

When The Going Gets Tough

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Date: 12 June 2022

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] Our reading this morning comes from Paul's second letter to Timothy, chapter 3, verses 1 to the end, and that is page 1196 of the Church Bibles.

Just give you a moment to find it. Page 1196. But mark this, there will be terrible times in the last days.

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.

Have nothing to do with such people. They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Just as Janus and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.

[1 : 37] But they will not get very far, because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone. You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.

What kind of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the persecutions I endured? Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

[2 : 59] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks, Alan, for reading that. If you could keep your Bibles open at 2 Timothy chapter 3, that would be really helpful.

We started looking at this chapter last week, so we're going to be looking at verses 10 to 17 together this morning, and you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful as we look at this together.

Father, let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. We praise and thank you, Heavenly Father, that the scriptures are breathed out by you for our greatest good.

And we ask that each of us would have an encounter with you this morning through your word, that you, the God who is there and who is not silent, would speak to us.

You would make us wise. You would train us in righteousness. For we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, what do you do when the world is not interested in the gospel, in the message about Jesus?

[4 : 06] And what do you do when the church is not interested either? Remember, a few years ago, when we were still part of the Scottish Episcopal Church as a denomination, we were in the Diocese of Glasgow in Galloway, and James and I represented the church at a gathering looking for the next bishop of Glasgow.

And all these ministers were there and representatives of the churches at this meeting. And they said, there's a little panel here of people we've selected who are going to find the next bishop.

So we want to hear from you now. What do you want us to look for in the next bishop? And different people got up one by one and said all kinds of different things.

And then, but nobody opened a Bible. So I got up. James and I were doing a bit of elbowing. And I got up and I opened up the Bible. And I opened up a passage from 1 Peter about what God calls church leaders to be.

And as soon as I did that, the room went chaotic. People started muttering to each other, mumbling away, shuffling in their pews. Because people did not want the Bible opened.

[5 : 16] There was this visceral opposition to having the Bible opened. What do you do? I've got a friend who went to be the minister of a church. Not long after he started there, one week, he was a couple of minutes into his sermon.

And a guy sitting near the front opened up his bag, got out a broad sheet newspaper, opened it up, folded it up, and started reading it in front of him.

What do you do? What about when the world is changing dramatically, isn't it? When because of technology, smartphones, TikTok, you look at the next generation and you think, the world they're growing up in now is so different to the world I grew up in.

What do we do when we want to avoid church extinction, but we feel the world is changing so much? Well, if we're tempted to think things have never been this difficult for the church, we've got a friend in Timothy who this letter was written to.

It was written by the Apostle Paul to a co-worker, Timothy. As Paul sees, he's near the end of his life, and he's passing things on to this second generation church leader.

[6 : 27] He's leading a church in Ephesus that the Apostle Paul had planted. It's the 50s AD, and things are going really badly. The early church leader who's writing to him says this in chapter 1, verse 15.

He says, You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Homogenes. Asia at that time is what we now know as modern Turkey.

That's where Timothy is in Ephesus. Paul says, Everyone's deserted me. And when we think about loyalty to Paul then, who's still living then, what we're thinking about today, the equivalent is faithfulness to the New Testament Scriptures, as we have them, where each book of the New Testament has either as its author or its source, the Apostles.

Because in Timothy's time, every church leader around him has decisively veered away from this, from the Scriptures. And then last week we heard that Timothy's situation there, that context, is not unusual.

It's not a freak thing. Because look at verse 1 that Alan read for us again. Paul says, But mark this, there will be terrible times in the last days. And we heard last week, the last days are these days.

[7 : 47] It's the days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and his returning glory. A key mark of those times, these days, is there will be terrible times.

Terrible because the church will be infected. Where we heard last week that church leaders will be lovers of, verse 2, lovers of themselves, lovers of money, verse 4, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

The leaders of the church. What does Timothy do when things are this bad? I mean, in his own church, he's got these detractors and deserters. And what should we do if we find that we are in similar times?

It might not just be a problem out there. In any church, problems can arise. At St. Silas, this church, there have been factions over the years.

People have disagreed over what they want the church to be. What they think a healthy church looks like. So what do we do? What do you do when the going gets tough like that?

[8 : 53] Paul gives Timothy three instructions here. Follow the pattern. Trust the scriptures. Teach God's word. We're going to spend most of our time on the third of those.

But first of all, follow the pattern. The truth has been lived out for you. So have a look with me again at verse 10. Paul says, you, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance.

So he mentions there his teaching. First, first, that is his doctrine, his message, the scriptures. but it's been confirmed as reliable by the model of Paul's life, the way he's lived his life.

And Paul has this triad in his writings about the Christian life, faith, hope, and love. He mentions them here. You see all three of them there. We saw faith in verse 10.

He mentions love. And then the thing about hope for the future is that it allows you to keep going and endure patiently in this life. So the fruit of his hope is, verse 10, patience and endurance.

[10:10] And then he expands on why he's needed that patience and endurance. In verse 11, he says, persecutions, sufferings, what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra.

The persecutions I endured, yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Timothy was actually from Lystra. Lystra was his hometown where Paul had met him.

He was probably there when Paul was preaching there, and a mob came from Antioch and Iconium, who had rejected Paul's message there. And they started throwing rocks at Paul as he was preaching in Lystra.

And Timothy was probably there when he saw a rock hit Paul and knock him out. And they thought he was dead, dead, and they dragged him out of the city, and they left him for dead.

But he was alive, and he revived, and he moved on. Paul makes a great deal here of his suffering, listing it there. Why does he do that? It's because the false teachers, they're not suffering for their message, such that Paul can say that a key mark of a faithful ministry is it's a costly ministry.

[11:22] So their message, the alternative that's getting traction in all these churches, embraces the glory of the Christian life rather than the cross.

And Paul is saying, truly authentic Christian ministry is going to look like Jesus' life looked, and Paul's life looked, being sustained by Jesus through trials, as you guard the good deposit, and it's costly.

And then he adds verse 12, in fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil doers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceived and being deceived. False teaching uses the language often of being progressive. It was a revelation to me some years ago, when I was asking somebody who was accustomed to meetings that church leaders go to, and you encounter these people who, in their ministry, reject the authority of the Bible.

And this guy said to me, the thing is, what you've got to remember is, these guys, they think they're ahead of you. You know, I know they see your church growing, but they think they're ahead of you, because they're with society, and it's moved on.

[12:38] They basically think your understanding of the Christian faith is infantile, because you're stuck with the scriptures. So we have this language of being progressive, and Paul reminds us here, that the progress that you make, when you move away from the Bible, is from bad to worse.

And as well as deceiving others, you deceive yourself with your own spirituality. So Paul says, instead of that, follow the pattern. Follow the pattern that you've seen, of authentic Christian living. And maybe we need to ask ourselves, is that the pattern, that I've seen, in other people? Are there people I could look to, and think, they have modeled for me, the real deal, authentic Christian living. Maybe, here, you could think of, some of our mission partners, who have faced cost, to guard the gospel. I, just on the weekend away, was struck again, talking to Andy and Rachel, who were in Zambia, just how inspiring it is, to hear them speak, about the cost, to them, raising Hayden and Daniel, in Zambia, their boys, for the sake of trying, to make Jesus known, in Zambia.

And they're just so normal, Andy and Rachel. They're regular people. There's nothing super spiritual, about them. There's nothing particularly, weird about them. But you look at their faith, and their way of life, and their endurance, and I think to myself, that's the train, I want to be on.

[14:05] The gospel train. I remember a couple, I went to visit, down in Lancashire, in ministry there, George and Hilda, housebound, because of their age, and frailty. And going to see them, with a ministry trainee, who came with me, Paul, who was a hardened guy, an ex-copper.

And we went in, and when we went in, the whole house, was sort of marked by, just humility, and prayerfulness. And George and Hilda, had never met Paul, said to him, how are you Paul?

We've been praying for you, we pray for you every day. That's the train, I want to be on. So let me ask, are there people, you could think of, who have followed the example, of Paul, in their lives?

Because that's Paul's, first instruction, to Timothy, he says, follow the pattern. Secondly, he urges Timothy, when the going gets tough, trust the scriptures, they make you wise, trust the scriptures. So have a look with me, at verse 14. But as for you, continue, in what you have learned, and have become convinced of, because, and here's the pattern again, you know those, from whom you learned it, and, how from infancy, you have known, the holy scriptures, which are able to make you, wise for salvation, through faith, in Jesus Christ.

[15:22] Now when Paul, is writing, he's talking, when he says scriptures, about the old testament, that we have, because the new testament, is still being written, literally, as he's writing, he's writing

it.

But Paul says, even then, that the scriptures, can make you wise, for salvation, through faith, in Christ Jesus. Speaking about, the old testament, but read through, the understanding, that the apostles gave us, having seen Jesus die, and rise again.

As we read, the old testament, it's full of this, this tension, as it prepares us, for the coming, of the Christ. God reveals himself, to us in the scriptures, as the loving king, of everything.

He made everything, he is the rightful king. And, he's a holy God, and he's a just God. So sin, cannot stand, in his presence.

And when the prophet Isaiah, has this vision, of God, he, says, woe is me, for I'm a sinful man. He's on his knees. And then, the law, and the prophets, of the old testament, reveal to us, that, all of us, like Isaiah, have fallen short, of the glory of God.

[16:36] There's no one, among us, who's righteous. But then, you also have, this golden thread, running through, the old testament scriptures, of God promising, unconditionally, he will have a people, who will be his people.

And they'll be with him, and he will be their God. And, he will save them, to be with him forever.

And, by Genesis chapter 49, we know, that there is a king coming, the star of Judah.

And, in 2 Samuel 7, we hear the promises, that that king, who's coming, this saving king, will come in the line, of King David, and he's going to reign forever. He'll have an enduring kingdom.

And, through the prophet Isaiah, and Psalm 22, we learn, that that king, will be a servant, who will be pierced, and die, in our place, to bear our sin.

But, from Psalm 16, and Isaiah 53, we know, the king will rise, because he'll reign forever, and win the victory. And, when we read the scriptures, through that understanding, of Jesus, and his death, and resurrection, they can make us wise, for salvation.

[17:45] We discover, that we need forgiveness. That we're not the people, we ought to be. And, the royal ruler, has come, and died to save us. So, that each of us, can turn to him, and ask him to be, our personal savior.

You know, on Thursday, Prince William, was in the news, because he, fresh from being, on the royal balcony, for the Jubilee, he was, selling the big issue. I don't know, whether you saw that. And, people recognized him, selling the big issue, and got photographs with him. And, one guy was on the news, and he said, honestly, I'd say, that man is the, people's prince, to be out here, amongst people like that.

So, he'd gone from, being in the royal palace, to having a go, at making a living, like a homeless man. I guess he's back, in the palace now though. And, what Jesus did, was beyond compare. For here was a man, from the royal palace, of heaven, who came, not just to live, with nowhere to lay his head, but to lay down his life, for the joy set before him, of having a people with him forever, he endured the cross, so that he could take, people like you and me, ordinary people, broken people, to be his people, his bride, his treasured possession, forever.

[19:06] And, Paul says to Timothy, even if your church, rejects that message, even if, your colleagues in ministry, have rejected that message, you, continue in it, yourself, because it will save you.

Guard it, find reliable people, you can give it to, because it's the only message, that can save everyone. There's an old hymn, that says, tell me the old, old story, of unseen things above, of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.

Tell me the story simply, as to a little child, for I am weak and weary, and helpless, and defiled. Tell me the story, slowly, that I may take it in.

That wonderful redemption, God's remedy for sin, and when the Lord's bright glory, is dawning on my soul, tell me the old, old story, Christ Jesus, makes thee whole.

So what does that mean, for Timothy's ministry? Well first, follow the pattern, of Paul. Second, trust the scriptures, that make you wise. Thirdly, teach God's word, it is everything, you need.

[20:14] So have a look with me, at verse 16, again. All scripture, is God breathed, and is useful, for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training, in righteousness, so that, the servants of God, may be thoroughly equipped, for every good work.

What does Timothy need, when it looks as though, the church has no future, when every other church leader, has moved on, and looks successful, for moving on? Paul says, Timothy, you just need the scriptures.

What does Timothy need, when it looks as though, teaching the Bible, doesn't work anymore, because people are not listening, to it in his church? Paul says, Timothy, you just need the scriptures.

And he assures him, of why. He talks to him, about the source, of the scriptures. That even though, every book of the Bible, has a human author, the words were breathed out, by God, inspired by God.

Even as Paul was writing, about the Old Testament scriptures, Peter says, that Paul's writing, is scripture, in 2 Peter 3, 16. And Paul, in his previous letter, to Timothy, in 1 Timothy, he quotes Luke's gospel, as scripture.

[21 : 34] So we're talking here, about the Bible, and saying that, it's, God breathed, inspired by God, all of it. And then he talks about, the use of the scriptures.

Teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training, in righteousness. And then he assures, Timothy, even when things are chaotic, you really never need, anything else.

At the end of the verse, the result, of the scriptures, verse 17, so that the servant of God, may be thoroughly equipped, for every good work. Is there a single good work, that the living God, would call you, his servant to do, in your life, that the scriptures, would not prepare you for?

Paul says, no. Says you will be, thoroughly equipped, for every good work, from the scriptures. And we're in 2 Timothy, because that message, is not just for Timothy, every church member, needs to know, what healthy ministry, looks like.

And Paul says, that it's a Bible centered, ministry. Not just that the Bible, is important. I've never met, a church leader, who doesn't think, the Bible is important. I've met, false teachers.

[22 : 50] The Bible says, it's the inspired word, of God, and it's everything you need. So that people, become righteous. They're trained, in righteousness. That's the goal, of healthy church life, that we become, more like Christ.

And Paul charges Timothy, you use the Bible, to teach. That, what does a church leader do? They teach. It's a teaching ministry. And I think, that's a very, confronting idea today, because we don't like, the idea, lots of us, that we need a teacher.

Do we think, we're at school, or something, needing to be taught, things from the Bible? And yet, the scriptures say, we all need, to be taught, because we're slow, to get things, in the Bible.

Or we forget them, we're forgetful. Or we overlook them, because they're too difficult. I think of a friend, who went to look, at a ministry job, in an area, that he would never, have dreamed, of choosing to live.

I won't say, where it was. And he got out of the car, and his wife, burst into tears. And he found out, that the previous week, in the street, where the church was, a guy had been shot.

[24 : 00] And it was a case, of mistaken identity. And he was shown around, the church, by an old lady. And on the way out, she said, I hope you decide to come. And he said, well you haven't really, asked me anything, about me.

And she said, well, what do you want to say? And he said, well I'm a Bible teacher. I think ministry, is about teaching. And she said, I love, that's what we need. You come here. And he did.

He's been there, probably 20 years now. He's still there. And I don't know, what you think about that. But I think, what a great way, to spend, your short life, in this world, that God gives us.

And maybe some of you here, would feel that, to reach Scotland, with the gospel, we need hundreds, more people. Willing to leave their jobs, and explore that kind of call, to ministry.

Teaching. Scripture for teaching. And then he says, all scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for rebuking. A rebuke, is a telling off.

[25 : 04] Calling someone, to repent, of the way they're living, because of what they believe. That they're a Christian, and what they're, the way they're living, isn't fitting.

And we always have to do that, in love, for the good of the person. But we're not used to being rebuked, are we? And we can be really offended, when someone rebukes us. But it can be vital, to growing as a Christian, to being trained, to be more like Christ, when a small group leader, or a Christian friend, says, what are you doing?

You can't do that. That's not right, is it? And they have the courage, to use the scriptures, to point out something, in our lives, where we're in the wrong. Because they love us.

Then a similar idea, he says, all scripture is useful, for correcting, and for training, in righteousness. I think of a couple, who were friends of mine, Andy and Vicky.

And we were at church, in London together, and our curate, was moving to New Zealand. To be a minister, to Christchurch. And Andy and Vicky, went to see him afterwards, after that was announced, and said, it's funny you're moving, to Christchurch, because we're going to move, hopefully, to Auckland, in New Zealand.

[26 : 20] Andy's actually got, a telephone interview, this week, for a job, in Auckland. We might be moving there. And the senior pastor, of the church, was in the conversation, and he said, well, why would you go, to Auckland?

Have you, have you thought about, why you want to go? And they said, they wanted an adventure, and that's why they wanted, to go to New Zealand. And he said, oh right, well is there a good church, in Auckland, that you know about?

And they said, yeah, we've had a church, recommended to us. And he said, oh right, good, who recommended it? And they said, oh, oh well it was, you know, you know, James at church, it was his, brother-in-law's cousin, is in Auckland, and they, or someone or other, but they, they've said, there's a good, there's a good church there.

And then they turned to him, and said, well what do you think? And he said, well I don't think, you should have, you should have the interview, this week. And they said, why not? And he said, well, you don't know, whether there's a good church, in Auckland, do you?

And you might have the interview, this week, and it might be a great job. And they might offer you the job. And then that could mean, that you move somewhere, and you haven't yet worked out, whether there's a good church there. And that might not be good, for you both spiritually.

[27 : 32] If you want to go to New Zealand, why don't you go to Christchurch? Because we know, that our curate's going there, and you could go and support him, as he gets going. Anyway, it was probably a great job, in Auckland, but Andy, turned, didn't go for the interview, and instead, they moved to Christchurch.

And they went there, and they spent a year there, shoulder to shoulder, with Costa, the curate, who'd gone to be the minister there, backing him, and they grew spiritually. The problem was, for Andy, his job there, didn't work out.

It was really difficult. So after a year, they came back to the UK. But you know what? They grew so much, in that year, spiritually. And wherever they've gone since, they are a mature, Christian couple, helping out, wherever they are in church.

They've flown, spiritually. And it could have gone so differently, couldn't it? They could have gone to Auckland, if they hadn't been corrected, they could have gone to Auckland, and who knows what could have happened.

It might have gone well, it might, the job might have been great. They might have found a church, and just drifted along, and drifted along, and drifted away. What caused the change?

[28 : 43] Somebody used the scriptures to correct them, to impress on them the urgency of the gospel priority in their lives when they faced a big decision. And Paul tells Timothy, teach the Bible.

It's everything you need. And a question we could ask is, what could you do this year, next year, as the person you are, with the gifts God's given you, to uphold and back that kind of ministry in your church, to be a guardian here, or wherever you go, of gospel ministry?

You might move to a new place, and you might need to look for a new church at some point in your life. You might stay here and be part of the process for choosing the next minister of St. Silas.

I hope that will be some time away, but eventually it will happen. I might do a D-mas. In chapter four, we hear about D-mas. He packs in gospel ministry.

I've got a dream of opening a karaoke bar. You know, not the ones where you have to sing in front of people you don't know, the ones where you hire a room and you go in with your friends and you order in food and drinks and you choose the songs you and your friends like and you sing them together.

[29 : 59] That's the dream. So imagine I've run off to open a karaoke bar and it's a more serious dream than it sounds, actually. And imagine that.

And so St. Silas is looking for the next minister and the patrons, that's who comes in to help the church. And they say to you, they call a meeting, that's what the patrons do, and they'll say to you, as people who belong to the church, what are you looking for for your next minister?

Well, what does healthy church ministry look like? What do you look for? And what might you do in those key moments to ensure that the next minister of this church is someone who serves God's

people by teaching the Bible because they believe that it's God-breathed and everything that you need?

What do you do in those moments when someone round the table with you, who's become a great friend of yours, says they want something different from the next minister? And you realize that it will cost your friendship to speak up and say, that's not what we want because the Bible tells us what we need and we do Bible ministry in the way the Bible tells us to do it.

Otherwise, we'll just all do whatever we think. What about if God gives you children or God has given you children? Could you take an interest in what they're getting from the youth ministry in the church you're in or the children's ministry?

[31 : 27] So often, we just settle for our kids. Is it fun? Are they having fun? Have they got friends? I just want them to have friends. How often does someone go into our kids' own rooms and say to Heather or David or Lizzie, thank you so much for teaching my children the Bible.

That's what they need. Who of us prays for them? Who of us prays for them that we would have Bible-based children's ministry and Bible-based youth ministry in our church because it's all that they need.

What about the direction of this church? What do we need as a church to be all that God calls us to be? It's so easy to think what we need is something different.

It's so easy to think we need what do you think we need? More testimonies. Well, testimonies are great. They're a great thing.

Hugely encouraging testimonies. But they can't replace teaching the Scriptures. Or what we really need are some more courses about the Desert Fathers, about Benedictine spirituality.

[32 : 37] Well, it could be helpful to hear about how past Christians lived. But again, what we can't replace is teaching the Scriptures. And if we've got them, we don't need anything else.

the in-vogue thing for churches is leadership conferences. I was invited to one hosted by a large Edinburgh church. The glossy adverts looked exactly like a leadership conference from the business world.

The platform speakers were paraded. There was high production values. The success of the people on the platform was applauded. It's easy to think, if only we had better leadership techniques.

If only we had a better sound system. A TikTok account. If only we had a better website. Drone footage on the homepage.

That's the silver bullet. Drone footage. Folks, do you see how liberating 2 Timothy 3 is? We're not missing the silver bullet. Paul writes to Timothy when Bible teachers are being put in prison and there are factions in his church actively rejecting the Bible and deserting him.

[33 : 48] And he says, teach God's word. It really is all you need. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for the pattern of those who have gone before us.

For their teaching, their way of life, their purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance. would you be at work in us, growing us, and training us in righteousness.

Help us to stand firmly in the scriptures and guard the good deposit you've entrusted to us that we would be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing in response to God's word. Prayer ministry will begin over at the back and the band will lead us as we sing together to respond.

Amen. So just going to have a quick moment of silence for us to reflect on whatever God is bringing up in your heart in this moment and then we'll pray.

[35 : 04] Amen. Father God we thank you for the gifts of faith hope and love we thank you that your scriptures don't just tell us about these things but they show us the source of them in your son and we pray as we go into this week you'd help us to be men and women who are passionate about your words as a source of life to each one of us a source of hope and a source of love would you help us father to use the scriptures to make us wise for salvation through faith in your son would you use this your word this week to teach us where we need taught to rebuke us where we need correcting and where we need trained and what it means to become more righteous more like your son and would you lord through your spirit equip us for every good work you have for us this week we thank you that we can ask these things because all authority in heaven and earth are yours we ask all these things therefore in Jesus name amen i'd like to take a seat um that's us kind of coming towards the formal end of a formal part of our time together as i said fair trade stall book stall lunch litter picking you've got your choice of things you can do this afternoon take them all prayer ministry will carry on at the back for a wee while so please feel free to make use of that we'll be back here at

half six tonight if you're around and if not we'll see you next sunday at 10 30 thanks very much
thank you