

What is our plumb line?

△ 2 Tim 3:4-17

Intro

We are carrying on with our journey in 2 Timothy

Last week Paul wrote to Timothy about that it is what we do and not what we look like, that is of value to God

Paul spoke about articles of gold, silver, wood and clay

But then what is their dedicated use

Is it ordinary or special use

And similary are we dedicating ourselves to special use for God?

Whatever we think we are or can offer,

So it was about our motivation

Today Paul looks at who and what is our example, our guide line, our plumb line

And he looks at people behaviour to copy

But also at another source of right information

The Last Days?

But the context that Paul is writing is 'the Last Days'

and distressing times

Does that mean that the behaviours he list do not happen?

But we see it all the time!

Does it mean that we are already in the Last Days?

Or even that they have already been and we have been left behind?

None of that

For Paul, the Last Days had already begun

And, yes he expected that Jesus would return imminently

Even in his life time - or in Timothy's life time

And that has not happened

But we still expect Christ to return!

So the last days are not over until he does

And with that these behaviours will not go away until he does

People and behaviours to avoid

Paul is listing people and their behaviours, that we should not copy

And we are to do our best to avoid them, if we recognise these behaviours

Yes, we are to be in the world, and not

Yes, we are to be in the world, and not of the world.

But that does not mean that we want to have close associations with people who behaving like this

And then follows a who list:

² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God

And we think - what is new?

We even see people who are in charge of countries and nations behaving like this

But he finishes with another more subtle category

⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power.

These are perhaps people that are part of our churches and congregations

At least in Paul's context

Because they are more dangerous as they look like they can be trusted, but they cannot

they cannot

As they proclaim a different gospel

They may behave in the seemingly 'right way', but the message that they bring is not!

He then uses an example in the his context, that for us is not politically correct

Gullible women

But he does not mean all women - as there are many examples in his letters that praise women

¹⁰[A woman] who is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

△ 1 Tim 5:10

⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

△ 2 Tim 1:5

And the other thing we have to take into account is the disadvantaged state of the great majority of women, in Paul's time.

Usually with little or no education and often hungry for knowledge

And so easy prey for the wandering teacher with good credentials

Jannus and Jambrus

Paul then compares these people with well-known characters in the Jewish folklore

Jannus and Jambrus are the names of the Egyptian magicians who were able to do the same miracles that Moses and Aaron did in front of Pharaoh

¹¹ Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: ¹² Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.

△ Exodus 7:11-12

²² But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.

²⁰ Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. ²¹ The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt.

△ Exodus 7:20-22

In folklore these magicians were

named Jannus and Jambrus

Like we named the wise men: Balthasar, Melchior and Gaspar

But these names are not in the bible

Why this comparison?

One of the characteristics of the way that Paul and the other disciples proclaimed the Gospel

Was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit

Which included miracles like healing, prophecies, tongues etc.

Paul writes in 1 Cor 2:1-5

2 And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

So as Jannus and Jambrus could also emulate Moses&Aaron miracles, so these preachers also demonstrated a power

They may have done very similar things

But they did these not through the Holy Spirit and Jesus, but by the power of the enemy

Current day

How often have we seen over relatively recent years preachers who have power of speech and/or miracles, but are not from God

Paul says - look at their lives and what they do

And look at what they preach - is it the Gospel - or a slightly different gospel?

Prosperity theology springs to mind..

People to follow and behaviours to copy

Paul himself

Paul puts himself forward as an example

This may feel a bit big-headed in our today's culture

It is one of the reasons that some theologians think this letter is not written by Paul

But posthumously by his close followers

As an example to follow

But on the other hand there is so much frustration in this letter about so called fellow believers

That Paul has to give his credentials time

that Paul has to give his credentials time and time again.

And we know it is true based on Acts and other letters

So we can accept that this letter is of Paul

He is just certain about his achievements

Paul's track record

...my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, 11 persecutions, sufferings

△ v 10

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

Other Christians who are persecuted

Everyone who lives a Godly life in Christ will be persecuted

Maybe not in our time

But villified, ignored, marginalised

In and outside the church

If people carry on with their conviction in the face of difficulties

they must be real

Because the ones who do it for their personal gain would give up!

Read the Bible

Another source is the Bible

In Paul's time it would have been the Old Testament, the Law, the Prophets, and the

Testament: the Law, the Propnets and the Writings

This is the plumb line Timothy and we can measure everything we do and everyone engage with

It is inspired by the Holy Spirit - God himself

"God-breathed"

Useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work

That is the final test: what is the fruit

What do we do with our salvation in Jesus Christ

Do we help build God's Kingdom?

And what do others do

And how can we learn from those who have clearly worked for the Kingdom of God

Conclusions

God wants us - his servants - to be thoroughly equipped for every good work

Using other Christians and the Bible as our plumb line

Avoiding those who clearly do not

And be wary of those who do not
preach the gospel

Or who are in it for their own gain

But what is our motivation?

Are we in it for our own gain

But change heart once Christian
life gets difficult?

Or do we hold on to Jesus,
regardless of the cost

Perhaps then we can also be as
sure of our accomplishments in
Christ at the end of our lives

What is God calling you to?

Amen
