of priests, we are the fulfillment of that promise today. No longer do you need me, or some Masters degree in biblical languages to understand the word of God, we have been given the holy spirit, and the written word of God in which we are, ourselves able to know, and understand.

I think at least for us here who live in this country we can take the word of God for granted sometimes because it has been so easily available to us for our entire lives, and we can be in danger of losing touch with how important, and powerful it truly is. There are people in this world even today, who are risking their lives just to have a few pages in their possession. We have no excuse here, and it is because of this that the church is full of ignorant and weak Christians, for they have neglected to feed themselves from the word of God. Every year in South Korea there are young people who are found slumped over dead in front of a computer in an internet cafe. Video games is a large part of their culture, and every year it seems there is reports of one or 2 people who become so addicted to some online game that they neglect to eat, neglect to sleep, do not get up and move around, and end up dead slumped over the computer they were sitting at or at the very least, sick and hospitalized. This is a christian who denies himself the food of word of God, we become weak, and frail in our faith and unprepared for the challenges this life brings.

Back in the letter that Paul wrote to the Ephesians he equated this Christian walk to an athletic event, needing training, practice, and hard work to be able to hold our own. By neglecting time in the word of God, we starve ourselves, we stunt the growth of our faith, and open ourselves up to false

teaching and being deceived. Paul also in the letter that Paul wrote to the Ephesians he said, that the word of God is a sword, well a sword is both an offensive and a defensive weapon, used to protect oneself against deadly attacks. Knowledge of the word of God is the first line of defense against someone who would deceive you and lead you astray, so it is important that you know how to wield that sword. It is a great and precious gift that we have been given to have the word of God so readily at our fingertips, and the holy spirit which grants us understanding, no longer needing a priest and a mediator to deliver God's word, but to have direct, and person access because he has made us a nation of priests.

So, I guess to sum it up this morning, Paul is telling Timothy, do not neglect the things which he has learned, do not neglect the word of God, for by doing so he will find peace, defense against falsehoods, and also conviction, and instruction. The world will ever be covered in darkness, ignorant of the things of God, and violently lash out against them, but Christ is our comfort and peace, and we know him through the word of God. And it is by the word of God that we as believers are "thoroughly equipped for every good work" So let us not neglect this great gift that we have been given, so that we may be prepared and skilled, protected, and encouraged through a solid knowledge and handling of the word of God.