

TO MY SON

An Expositional Study of II Timothy

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CHAPTER ELEVEN -

A MIRROR OF LAST DAYS

II Timothy 3:1-9

- 1 **This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.**
- 2 **For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,**
- 3 **Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,**
- 4 **Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;**
- 5 **Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.**
- 6 **For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,**
- 7 **Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.**
- 8 **Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.**
- 9 **But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.**

"**In the last days**" - what is the period to which the phrase refers? Some say that it describes the whole of this age, from the Departure to the Return of our Lord JESUS CHRIST. Others hold that it means only the close of the age, the last times immediately preceding His Coming. Personally, I believe that the latter view is the correct one, and that what we have in this passage is an outline of the deplorable character that will become outstandingly common amongst men at that time. Yet, the sad characteristics are, alas, not the exclusive property of this last period; for in different ways and degrees they have appeared and will appear, through the years. So much so that it has often happened, in the course of history, that life has become so evil, and so like to such verses as these of our present portion, that earnest people have thought, "these that we are living in must be the last days."

Yet it has passed, a certain improvement has been manifested - and then another outbreak has occurred; and once more godly folk have wondered. It may, then, be said that while in the intervening years some measure of the picture will, from time to time, be seen, yet when the end-time really does dawn, these dread qualities will be so widespread, and so deep-seated, as has never been before.

Any time, therefore, that, in any exaggerated degree, exhibits such a manifestation of prevalent sin may turn out to be, in all solemn truth, "**the last days**" before the Day of His Appearing. If we find such elements in our present-day life, we are bound to pause for serious reflection concerning this possibility. It may be, or it may not be - it may pass, as have other similar seasons; but we do well to make enquiry.

Some people have said that Paul expected these things, and the Return, to come immediately, and that circumstances have proved him to be wrong; yet I think we may reply that Paul never said it would be immediate, but that it might be a very different thing. It is evidently the Lord's intention that each succeeding generation of believers shall remain on the "qui vive": "**Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour . . .**" Matthew 25:13.

Let each following age of Christians watch, let each individual Christian watch - for any emphatic recrudescence of evil men might prove to be the predicted sign of "**the last days**," whose marks so frequently have shown themselves. As our own Cowper has written, in his "Winter Walk at Noon":

"The prophets speak of such, and, noting down
The features of the last degenerate times,
Exhibit every lineament of these."

It was eighteenth-century times that the poet spoke of; his words have equal point for "these" twentieth-century days, as we shall presently observe. Timothy was to see some of these things in his time, as the closing words of verse 5 make plain, yet those did not turn out to be "**the last days**"; we, too, see these things, yet these may not be "**the last days**" - but they might be. "**Watch therefore**" - in case. Let us, then, look now into this Divinely given Mirror of the conditions of the End Time, and note how it discloses

THE TYPE OF PEOPLE

We observe them here in the Glass, and we cannot but be struck, in not a few instances, by the remarkable resemblances to our own times. Indeed, as we watch, let us beware of any ungodly censoriousness, or unhumble superiority - for it may be that even we ourselves personally, individually, Christians though perhaps we be, are not altogether immune from some of these undesirable traits here depicted.

With this personal proviso in mind, we note, first, that

(a) Their Behaviour is all wrong. What a catalogue of infamy it is. As we mention each particular, I will add Moffatt's translation of the word, lending, as it will do, necessary illumination or correction.

(i) "**Blasphemers**", abusive. Dr. Moule renders it "foul-mouthed" - a strong expression for the gentle Bishop to allow himself! But, what a mark of our day is the loose language that abounds in so many quarters - the lying, the swearing, the filth, the blasphemy.

(ii) "**Disobedient to parents.**" Am I reading from my Bible, or is it my morning newspaper? how, on the very day I was studying this portion, *The Times* recorded a speech of Mrs. E. M. Lowe, former Chairman of the London County Council, made on 13th December 1943, in which she says, "We have never had so many parents bringing girls to the courts . . . said to be out of control." The phrase might, indeed, have come from *The Times* as truly as Timothy.

(iii) "**Unthankful,**" ungrateful. Oblivious of any goodness of GOD or man; taking everything for granted. Having no use for GOD while things go well; using Him only as Someone to blame if things go ill.

(iv) "**Unholy**", irreverent. This is, alas, one of the prevailing features of these days - scarcely anything is held sacred, hymns are hilariously gayed or parodied the Bible becomes a medium for what are imagined to be funny stories; and many Christians laugh heartiest.

(v) "**Truce-breakers**", relentless. In order to gain our end, becoming utterly careless of our bond, our word, our pledge.

(vi) "**False accusers.**" scurrilous. How prone we are - yes, even we in the churches to scandal-mongering, back-biting, unkind gossiping; attempting to find out whether the thing be true or false. Indeed the truer it is, the more serious it becomes. They have a saying in legal circles, "The greater the truth, the greater the libel."

(vii) "**Incontinent,**" dissolute. A woeful lack of self-control in matters of sex throughout the land is deeply disturbing the more serious thinkers of the day; the laxity of morals, and the alarming increase of venereal disease, are creating immense problems in the minds, not only of religious people, but of decent citizens.

(viii) "**Fierce,**" savage. While in some quarters seems to be a growth in kindness, there is elsewhere an increase in cruelty. In any case, the savage tongue is still actively at work as ever, inflicting wounds that break hearts and blast hopes, and ruin lives.

(ix) "**Traitors,**" treacherous, Undependable; quite prepared to change sides, if it seem advantageous to do so; having no real convictions to stick to; having no sense of loyalty to any cause, or any person, unless Self.

(x) "**Heady**", reckless, Headstrong; having taken the bit in his teeth, becoming entirely heedless of right, or of others, or of consequences. What a distressing picture the Mirror gives back! But there is more yet.

Behind the behaviour is the thought.

(b) Their Opinion is all wrong. We shall not find it easy to accept what such people think about any matter. But see here

(i) *Their opinion of themselves.*

- "**Boasters**", boastful - of what they do, and of what they are;

- "**proud**", haughty - as if humbler folk were beneath consideration, even beneath notice;
- "**high-minded**", conceited - eaten up with self-esteem, bloated with self-importance.

How forcibly it all reminds us of the Pharisee of Luke 18:10 ff. "**I, I, I, I, I**" - yes, five times over in two verses. He had the very highest opinion of himself. And, mind you, he had his points.

"**I fast twice in the week**" - why, but he was, by his Law, required to fast once in the year only, on the Day of Atonement.

"**I give tithes of all that I possess**" - why, but he was, by his Law, expected to tithe only certain of his possessions, but he taxed all. Splendid! Ah, but what a spirit of boastfulness.

Timothy would be called to meet, and to deal with, some of his blood relations. Indeed, they are not extinct yet.

Look, too, at

(ii) *Their opinion of others.* How terribly misguided it can be. For example, as here, "**despisers of those that are good.**"

You have heard of Christians who put people off by their inconsistency ("**Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God**", Psalm 11:14), and of others who put people off, with the best intentions in the world, by their blundering tactlessness; but the strange thing is that sometimes people are put off by a Christian's sheer goodness.

The mere sight of them becomes a rebuke to their ungodliness; sinfulness cannot abide such saintliness - and, if it is only to quiet their conscience, this hatred of the good is born within them. I wonder if, among the "**ungodly sinners**" of Enoch's day, that Jude 15 tells us about, there were some who grew to loathe the lovely character of that dear man who, amid all the base wickedness of those times, "**walked with God**," Genesis 5:22, 24.

I wonder, too, what, out of their daily intercourse and intimacy, the wicked heart of Judas made of the holy life of JESUS. Did that traitor become a despiser of the good, as these "**traitors**" of our passage did? Maybe; but, in any case, their opinion is of no value; their mind was all awry.

How different is the true and loyal believer who can say, as Paul does in I Corinthians 2:16, "**we have the mind of Christ**" - who in everyday practical life, as they simply "trust and obey", so closely "walk with the Lord" that they come to know what His mind would be about things, who are quite sure of His opinion and ever ready to make it theirs. But, in presenting these "men" to us, our passage goes further still.

Down underneath their behaviour, and their opinion, lies that which explains the unsatisfactory condition of both.

(c) Their Affection is all wrong. It is said that they are "**without natural affection**," callous - husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, living under strained relationships. What a tragedy it all is; and how revealing as the source of so much of the wider

evil that obtains. Yes, but in the absence of this proper feeling, where is their affection placed? Our passage is clear: they are

(i) "**Lovers of their own selves**," wrapped up in themselves - and an uncommonly small parcel it will make, I expect.

(ii) "**Covetous**," that is, Lovers of money. Of itself money is no evil thing; it can be a very useful thing, and can exercise a very blessed ministry in the world; but, as Paul had told his "son" earlier (I Timothy 6:10), "**the love of money is the root of all evil.**"

(iii) "**Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.**" What a wild, mad, feverish rush after pleasure has this modern age seen, with multitudes of its people supremely bored if anyone might be without its "flicks", or its dance, or its "do" of some sort.

Even some Christians are so swept up by the thing that their love of pleasure is beginning to sap their love of GOD. A certain relaxation of mind and of spirit is, in this busy world, not only permissible, but necessary - provided only that it be of the right kind, and in the right portion, and at the right time; but to set our love upon it is quite a different proposition.

It is a dangerous and damaging to love unworthy things. A great friend of mine tells of how, on one occasion, while he was immensely enjoying a piece of chocolate, he said to his mother, "Mummie, I do love chocolate"; to which his wise mother replied, "But, Dick, you mustn't love chocolate. Like it, by all means, but don't love it. This fine quality is to be reserved for things worthier than sweets. Pleasure, Money, Self - these are to be respected, and to be kept in their proper place, but never to be loved.

"**Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth**", is the inspired direction to believers through Colossians 3:2.

Misplaced affection is, after all, the explanation of so much of the evil living that "**the last days**," and even these days, display. Such is, alas, the type of people disclosed in this Mirror.

And now look again, and see -

THEIR KIND OF PIETY

How strange it seems to talk of such a thing as piety in connection with the sort of persons we have been, perforce, discussing.

Dr. Alexander Maclaren sees them as "pagans masquerading as Christians."

(a) *Religion as a Form* - is what we have in them, "**having a form of godliness**", as our verse 5 says. In spite of the sinful life they are living, in spite of the wicked state of their hearts, they have retained a certain shell of religiousness.

- they may go to church still,
- they may say their prayers still,

- they may read their Bible still,
- they may attend their Communion still,
- they may even take their class still;

but there is no real religion about this outwardly exemplary adherence to the old splendid habits - it is all unreal, only formal. Yes, strangely enough the Form is maintained; but

(b) *Religion as a Force* - is unknown to them; or, if they ever did know it, they have since become strangers to it, "**denying the power thereof.**"

So far as we ourselves individually are concerned, that religion is a farce which is not a force - "**vain**" is the Bible's own word for it, James 1:26. The "men" of our present passage are notable for the absence of any restraining, or constraining religious force in their conduct and character.

Their profession is but an outer veneer, an empty shell - like that tine, strong, exquisitely modelled chair that you dare not sit on, because the white ants have eaten away all its "inside," and left only the outward Form. Their so-called "**faith**" doesn't "**work**" - it is a "**dead**" thing, as James 2:26 tells us.

A religion that doesn't influence our lives is a pitiable thing, having short shrift from Scripture. Yet so distinguished a person as Lord Melbourne is reported to have said, in the course of a debate in the House, "We have come to a pretty pass if religion is going to be allowed to interfere with our ordinary daily lives" - or words to that effect. It is an empty piety that these people profess.

Nevertheless, I am going to venture the opinion that there are far fewer deliberate and conscious hypocrites in the world than we suppose. Most of this ilk would be immensely surprised at the charge.

Some of them have known better days, and are tragically unaware that things are changed, like poor Samson, in Judges 16:20, who "**wist not that the Lord was departed from him**", and fondly imagined that things were "**as at other times before.**" Or, like that other of whom Hosea 7:9 reports that "**strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.**"

How infinitely sad it all is - how easily possible for the writer, or his reader.

Let us not forget to look at ourselves in this Mirror, as well as at those who are thus the more prominently exposed.

Well, the apostolic injunction runs, "**From such turn away**" - which means, I suppose, two things.

First, that Timothy, as an individual, was studiously to avoid the company of such undesirable people as have been described.

Second, that Timothy, as a leader, was carefully to guard the purity of the church, both in respect of doctrine, of practice, and of life and so to see to the exclusion from membership of all such.

And now we turn to a second big surprise about these men - the first was that any kind of religion should be associated with them; and now comes the unexpected news that there was credited to them a certain missionary zeal, a desire to extend their ranks by winning fresh adherents.

It is a plain fact that while heterodoxy is mostly so eager to get others, orthodoxy is so shy, or so slothful, that it remains too easily content with those already won. My reader, how long ago is it since you made any serious endeavour to "find another, just as Andrew found his brother"?

Turn again to our Mirror, and observe

THEIR METHOD OF PROPAGANDA

You will see at once that they are

(a) Masters of cunning - "**which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women.**" We must be careful about that

(i) "**Silly**" - I think it does not imply lack of brains, but lack of stability. They are not the only ones to be afflicted with this disability; plenty of men are just as weak; but it happens to be women in this case.

(ii) "**Lead captive**" - reminds us of that "**taken captive**" at the end of the previous chapter; only this time it is such a different word in the Greek - here it is, indeed, a taking prisoner, with all the loss of freedom and comfort which that involves. Their captures are captive indeed. But, why that

(iii) "**Creep**" - there is something sinister, something of cunning, about it. They thus get the women; but where are the men? Ah, that's where the slyness comes in: the men are not at home, perhaps they are at the office, earning the family bread and butter. This afternoon hour is the safest possible time for these unhealthy propagandists to "**creep**" round the streets, and call at the

(iv) "**Houses**" - door-step propaganda. Have you had them at your door-step, I wonder? Christian Scientists, Spiritualists, Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses. How assiduous, they are. Don't you admire their pertinacity, sometimes even their pugnacity? Does not their fine zeal move you to shame? By comparison with them, we are so many of us so slow, and slothful yet - we have such an infinitely better Cause!

Timothy here may rest assured that he will find these people ever eager to swell their numbers by gaining new converts; and he will need to exert himself, and to encourage others, to counteract their endeavours. The representatives of the Master will need to formulate their plans for door-step evangelism, and to go round streets and houses engaging themselves in what some in the Chinese Christian Church call "gossiping the Gospel."

But wherein is the secret of these people's success in this method? I imagine it lies in the fact that their visits synchronise with need in the homes they call at; for they are

(b) Exploiters of conscience - "**women laden with sins, led away with diverse lusts.**" The evil things they have done, the evil things they have desired, have become a load upon their mind.

How shall they get release? It is at such a juncture that these evil teachers appear upon their door-step, telling them that they need not worry, that they are all right. Thus do they fulfil the prophet's words, "**They have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace**" (Jeremiah 8:11).

Oh, that we might learn to go to their door-steps with the thorough-healing message of Matthew 11:28, "**Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**" Those poor women were "**ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth**" - in their restlessness of mind, ever consumed with religious curiosity, yet never arriving at any real knowledge, any clear faith. And they never will until they "**learn of Me**" as the Master said in that same Matthew passage.

For it is not "**the truth**" that those District Visitors offer on their rounds; rather are they

(c) Purveyors of counterfeit" - "**as Jannes and Jambres.**"

(i) Those gentlemen "**withstood Moses**" by pretending to do the same wonders that he did. Is Pharaoh impressed by that stick becoming a serpent? These Court Magicians are snake-charmers: their reptile, mesmerised stiff as a rod, shall, on being thrown to the ground, break out into wriggling life. The same as Moses? No; a counterfeit - their "**stick**" never was a stick.

Shall Pharaoh be unduly moved by Moses turning all that Nile water red? His own conjurers can match that trick - fetch them a jug of clear water from somewhere, and lo, the thing is done.

Shall frogs come forth at Moses' word? Well, what conjurer worth his salt knows not how to produce rabbits from his hat - or frogs, for that matter? So is Moses discredited again in the royal eyes, for his magicians match Moses at every point - or so it seems.

But their powers of counterfeit have their limits - "**lice**" are beyond them; performing fleas they might have managed, but not those dreadful little things. They have to admit their defeat, "**This is the finger of GOD,**" Exodus 8:19. Their wonders have all been Masterpieces of counterfeit - not legitimate, but legerdemain.

There is something particularly apt in introducing the mention of magicians in a letter bound, as II Timothy was, for Ephesus, seeing that that city was a very home of magic, and abounded in incantations.

We recall Acts 19, to remind ourselves of Paul's encountering there the exorcists, "**sons of Sceva**", who dared to use the Holy Name as an incantation, to their own dire misfortune. And in the same chapter the practitioners of these "**curious arts**" made a bonfire of their books of incantations, as a sign and seal of the reality of their conversion.

Without doubt, the Bishop of magic-ridden Ephesus would be intrigued by the mention of those wicked old conjurers of long ago. In like fashion

(ii) These gentlemen "**also resist the truth**" by pretending to preach the same gospel as Paul, or as Timothy.

In reality it is a counterfeit of the true. It is the same old message, they will say, only couched in more modern terms - the Identity is the same, though the Dress may be more up-to-date.

"**So they wrap it up,**" as Micah 7:3 says.

Well, this has been a depressing Study; but it is necessary for us to be thus fore-warned, and fore-armed.

All this wrong behaviour, and opinion, and affection are to be expected in the perilous atmosphere of "**the last days**" - all this hollow religiousness - all this subtle and energetic counterfeit. And if we see these things abounding in our day, it may be we are nearer the End-Time than we thought; the Master may, in very truth, be on His way.

In any case, we will keep a look-out. But is the hope of His advent only dark and dismal? A thousand times, No! It is characterised by Titus 2:13 as "**that blessed** [happy] **hope.**" It has its somber side; but how sunny is its other side. Do you happen to know that exquisite sonnet of Keats on Homer? If you do, you will recall that lovely line - "There is a budding morrow in midnight."

For the true believer, the emphasis of His Advent is not black, but bright; not on the midnight, but on the morrow. If our present passage has had to stress the prevailing gloom of the preceding days, let us conclude by remembering the exceeding gladness that lies just on ahead.

As Psalm 30:5 assures us, "**Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.**" Even in the prevalent darkness which this Mirror of a Passage reveals, there is a streak of coming dawn in verse 9, "**but they shall proceed no further**" - there is an appointed limit to all this! Then, hurrah for the Dawn of that budding morrow. II Peter 1:19.

~ end of chapter 11 ~
