

Title: My Kingdom Come
Text: II Timothy 3:1-9
Theme: The devastating effects of church abuse
Series: II Timothy
Prop Stmtnt: The value and necessity of the church makes it vulnerable to abuse that is devastating to those effected by it.

Read Text:

If you ever drove by a chicken farm with your windows down, you probably will never forget it. You will smell a chicken farm before you see it. However, if you were born and raised on the chicken farm, the smell that others complained about wouldn't bother you. Brothers and sisters, we live on the chicken farm. Every day we breathe in the aroma of the spirit of our age. We are used to it. We are so used to it, that if the church starts to smell like the spirit of the age, many people won't notice, and in fact, many will think that it is a good thing. But, the spirit of this age is not a friend to God and it is not your friend. And when we tolerate, accept and champion the spirit of the age, we will cease being a church. And, we are vulnerable to this, because churches tend to attract people in leadership who appear to be believable (that is their job) and people who have a need. People who have a need are vulnerable to being manipulated and people who appear to be believable are in a position to do it.

Do you remember the story of the local oncologist doctor who falsely diagnosed people as having cancer and administered chemo in order to enrich himself? Let's dissect that for a minute. What are the factors that created a setting where this could occur?

- 1) Need (at least a perceived one – cancer)
- 2) “Solution” (treatment)
- 3) Appearance of competency (doctor)
- 4) Trust (I will allow you to do something that will harm me because I believe that you have my best interest in view.

It all starts with need. A need makes us vulnerable. The greater our need; the greater is our vulnerability. Ian Doney met a girl on-line who told him everything that he wanted to hear. He thought he had a girlfriend. He thought she was going to marry him. He thought he was finally going to have a family. He dreamed of having a family and his overwhelming desire to have a family made him exceedingly vulnerable to someone who told him what he longed to hear. He really believed that she was going to come and visit him. He sent her money for the plane ticket and went to the airport to meet her. She never arrived. She told him that she had been in an accident and needed money for medical bills. He emptied out all of his savings and sent it to her. Then he borrowed money from friends and sent it to her. He starved himself so he wouldn't have to spend money on groceries and sent what he saved to her. There was no “her”. Ian was scammed. He took his own life. It happens to girls too. Often, the “guy” pretends to be in the army. He sounds too good to be true. Our greatest need exposes our greatest vulnerability. That is why the church is so vulnerable to abuse. Churches are supposed to deal with the most

important and personal stuff there is. And the fact that many people trust their church creates a setting that is tempting to exploit. What is more important than being free from guilt, being at peace with God, being reconciled with others, knowing who you are, dealing with issues of your past, gaining assurance about your eternal destiny? These are really big issues and we are right to be concerned about them. And for hundreds of years, people have used the vulnerability of people to scam them, all in the name of God, religion, church and ministry. This creates additional difficulties for us because not only is the message that we embrace not accepted by our world, but we have to distinguish ourselves from those who are false teachers and present a false gospel.

I. Expect difficulty (v.1)

If you have chronic back pain, you expect to be in pain when you try to walk, stand, lay down and do just about anything. If, you happen to experience a moment of relief you are stunned by the sense of, “wow, this is how my back is supposed to feel.” If you have chronic back pain, you are surprised by relief, not by the pain. Verse 1 sets the stage of what follows and it is important that you understand all that this text is saying. In the last days, there will come times of difficulty. Expect this. In your short time on this earth, do not be surprised by difficulty. Be surprised when you are not facing difficulty. Now, that may sound morbid, but it really isn't, because our goal is not for this life. And my joy does not find its source in my circumstances. The fountainhead of my joy is the throne on which Christ sits. My joy is safe there. But that is not how our world thinks and as followers of Christ, we are out of step with this world.

We are in the last days. The wind of the world is in our face. These descriptions of people that we are warned about are the very things that are championed in our culture. These things describe so many of the heroes in pop culture. Songs, movies, pop stars are built on this stuff. These are the things that are highlighted and celebrated. In contrast, we appear to be so out of step with our world. If you ever played in a marching band, or if you were ever in the army, you know that when you are marching in formation you have to be in step and if you are not in step that it is obvious. Well, we are out of step with our world! Following Christ is the best thing you can do, it is also the most difficult thing you can do.

So, here is what Paul is telling us in this text. In the last days, the spirit of our age will become more and more pronounced (described in verses 2-5). These descriptions will be so pervasive, that they will be assumed to be normal, legitimate, laudable and even goals that are worthy of pursuing. If you dare stand against the spirit of the age, you will risk the wrath of the culture.

Because of that, the church will be vulnerable to people who, instead of identifying the spirit of the age for what it is, they will attempt to use the arena of the church as a means to advance and legitimize the spirit of the age. They will use some of the same words, but will teach different things. When you really pay attention to what they are saying and what they mean, you realize that instead of pursuing the Kingdom of Christ, they are in reality pursuing their own kingdom. So, we are going to find out that the difficulty that

we face is not only from this world, but we will face difficulty from people who claim to be followers of Christ, but, who, in reality are still followers of this world. As Jesus said, following him means to walk on a narrow path. Jesus said that not many people will walk that path. So, expect difficulty and be discerning.

II. Be Discerning. (2-5)

Evil and evildoers will increase as we get closer to the end of the age and the return of Christ. Living in this world is like being afloat in a large river. You may not feel as if you are moving because the water around you looks the same, but if you were in a boat and you put an anchor down, or in more shallow waters, were to drive a pole down and try to hold on, you would feel the current trying to pull you along. As long as you go with the current, there is no struggle. But when you try to stay in one place then you feel the fight.

Notice how the people in the last days are described. The list begins and ends by describing these people as having misplaced loves. Instead of loving God, he loves himself, he loves money and he loves pleasure. The love of money and the love of pleasure are simply different expressions of loving self. Everything in between (the rest of the descriptions) is the result of loving self instead of loving God.

These people are described as being totally into themselves. They are so absorbed with themselves that they have no sense of perspective about anything else. They know little to nothing about things of importance. They care nothing about history to give them context. They care nothing about character and knowledge to give them depth and wisdom. They care nothing about God other than using his name in vain. So many reality shows are about paper people. Everything is about make-up, fashion, popularity, and body image. These champions of culture have nothing to say because there is nothing to them yet, these are the ones who are given platforms to talk about political policy, raising kids, values and even religion. Look at the names of pop culture icons who have died from suicide, substance abuse and addiction. It is overwhelming. Something is seriously wrong, and yet we keep applauding all of this dysfunction and anyone who tries to point out how messed up all of this is, is marginalized or worse. But, this is the spirit of the age that the church either fights against and catches the flack or succumbs to. If the church does not embrace the spirit of the age, it appears to be irrelevant. If it does embrace the spirit of the age, it is irrelevant. Our relevancy is found in what appears to be our irrelevance because this world is passing away. But, the spirit of the age feels so important, but it is so fleeting. Loving self is always the spirit of the age and this text, ironically, while being so old is SO relevant.

Let me give you an example. What I am about to say is theologically correct, but it is cultural heresy and because it is cultural heresy it is going to sound shocking and even offensive to some of you. But, it is shocking and offensive because you have been drinking too much of the cool-aid of the world. Let's say that Thomas is getting bad grades, playing too many video games, has a meth addiction and drinks himself almost to the point of alcohol poisoning on the weekends. What is Thomas' problem? We live in a world that tends to assume that Thomas does so many bad things to himself because

Thomas has such a low opinion of himself. If Thomas felt better about himself and believed in himself, then he would not be doing so many self-destructive things. It sounds plausible, but then why do so many pop icons who have slavish fan clubs, and every circumstantial reason to believe in themselves, participate in the same destructive habits?

The problem for Thomas and others is not that they do not love themselves; it is that they do. But, they love themselves instead of loving God. And love of self will never satisfy and people who are not satisfied will pursue it in an effort to find it, and many will pursue it in dangerous ways.

A. People who love self expect and even demand to be worshiped. (2)

People who love self act as if they are God and should be treated as such. Look at these descriptions in v.2. This is Genesis 3 all over again. This is describing the person who wants to be in the position of being God.

- 1) Proud
- 2) Arrogant
- 3) Abusive (violent with words or actions when you do not get your way)
- 4) Disobedient to parents (no one can tell me what to do)
- 5) Ungrateful (I deserve even more)
- 6) Unholy (not being like God)

Again, here is what Paul is doing. He is dissecting the spirit of the age because false teachers are going to mimic the spirit of the age and you need to be able to identify who the false teachers are.

B. People who love self have little room for loving others. (3)

- 1) Heartless
- 2) Unappeasable (they are never satisfied)
- 3) Slanderous
- 4) Without self-control (why should I have to wait?)
- 5) Brutal

No joy, no peace, no rest, no satisfaction, no contentment. People who love themselves instead of loving God are absolutely miserable and are on a mission to make everyone else miserable as well. A person who loves self, attempts to use and abuse God and use and abuse others for the benefit of self.

C. People who love self are in danger. (3b-4)

- 1) Not loving good (cannot discern what is actually good)
- 2) Treacherous (are deceitful and deceived)
- 3) Reckless (place themselves in harm's way)
- 4) Swollen with conceit (think they can do anything)

D. People, who love self, care more about image than reality. (5)

1) Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power

Do you Paul's point? Look at these descriptions in verses 2-4 and they really do not surprise us. This is our world. However, this text is warning us that people will attempt to use the covering of religion as a means to actually pursue this godlessness. This is where the church is vulnerable. We are vulnerable to convincing and persuasive people who will use their charm and skills to change the message, or who will use the message as a covering to advance their own selfishness.

Here is where this shows up so often in our context. One of the worst religious poisons is the health and wealth gospel. The health and wealth gospel is not the gospel of Jesus. It is the spirit of this age spray painted with religious phrases and Bible verses taken out of context. The health and wealth gospel teaches that God wants you to be healthy, God wants you to be wealthy and that God has sprinkled throughout the Bible little secrets and promises that function like keys or magic potions, that when used will unlock your access to wealth and will cure you of any physical ailment. You can also find formulas for power surges (like you do in video games) that will give you extra spiritual energy to drive away spirits of depression, or spirits of conflict in your marriage, or bad spirits that you may have inherited from a generational curse.

Without raising hands, how many of you would like to have more money? How many of you would like to have a healthier body? How many of you would like to be free from depression and discouragement and addictions? The fact that you would like those things, means, that you have a "need" (at the very least a desire). To the degree that you desire those things, you are vulnerable to someone calling along and telling you that they can help you get it.

But, have you ever stopped and dissected the promises of the health and wealth gospel? If you were so wealthy that you had everything that you needed and wanted and you were so healthy that you would never die, and if you had no conflict in your life, no discouragements, no depression, no problems, you would be – what? You would be God. And that is what the health and wealth gospel promises. It is nothing less than the serpent in the garden telling you that if you eat the fruit, then you can be like God. And just like Adam and Eve fell for it, people fall for it all of the time. It sounds religious. But, it is godless. It sounds like it has untapped the secrets for living, but it is powerless. It is powerless because the gospel that comes from the spirit of the age fails to understand the real problem and therefore fails to focus on the real solution.

The real problem is not my sickness, poverty or lack of power to overcome my circumstances. The real problem is my sin. I am a rebel who has sinned against my Creator. I deserve the wrath of God. In my natural condition, I want to be God. I want to rule. I want to be worshipped, respected, admired and affirmed. I want my life to be like Teflon so that bad things never stick to me. Do you see this? If I find religious teachings

that affirm my pursuit of my own glory, I will feel validated. God is there for me. God is there to serve me. God exists to make much of me. God exists to help me get my way. That is why you hear so little to nothing in the health and wealth gospel about repentance of sin, or the doctrine of propitiation, or about the wrath of God against sin, or about hell, or about justification and being rescued from hell. What you hear about is how to have more power. How to overcome the spirit of darkness in your marriage, or the spirit of spending in your wallet, or the spirit of flatness in your tires, or the spirit of defeat in the Tigers. Here are 4 secrets to unlock the power of God in your life and give you the victory that God wants for you. Look at the titles of some of the best selling books in the Christian section and so many of them are full of this garbage. At the heart of it, is how you can manipulate God to give you the life that you think you ought to have.

That is appealing. That is tempting. It is also Satanic and I mean that in literal terms because that is what this text is teaching. Look at the warning at the end of v.5. Know the evidences of these false teachers so that you can stay away. Avoid such people! And here is why you have to avoid them. Look at what they do. They exploit people by promising them things that string people along and delude them. Karl Marx famously said that religion is the opiate of the masses. When you look at this aspect of religion that Paul is warning about, you can see that at that level Marx was right.

III. Recognize the patterns of false teachers. (6-8)

- A. They prey on those who are vulnerable**
- B. They study and exploit the weaknesses of others**
- C. They are calculated and charming**
- D. They are wicked**
- E. Their followers are never at rest**
- F. They hate the truth and those who teach it**

Paul is not calling women weak, he is saying that there are some women who are vulnerable to being exploited because unresolved issues in their lives makes them susceptible to people who promise to help them. There was a lady, (we'll call her Sharon) who had some unresolved issues in her life. She learned to treat the symptoms with alcohol. The older she got, the walls of her life closed in on her. She had no friends and her adult children did not trust her. After her husband died, she was really alone. Her loneliness, her guilt and her bondage to drinking made her easy prey. She started watching a T.V. preacher. He made her a lot of promises and she was desperate. She called the number for prayer and began to send in money. This was her act of faith, but since her problems continued, she obviously needed more faith, so she sent in more money. Eventually, this well known preacher called her and sent him even more money. She never did get any help and the T.V. preacher ended up with all of her money. She

kept hoping that one of his secrets to having power to change her life would come true for her. It never did and her children were left to deal with all of the mess when she died.

Paul uses an example from the history of Israel to illustrate his point. These false teachers promise power. Jannes and Jambres were the names of two of the men who were sorcerers in Pharaoh's court who opposed Moses. Their names do not appear in the Bible, but they were part of Israel history and were well known to the Jewish people. These men had power, but it was evil power and it was used to blind people from the real power.

When Moses and Aaron stood before Pharaoh, they demonstrated power before him by throwing their staff's on the ground and they turned into snakes. Jannes and Jambres did the same thing, although Aaron's snake ate theirs (which meant they lost a perfectly good staff). But, that was all the excuse that Pharaoh needed to disbelieve in the moment that he had to listen to anything that Moses and Aaron had to say.

IV. Know the consequences of false teachers. (9)

False promises and even examples of dark power (Jannes and Jambres) are used to keep people in darkness. These teachers, in the end will be found out for what they are. Like Jannes and Jambres who could not stand before the true power of God and had no defense and no excuse, so too, these false teachers will be exposed and will ultimately fail. There are good churches and good teachers and good pastors. There are some bad ones as well. I want you to know good doctrine so that you can discern between truth and error. But a good church is more than a place where true things are taught; it is a people who are intentional about orienting their lives around that truth. That means that the lives of the leadership should reflect the truth of the gospel. (v.10 – next week's emphasis)

Questions for leaders:

- Do I look at the people I influence as people who can do things for me or people I can move closer to Jesus?
- Do I try to keep people at arms length or do I invite and welcome close relationships and thoughtful questions?

Questions for the church

- Do you know the lives of the leaders?
- Do they invite conversations?
- Do they allow you opportunities to ask questions?
- Do you know their families?
- Are they real or are they more concerned about maintaining an image?
- How do they talk about the church when the church is not around?

The closer you get to Jesus, the more reasons you have to believe in him. While we will never be perfect like Jesus, the same thing should be true for our church.