



THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Sunday 12 September 2021

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

"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 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 Jannes 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. 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 kinds 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 who 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 Timothy 3)

Well, when Moses went before Pharaoh he said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go." And pharaoh said, "Why should I let your people go?" So, Moses and Aaron threw Aaron's staff down on the

ground and it turned into a snake. So, Pharaoh called in his wise men – particularly two by the name of Jannes and Jambres who were brothers. They came in and they threw their staff down on the ground and it became a snake. So, Pharaoh said, “Well, why should I let you go? You look just the same as Jannes and Jambres. I can't tell you apart. They say they're from God; you say you're from God. You do the same stuff.” So, he says, “I won't let you go.”

So, Moses and Aaron came back the next day and they hit their staff on the rivers and the rivers turned to blood. So Jannes and Jambres came and they struck their staff on the rivers and, again, the rivers turned to blood. So Pharaoh said, “Why should I let you go? You look exactly like Jannes and Jambres. I think I'll stay with them.”

So Moses and Aaron come back the next day and they hit their staff on the waters and a plague of frogs come up. So Jannes and Jambres come; they hit their staff on the waters and, again, a plague of frogs comes up. So Pharaoh says, “You look exactly the same to me. You say you're from God; they say they're from God. So I won't let them go.”

Well, Moses and Aaron continued to do these miraculous plagues against Egypt, and eventually Jannes and Jambres couldn't match them; So Pharaoh decides to let them go.

The Jewish tradition, and particularly the Talmud, tell us that when Israel left Egypt, Jannes and Jambres went with them. I don't know why – maybe they thought that Israel had taken all the money and so maybe there's more to be had going with them? So, they go with Israel and the Talmud tells us that when Moses went up onto Mount Sinai to get the ten commandments, Jannes and Jambres persuaded Aaron to make a golden calf. And so, he makes the golden calf and God is very displeased, so there's a great plague and the writings tell us that Jannes and Jambres were killed in those plagues.

So Jannes and Jambres ultimately outed themselves: they showed that their power was actually from demonic powers, it wasn't from God, but, for a period, they looked exactly the same as Moses and Aaron. And Paul is saying to Timothy, “Moses had his Jannes and Jambres. I've had my Hymenaeus and Philetus. And you are going to have people who come in who look like they're the real thing, but they're actually from the Devil; they're actually false teachers. The actual Jannes and Jambres brothers use miraculous powers to look that way, but the coming ‘Jannes and Jambres’ will probably use more sophisticated arguments and teachings that will try and lead people astray.

We've been going through the book of 2 Timothy. I hope you're enjoying it. I hope you're finding it helpful. It's a great book, it's a powerful book, particularly because Paul is imprisoned in this Roman jail and he's maybe days or weeks from his execution under Nero, and so he's writing to Timothy to give him his final instructions. These are the last words that we have from Paul. And you'll remember in chapter one, he tells Timothy to fan

into flame the gift that God has given him and take on the task of being Paul's successor, preaching the gospel. Then in chapter two he says to Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; know that you know that you're forgiven, that you're loved, that you stand in God's blessing, and then pass that grace on to others. In the second half of chapter 2 he says there's going to be many worldly influences that will try and lead you astray from being useful and fulfilling your task; and so you need to set yourself apart from those things, set yourself apart so that you can move ahead with the purpose that God has for your life.

Well, Paul continues his words to Timothy in chapter 3. In verse 1 he says, *"But mark this: there will be terrible times in the last days."* That phrase 'the last days' in the scripture refers to a number of things, but most frequently it can refer to that entire time between Jesus' first coming and His second coming. That entire time is called 'the last days', but more particularly the end of that period just before Jesus comes again. And in this passage, he says things are going to go from bad to worse, so he's saying this will pertain all through that period, it'll be a terrible time because the world will completely distort the truth. There'll be all sorts of false truths and distortions of the truth in the world; but what will make it worse is that there will be people like Jannes and Jambres who will come and bring those false teachings into the church. They'll look like they're part of the church, but they will bring false teaching into the church in order to manipulate vulnerable people. In Paul's day the vulnerable people were particularly women because they'd had less access to education. In our day people make themselves vulnerable because they don't read the scriptures enough.

So it'll be tough times and Paul goes on to describe what those people will be like. In 2 Timothy 2-5 it says, *"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."* It's a fairly pointed list, it's a long list ; but everything in that list stems from the very first phrase: "people will be lovers of themselves". In the Greek this is 'philautos': lovers of themselves. That's a major theme in the world these days. Even Whitney Houston used to sing, "Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all," but the Bible wouldn't exactly agree with that. There are seminars, there's blogs, there's books, there's courses on self-esteem, self-growth, self-acceptance, self-worth, self-image, self-actualisation - all designed to help you build yourself up, to become the best self you can be, to have a good sense of your own self-worth.

And, unfortunately, many in the church have got carried along with that. We say, "Well, isn't having a good self-image a good thing?" Matthew 16:25 says, *"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."* It's saying that if you go after developing yourself and building up yourself and trying to feel good about

yourself, it'll ultimately end in mess. It ultimately doesn't work when you're trying to build your own self up. Our problem with 'our-self' is the fall and we can't fix that in our own strengths, so by trying to build up your own self you'll ultimately lose yourself. People get lost looking inwards and it just doesn't work. But the Bible says if you go after Jesus, if you seek Jesus and you're prepared to deny some of your own stuff in order to find Him, the great news is when you find Him you'll find yourself as well. We find ourselves in Him, in relationship to Him, so that's the great news: go after Jesus and you'll gain a sense of self-worth as you understand how much of a price He paid to redeem you, to bring you into His family; but you'll get humility at the same time. If you go after Jesus, you'll find yourself; if you try and find yourself, you'll get lost in a morass of inward looking - it just doesn't work.

And all of those other things in 2 Timothy 3:2-5 flow out of self-love:

- If you love yourself, you'll become a lover of money because you'll want the things that make you feel good and that make you feel important and look important. You'll want the money and the things to build yourself up, and it makes you boastful and proud because, "I'm the important one here," and you put others down to make yourself look better and to lift yourself up.
- It makes people disobedient to their parents: "I'm the important one. You can't tell me what to do!" Whereas the Bible says to honour your mother and father, and then you'll be blessed.
- It makes people unforgiving and slanderous. I mean, that's almost descriptive of our times isn't it - people are so critical. You read the papers and everyone's slamming someone and criticising someone else and that stems from self-righteousness: "I'm right. You're wrong." It all flows out of this love of self.
- People become lovers of pleasure: if you're the most important thing, then what makes you feel good is more important than what makes God happy. "I'm not going to deny myself for the sake of God, if I'm the most important!"

Of course, this self-love just simply doesn't work. If you look around, people are less happy than ever before, and the problem is that some of these false ideas and false thinking have been brought into the church - the 'Jannes and Jambres' bring some of these ideas into the church. And what Paul is saying what Paul is warning Timothy about is that many people are going to fall away from the faith - not by deserting the faith, but by changing the gospel and twisting the gospel and altering it in a way that they find more acceptable. They get rid of the bits that they don't want, and they bring in the bits that they like, and they're going to twist and alter the gospel to make it more acceptable to them. But they're going to change it so much that it'll no longer be the gospel. They'll have the form of the gospel: they still go out and they help the poor and they pray and they put money in the plate and they come to church. They can still look on the outside like they're normal Christians, but they've changed the gospel so much that they've denied its power. It no longer has the power - what is the power of the gospel? The power of the gospel is the

fact that Jesus gave His life on the cross to pay the price for our sin, to remove that barrier of sin between us and God so that we can come back into His presence and receive His Spirit. People deny that. They deny aspects of the gospel; and Paul is saying that we need to be careful we are not influenced by these people. And more to the point, we need to be careful we don't become these people.

Paul gives us three ways we can pick a 'Jannes and Jambres' in the next few verses: He said, first of all, is their teaching in line with the Bible? The 'Jannes and Jambres' of this world's teaching will not line up with the scriptures. They've altered it; they've changed it; they've twisted it. Secondly, does their life line up with the Bible? Are they living in line with what the scriptures say? And his third test is, if they're teaching and living in line with the scriptures, they'll be contradicting the world and the world won't be happy, so they will face persecution. Are they facing the persecution that comes from preaching the gospel straight? It all comes back to the Bible, to the scriptures.

So Paul says to Timothy in verse 14, *"But as for you: continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learnt 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."* How can you navigate these false ideas? Through the scripture! It is the scripture that helps you to find your way through this whole morass of ideas. And one of the reasons that many in the church are so susceptible to every wind of doctrine is because many don't read the scriptures enough; they don't spend enough time in the Bible. We are continually bombarded by the world's ideas all the time - be it by the media, be it by social media, be it by music that we listen to, be it by TV programs, movies - we're bombarded with the world's ideas all the time, so if you're not counteracting it with a regular intake of the scriptures then you are just simply allowing the world to reshape your brain. It's that simple!

The only way to not be reshaped by the world is to be regularly taking in the scriptures. There's many reasons why people don't read the Bible: sometimes it's just sheer laziness, other times we don't see the need (and I hope that won't be a reason after this talk). Some people say, "Well, I find it just too hard to understand the scriptures," but there's so many resources these days. I read four chapters a day and that'll get me through the Bible in a year. If you find that too much, you can just read a chapter a day. You might find it easier to listen to it on mp3 - you can get plenty of versions of that these days. Maybe if you find it hard to understand you need to get a devotional - you can get them sent to your email every day. Find someone who teaches the Bible accurately and they'll walk you through a passage each day. It's also good to listen to sermons - go back re-listen to the 2 Timothy series, or pick another preacher that you like who goes through the Bible. There are many ways to be taking the scriptures in these days, and we need to do it or will become susceptible to the 'Jannes and Jambres' who have twisted the gospel and changed it till it's no longer the gospel.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul says, *"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."* All scripture is God-breathed. It's inspired by God. That doesn't mean that God inspired Paul and that Paul's a very inspired man, a very clever religious man, so when he writes stuff down it's well worth the read... That's not what it's saying. It's saying God breathed those very words through Paul, the very words God wanted written, He breathed through Paul and Paul wrote them down. So Paul, no doubt, is sitting down to write a letter to Timothy and what he wants to say to Timothy, God is breathing through him, through His Holy Spirit, to make sure the exact words that God wants written down are written down. The scriptures, every word, the very words of scripture, are breathed out by God. It's God's Word to us. It's the same Word He breathed into Adam and Eve, the breath of life, and they become living beings. And so He breathes out the scripture to give us the Words of Life; the very Words of Life that we need to live a good life, to live a fulfilled and blessed life. These are the words we need and they're breathed by God for us.

2 Peter 1:20-21 says, *"Above all you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things, for prophecy never had its origin in the human will. But prophets, though humans, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* The words of prophecy in the scriptures didn't start in the human will, they were breathed out by God. These are the very words God wants us to hear. These are the things God says you need to know. And in Isaiah 55:10-11 he says, *"As the rain and snow come down from the heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My Word that goes out from My mouth. It will not return to Me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."* God's words are powerful. Like rain that comes down and produces a crop in the earth, His words are powerful and they will achieve the purpose for which He sent them. They're powerful and living and active and they achieve the task. If we'll take them in daily, they are powerful to get us through this life without being led astray by every 'Jannes and Jambres' that turns up.

Mark 4:26-29 says, *"This is what the kingdom of God is like: a man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain: first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it because the harvest has come."* It says the Word of God is like a seed. It's like a seed that you plant in your heart, and you plant it day-in day-out; and you don't initially see much happening, but as you keep planting the seed that seed starts to grow, and it's slowly growing; and eventually it starts to put up little shoots, and you start to see little shoots come up everywhere, and you're still sowing that Word in your heart, and the seed's slowly growing up; and then it starts to put out leaves and then the kernel comes and the grain comes and eventually you get the full harvest, the full crop. As you continue to plant the seed in your

heart, it produces a crop. It's powerful, it's effective, it's the very words God wants you to hear that you need to know.

Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, *"All scripture is God-breathed and it's useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness."* It's useful for teaching; it tells you the things you need to know. Here's the stuff that God says you need to know to live this life – the stuff you won't know any other way – but you need to know these things and it teaches you those things. That's why it's not enough just to have a little round-table conference among ourselves, because we don't know the things we need to know. They come from the scriptures. The scriptures tell us the things we need to know.

They're also useful for rebuking. So these are the things we need to know, but then it also shows us that these thoughts we have are incorrect. It shows us where our thinking's gone wrong. It shows us what we need to know, it shows us where our thinking has gone wrong, and it corrects that wrong thinking.

But it's also useful for correcting and training in righteousness. It shows us how we should think. It shows us when our thinking's gone wrong. It also shows us how we should live, how we should act, how we should behave. It trains us in righteousness, and it also corrects our behaviour. It shows us how we should be living, behaving, acting, and it shows us when our actions have gone wrong. It says, "You need to be doing this but you need to stop doing that." It shows us how we should think. It shows when our thinking goes wrong. It shows us how we should act; and it shows us when our actions have gone wrong. And it does this so that we might be thoroughly equipped for every good work God has put us on this planet for. He has a plan and a purpose for your life, but the scriptures are what it takes to thoroughly equip you and to prepare you to fulfill your purpose and your task in this life. We're all part of this great plan that Paul's talking about to Timothy, where he passes the gospel onto Timothy who passes it on to the next generation and on it goes, through the generations – and it's come to us now and we have a part to play in this great purpose of God's: spreading the gospel from generation to generation. The scriptures are able to thoroughly prepare us for every good work, so we need to be taking the scriptures in day by day because we live in times when not just the world has gone astray with its thinking, but there are 'Jannes and Jambres' who are bringing this false teaching and false ideas into the church, and it's only through the scriptures that we can thread our way through that maze of false ideas – because the scriptures are thoroughly powerful. They are powerful to change our life, to produce fruit in our life. They're the very words of God and they will help us to live a holy and a fulfilled and a purposeful life.

So I want to encourage you this week: are you reading the scriptures? Are you taking the scriptures in regularly? If you're not, I want to encourage you to think about how could you go about it? How could you fit that into your life? What would be a good way for you to be going about taking the scriptures in regularly? Because if you're not, you're letting the

world shape your brain. The scriptures are powerful to get you through this life and to help you live a fulfilled and purposeful life and to help you to find your true self in Christ.

Let's pray:

Father, we just give you great praise that you sent your Son, Jesus, to give His life on the cross to pay the price for our sin. For all the times we've rejected you and pushed you away, Jesus paid the price for us. He gave His life and then He rose from the dead. And as He rose, He gives us new life as we put our faith in Him, and we just praise you for that. And I thank you that You've spoken to us Your powerful Word, Your powerful scriptures, which are powerful to help us to know how to think, how to live, how to live a holy and a fulfilled life. And I pray for each one of us now, that You'll help us to be able to take the scriptures in on a regular basis, take it in daily, so we can counteract the ideas of the world around us. And Father, I pray that You'll give us a spirit of wisdom and the spirit of revelation so as we take the scriptures in, we'll understand them, and they'll produce powerful effects in our lives. We give You praise that You've given us Jesus, that You've given us Your Word. And I just pray that You'll help us to find our fullness in You through the scriptures. We just praise You for this, in Jesus' name. Amen.