

The Characteristics of The Last Days

2 Timothy 3:1-7

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We are going to look at an amazing text tonight and draw from other portions of Scripture, but this is an unusual passage to look at when we are dealing with the subject of marriage. What it really is, is the end of last week's sermon. Although I went long, there is more that we need to look at. We are going to continue with where we stopped last week at why marriage is so difficult, and this evening the characteristics of the last days is the reason why it is a challenge to be married in these last days.

In 2 Timothy 3:1 Paul says, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." There they are savage, demonic wicked times have come. Why? "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent..." that means that they are without self control, "...fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof:" and Paul tells Timothy, "...from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

We have looked at marriage the way God created it. In Genesis 2 God said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." It is only a man and a wife that can technically become one flesh. Two men cannot become one flesh, they are a mirror of each other. Two women cannot become one flesh, they are a mirror of each other. A man and a woman were made for each other. God created male and female. He said the man leaves father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and the two become one flesh. The Bible says they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed. So we saw that there is in marriage a foundation. There is the severance. There is the permanence, they are glued together. There is the intimacy, they become one flesh, and there is the mystery (Ephesians 5), I speak concerning Christ and the church. The marriage relationship reflects the relationship of Christ with His church. It reflects the relationship of a triune God, three persons, one God. Two persons, one marriage. One unit, one unity, the man and his wife. So that's how God created it, but we also saw that Satan corrupted it.

Satan deceived the woman, she disobeyed God and disobedience brought the fall. You are not going to understand the world we live in unless you understand man is fallen. When you get married, you are a sinner marrying another sinner, and there are going to be challenges and difficulties. We also saw the curse of God. God said to the woman, "Because you have done this thing your desire shall be unto your husband and your husband then will rule over you." Because of the curse, there is this strife and difficulty in the marriage relationship. Now, trust me, we are going to get to God's solution and the answer to the problem. It starts next Wednesday night, you don't want to miss it. We are going to talk about a spirit-filled marriage. I

believe that is the key to a blessed and happy, successful marriage. It is when the Spirit of God regenerates you and gives you His power to die to yourself to love that other person and to walk in the Spirit not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh.

Tonight we look at the characteristics of the last days. Marriage is hard because of the characteristics of the last days. Now, what will characterize these last days, 2 Timothy 3:1, are perilous times. Now that word "perilous" is an interesting word. It means difficult or dangerous. The only other place this word is found in the Bible is in Matthew 8:28. It is used to describe the two demoniacs of Gadara. It is translated there as exceeding fear. You know the story of the demoniac of Gadara, there are actually two of them, but some of the Gospels only focus on one. It was a man who was demon possessed, and he was living in the tombs. He was sometimes chained and would attack people. He was cutting himself with stones. If anyone would walk by that area, he would attack them. They had to put up a sign, "Danger, Demon Possessed Man." If you walked through that area, you became attacked by this man. Well, he encountered Jesus. The demon spoke out of this man and said, "Don't cast us into the deep..." the abyss or the abyssos, "...but let us go into this heard of swine that was nearby." So Jesus told them to go ahead, and all of these demons came out of this man and entered into the pigs. The pigs ran violently, the Bible says, down a steep place, fell into a sea, that is the sea of Galilee and they drowned. They were wiped out. Well, this guy then is transformed and is sitting, clothed and in his right mind at the feet of Jesus. The guys that were keeping the pigs were so freaked out they actually told Jesus to go away, and they didn't want Him around there because they saw the power of God to deliver and set free a man. When you think they would be rejoicing, instead they were filled with fear and kind of upset that they lost their heard which was wiped out in the sea. So, exceeding fears. I said all that to say this, that these perilous times are demonically energized. There is no other explanation for the conditions of our world around us today other than Satan and his demons.

Satan is real. He hates marriage. He hates your marriage. He hates Christians' marriages, and he wants to do all he can to destroy the institution of marriage. As goes marriage, so goes the family. As goes the family, so goes society, our culture, our nation and our world. You destroy marriage, you destroy the family, you destroy our culture and our world. So, we are living in savage, difficult, dangerous demonically energized days, and it is difficult to be married in these last days.

Now, Satan wants to promote in these last days, these demonically energized times that we live in, four perverted loves. I want to point them out to you in this text. I find it fascinating that in this last-day picture here, Paul gives us so much insight to how perverted, what the world calls love, will exist in the end of time. The first is that men will be lovers of themselves. It is very simple, but not simplistic. One of the reasons that marriage is difficult today is because we live in a narcissistic, self-absorbed, "me first" culture. Look at it in verse 2. It says, "Men shall be lovers of their own selves..." Wow. That is radical. Right at the top of the list creating all the problems that we have today in our culture is self love. Now let me tell you, if you get married and you love yourself more than anyone else, you are going to have problems in your marriage, okay. If you love yourself more than anyone else, more than God, and you worship the unholy

trinity; me, myself and I, you are going to have trouble. You hear so much today about love yourself, believe in yourself, check yourself out in the mirror. Isn't it funny? Whenever you're in a group photo, and you see that group photo. Who is the first person you look for in the photo? Then you find yourself and say, "Oh, that's not a good picture of me." You know you're thinking, "I'm looking good, I'm looking good!" Or maybe you're hidden behind somebody else, "Bummer, I'm hidden. They don't see me." We are self centered, we're conceited, we're egotistical. The danger of self-centered marriage is a challenge. Marriage is one of God's purposes or plan or tools to deliver us from selfishness. I talked about how desperately men need to be domesticated, and marriage does that. Marriage matures you.

I look back and it's just amazing how immature I was when I got married. I got married at 25. I wasn't real young, I wasn't real old, but I got married at 25. I was already a pastor. I was already pastoring a congregation in the church, and man, did I have a lot to learn, did I have a lot of growing, did I have a lot of dying to myself. Some people say, "Well, why get married?" I believe that God uses it to develop and mature us, primarily our walk with God, but God uses marriage to stretch, mold and shape us. I sometimes think that when you're looking for somebody to get married to, just realize that God isn't finished with them. There are a lot of single folks with standards that are so high that they never end up getting married. You need to focus on yourself being the person that God wants you to be so that when you meet somebody spiritual, they'll want to marry you. I've met guys that are a bunch of dodo birds and really carnal. I go, "What are you doing?" "I'm looking for a really spiritual girl." I say, "She wouldn't marry you if you found her. Get your act together and maybe she'd be attracted to you." You focus on your walk with God, but you know, nobody is perfect. We're all sinners, and really a whole lifetime together as husband and wife is the time when you grow, change and mature. This is why, again I don't say this to cause anybody hurt or pain, but a lot of times when people bail out on their marriage early on, after maturing years later, they look back and they think, "How foolish was I. What a mistake I made." If I can, I want to encourage you to not make that mistake tonight. Now, God forgives us and God restores the years the canker worm has eaten, but don't be a casualty. Hang in there. Let God use marriage to eliminate selfishness. Jesus said, "If any man come after me...", he has to do what? "...deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." That's a good call to the marriage relationship.

In Philippians 2:3 Paul says, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory;" I love that, "...but in lowliness of mind..." that's humility of mind, "...let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind..." or attitude or outlook, "...be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Now is that not a great verse for marriage? I think that's a marvelous text for marriage. Don't look on your own interests, but look on the interests of others. When you get married, you have somebody else to think about. You have somebody else to be concerned about. You have somebody else to look after, and it's a great opportunity to die to yourself, to take up your cross and follow Jesus Christ. Let nothing be done in your marriage with strife or vainglory, but with humility of mind esteem your marriage partner better than yourself. Don't think about your own interests, but think about the interests of others.

Jesus, verse 5, is our example. Have the same mind or the same attitude or the same outlook that was in Christ Jesus. This is what is called the kenosis passage where it describes Jesus leaving heaven and coming down to earth. Jesus is our example of humility and service. I want to encourage you to bring that into your marriage relationship. Jesus thought equality with God the Father, not something to hold on to, but He emptied Himself. In reality, what He did was divested Himself not of His deity but of the demonstration or display of His deity and His majesty, and He came down to earth and took on humanity in the form of a servant. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. So, I'm saying in this narcissistic, self-centered "me first" culture that we live in, don't buy the lie, don't buy the goods. You know, "If your marriage isn't good for you, if it isn't making you happy, if it isn't fulfilling you, then just bail out and go find someone else." The truth is, you need to die to yourself and you need to consider others, your spouse, to be more important than you are.

In Ephesians 5:28, "So ought men to love their wives...," How? "...as their own bodies..." remember the two become one flesh? "...He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Then he goes on to quote the passage from Genesis; we leave, we cleave, we become one flesh. Do yourself a favor, men, love your wife. He that loves his wife loves himself. No man ever hated his own flesh. I love that in the King James, he nourishes and he cherishes. Do you know what that word means? It means to warm with body heat. Christ cherishes the church, and a husband ought to cherish his wife and die to himself. So ask yourself tonight, "Have I died to myself? Am I willing to consider my marriage partner more important than I am?"

The second perverted love is in verse 2, covetousness, which is the love of money. So, the first was love of self, and the second is love of money, which is covetousness. By the way, I'm back in 2 Timothy 3:2. The term covetous there actually means love of money. Now, how many marriages today struggle over money? It's a big issue. Money becomes an issue. Who spends what, how you spend what, what you can buy, what you can't buy, what did you do with your money. Your money becomes joint money. You can have your little stash if you want. I have a little stash in my sock drawer, but it's not really mine. Sometimes my wife says, "You got any more money in that sock drawer?" "Yeah, but it's for me." "I need it to buy groceries or to get gas." What am I supposed to do? "I need it to buy another surfboard." I'm already starting to sweat right now. I confessed the other day I have 13 in my garage, pray for me. I'm going to have a garage sale, a surfboard garage sale. But, money becomes an issue unless you die to yourself, right? I know in many marriages this has caused a lot of problems.

You know, we have what is called the ten commandments, not the ten suggestions but the ten commandments, and the tenth commandment (what is called the decalogue there) is thou shalt not...anybody know? Thou shalt not covet. This is an interesting commandment because you can commit sin by coveting, and you don't even physically do anything. It is a thing of the heart. You want more than you have. You covet what others have. Thou shalt not covet. First on the list is thy neighbor's wife, in the context. I think it would also stand for thy neighbor's husband or I want a marriage like that, or I want a man like that, or I want things like that.

First Timothy deals a lot with money and the dangers of wealth, and I want you to notice in 1 Timothy 6:5, he's talking about false teachers who think that godliness, verse 5, is the way to get rich. Now, notice what he says in verse 6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world..." have you ever seen a baby born with a Rolex watch on, or a baby born with a wallet, you know, and pays the doctors off, "Thanks for giving birth to me, or helping in this room," and he's paying mom and dad. Naked came I into the world (we call it the birthday suit), naked shall I return from whence I came. Paul says the same thing. He says, "If we have food and clothes (verse 8) let us be content. But they that want to be rich..." you need to understand that in the Greek it should be translated, "They that desire to be rich..." This can destroy your marriage. This can destroy the relationship with your wife or husband and with other people. You make the number one goal and passion and desire of your life to be rich, which is our culture, you, "...fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." Why? Because, verse 10, "For the love of money is the root..." and this is the way it would read, "of all kinds of evil." Now, money itself is not the root of evil, but the love of money and the desire to be rich is the root of all kinds of evil, which they that have "coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."

Now there are some things about wealth and money I want to say in seeking to apply them to your marriage. First, verse 6 teaches us that wealth does not bring contentment. Wealth does not bring contentment. Money can't buy happiness. Have a God-centered, God-focused life. Examine your heart right now as a married or single person and ask yourself, "Is my passion, my goal, to make money to get rich or is it to know God and make Him known?" Now money and wealth in and of itself is not sinful or evil. Jesus didn't say, "You all have to sell everything you have and give it to the poor and just wear a sheet and sit on a hill and wait for the rapture." The Bible does say that we should love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and love our neighbor as our self. The love of money leads to temptation.

Secondly, notice in verse 7, wealth is not lasting. Don't live for things. It doesn't last. Then, in verse 8, he is basically saying that our basic needs are easily met. Our basic needs are easily met. Christian married couples get into this thing of keeping up with the Joneses, trying to impress people you don't like with money you don't have and buying things you don't need—keeping up with the Joneses. May God free us. May God deliver us. So you don't have a fancy car, you don't have a big house, you don't wear fancy clothes, that doesn't matter. These things are not necessarily important for life. In the basic things of food and clothes, let us be content. I think of all that we have that we don't need, like surfboards. Maybe you have a closet full of shoes (let's change the subject quickly), or cars you don't need, or other recreational vehicles you don't need. The basic things in life are met easily.

In verse 10, the love of money leads to temptations which leads to sin and snares. Many people are pierced through with many sorrows. How many wives have been left alone because

her husband is a workaholic, or the wife gets busy outside the home and starts making more money than her husband, which is fine but it can be dangerous because now I don't need the bum. I can buy my own house, I can get my own things, I can have my own apartment and I can do whatever I want. Believe me, it happens. Now, I'm not saying that you should keep your wife in chains or in rags...shove her food under the door so she needs you or something like that. I'm getting myself in all kinds of trouble here tonight. But you need to be careful. The love of money leads to all kinds of temptations and sorrows and sin.

What do we need to do? I'll just mention them. In verse 11, we need to flee covetousness. Flee these things. What things? The things we just read about. In verse 11, we need to follow righteousness and godliness. Thirdly, we need to fight, verse 12. "Fight the good fight of faith." That's a great three-fold ambition for married couples; flee, follow and fight. Flee the things of covetousness, follow after righteousness, and fight the good fight of faith keeping your eyes on Jesus Christ.

Now, there is a third perverted love. First of all, men love themselves, go back to 2 Timothy 3. Secondly, they love things, covetous. Third, we see in verse 3, they are without the love of family. All of these involve a perverted kind of love. They are without family love. This is the clearest application to marriage. We live in a culture today that makes jokes about traditional marriage, puts down the idea of traditional marriage and raising children. A lot of young people today don't want to have children. They feel they are a burden. When the Bible says there in verse 3 that they are without natural affection, if you consult other translations, I think that you'll see that it's true that it should be rendered, without family love. One translation has, without the love of family. This is a characteristic of demonically energized last days, and we see the move today to destroy marriage. I actually believe that the push for same-sex marriage is an attempt to destroy marriage as God created it and as God designed it, because it reflects the glory and the image of God, and Satan hates God. Satan hates mankind and wants to wreck all the havoc and the destruction he can. He knows his time is limited. He knows the hour is late. The Bible says concerning the devil, that he comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. The Bible also says that in the last days they will forbid to marry and that they will be preaching doctrines of demons. Second Timothy 3:3 also says there will be trucebreakers. They will be unforgiving. That is exactly what happens when somebody is without family love, and they break their covenant that they have made in a marriage. When they promise to love that person in sickness and in health, for richer and poorer, till death do us part, so help me God. They vow that before God and witnesses, and yet they are trucebreakers. They are unforgiving. In a few weeks we will get to Matthew 19 where Jesus is asked about the subject of divorce. You know what He says bottom line is in a divorce? He says because of the hardness of your hearts. Divorce is a divine concession to human sin. Jesus described that because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you, he didn't command you. He didn't tell you you had to, but he allowed you to put away your wives, but he said from the beginning, Genesis 2, that was not God's will. That was not God's design. That was not God's purpose.

Notice in verse 3 it says, "...despisers of those that are good." They oppose goodness in any form, any shape, any fashion. We read in Romans 1 last week that those who suppress the

truth of God and are given over to their own lusts, change the glory of God into corruptible things, men with men, women with women, and it says that God gave them over to reprobate minds. Not only did they do those things, but they give their hearty approval to those that do them. So they clap for them. There's a lot of clapping going on in Hollywood right now. God made you a man but you decide you want to be a woman (everyone claps for you) instead of being who God made you and how God designed you in fulfilling your masculinity or your femininity. God made you and designed you that way. We want to rebel against the Creator. That is outright rebellion against the Creator. You say, "I don't like the way God made me. I'm going to reject that and I'm going to make myself in my own image." God made man in His image and likeness. Now man is returning the favor, he's making God in his image and in his likeness rejecting God's will for his life. So they despise those that are good, and they give their hearty approval to those who would do those things.

Here's the fourth and last false love, verse 4. It is, "...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." Now tell me that doesn't take its toll on a marriage relationship. Notice in verse 4 it says that they will be, "...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." In other words, personal pleasure is paramount in their lives. What do you expect? They love themselves. They love money. They don't love family, and they don't love God. They love pleasure. So, it's all about what makes me feel good, what I want to do and how I want to do it, where I want to go and what I want to do. So, today we live in a world that is seeking personal pleasure. Personal pleasure is really the number one passion and goal of the heathen. It is called hedonism. Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure. Solomon had a hedonistic philosophy. He had everything he could ever want and that only intensified his emptiness. He said it's all vanity. It's all vexation of spirit. It's all chasing the wind. It's all empty. Jesus said, "If you seek to find your life, you'll lose it." I'm speaking to married people especially right now. It applies to anyone, singles. If you seek to find your life, you'll lose it. I can't tell you how many times I have had people say, "Well, I gotta find myself. I gotta do what's good for me." Why would you want to find yourself? The moment you do, you will be sickened. You'll be empty, lost, lonely and filled with despair. Remember, Jesus said, "Deny yourself. Die to yourself. Pick up your cross and follow me." You say, "I don't care what God says. I don't care what the Bible says. I just want to do what's good for me. I want to live for pleasure." It's not to say that Christians can't have pleasure. No. When you're pleasing God, and you're living a life that pleases God, then your heart is filled with pleasure. Your heart is filled with joy.

There are days, and I know that I carry a lot of responsibility, and I carry a lot of burden, but there are days that I look around and am absolutely overwhelmed and amazed at God's goodness in my life. I am absolutely amazed! That He saved me by His grace, that He would call me into the ministry, that He would give me an amazing wife, soon to be 38 years, it's been 37 years—I'm pretty sure I got that straight this time. He gave me four amazing children, three amazing son-in-laws and three amazing grandchildren, an amazing church and congregation to be a part of. I remember so well as a young man just saying, "Lord, take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee. I'll go where You want me to go. I'll be what You want me to be. I'll do what You want me to do. I'll say what You want me to say." I remember before Kristy and I were married, I remember thinking of the story of Abraham and Isaac. How Abraham put his

son Isaac on the alter, and I prayed that prayer. I said, "Lord, I put this woman on the alter. I give her to you. I put our marriage on the alter, Lord. If it's not Your will... If it's not Your plan... whatever You want, Lord. I'd love to be her husband. I'd love to marry her, but Lord, Your will be done, not my will be done." How wonderful when we are willing to give that to God. God is then going to give us back a hundred fold and bless our lives. You can't out give God. So, I'm saying that if you'll be faithful and you will trust Him...It doesn't mean there won't be difficult days. It doesn't mean that there won't be heartache or sorrow, but there'll be such great pleasure and joy in the midst of your pain.

Now, I'm going to wrap this up, but I want you to notice in verse 5 that they profess to be religious. It says in verse 5 that, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof..." Paul says, Timothy, get away from those kinds of people. Their Christianity is not real. It's not genuine. There's nothing more important for you and your marriage, if it is going to survive, than for you to have a real genuine loving commitment to God and to one another. Ask yourself, "Am I loving self more than anyone else, more than God or my spouse? Am I loving things? Am I now controlled by them? Am I controlled by the desire and the passion to have more things? Am I living for material things? Have I rejected the love of a wife, the love of a husband, family love? Do I love pleasure more than God?"

This is a quote from one of my favorite authors, Warren Wiersbe. He says this, "In this universe there is God and there are people and things. We should worship God, love people and use things. But, if we start worshipping ourselves, we will ignore God, and start loving things and using people. This is the formula for a miserable life, yet it characterizes many people today. The worldwide craving for things is just one evidence of people's hearts have turned away from God." That is an amazing statement. We need to learn to worship God, love people and use things. I think that as a husband and wife, we can covet with our spouse to live that kind of a life. Instead, we start worshipping ourselves, we ignore God, we start loving things and we start using people. This is when our lives are headed for destruction. And the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. Jesus said, "It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you, it's what comes out, and the reason being is that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Jesus says, "For from within, out of the heart of man perceives evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, evil eye, blasphemy, pride. All these things come from within and defile the man." So, we are going to see that the anecdote or the secret of a blessed, happy, satisfying, fulfilling, long-lasting marriage is going to be our relationship to God, obedience to His Word and the filling of His Holy Spirit. If you haven't trusted Jesus tonight, that's what you need to do. You need to give Him your heart. Trust in Him. He'll forgive your sins and give you the hope of heaven.