

Preach The Word

2 Timothy 4:1-4

Introduction

This letter contains several urgent charges by Paul to Timothy. One leader is passing on vital instructions to the new leader. Paul has urged Timothy to endure abuse for the sake of the gospel (1:6-12); hold fast to Jesus Christ (1:13-18); be strong in the Lord Jesus (2:1-7); remember Jesus is the resurrected Lord (2:8-13); remind the Church about the dangers of false teachers, false doctrines and departing from the foundations of God (2:14-21); flee youthful lusts and follow after the Lord (2:22-26).

This chapter contains a final charge; preach the word (vv.1-4). Reach the world (v.5). We might think about this as Paul's farewell warnings to Timothy. Paul's ministry to the churches has been fruitful and not without difficulty. Paul will give a final testimony (vv.6-8); and make a final request (vv.9; 11-13). Paul will relate a final sorrow (vv.10; 16); Demas has forsaken him, and many of his Roman friends have forsaken him (v.16). But Paul will sing a final hymn of praise, a song for the centuries; a song of deliverance (vv.17-22).

Timothy has been called by God to preach the Word of God. I must state the obvious: the Word of God is not the opinions of men or the philosophies of men or the desires of men. The Word of the Lord is the Divine Revelation of God contained in both the revelation of God; the Bible; and the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. In an earlier letter Paul told Timothy; "This is a faithful saying. . . Christ came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). The gospel of Jesus is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

We live in a world full of messages. On any given day you will be asked to believe something, to buy something, or perhaps even to become something different. We want to hear and sing songs of hope.

Paul knows there is only one message that provides a permanent hope, a lasting hope, an eternal hope. In the last section Paul reminded Timothy that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (3:16-17). This is what Timothy has been called to preach. Doctrine—what is right; reproof—what is not right—correction—how to get right—instruction in righteousness—how to stay right.

If what you are preaching isn't right; doesn't make you right; help you stay right; you are not doing it right.

Preach The Word: The Lord Jesus Is Watching! (v.1)

2 Timothy 4:1 (NKJV) I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:

Do these words sound familiar? In 1 Timothy 5:21 Paul used almost the exact language; "I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice doing nothing with partiality." Here in this verse Paul adds references to judgment and Christ's return. Could it be that Paul's own nearing death caused his thoughts to focus on Christ's coming kingdom?

1. The Lord Jesus who will one day judge the living and the dead; that is Jesus will return and he will find me either preaching the gospel or not preaching the gospel. If I die Jesus will judge me in part

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on whether or not I preached or failed to preach the gospel. **If Jesus has called me to preach and I fail to preach he will demand an explanation.**

2. **Jesus will return in glory. The preacher is called to be prepared for his coming. The implication being the preacher will either be prepared or unprepared, embarrassed and ashamed or ready to be held accountable for all that has been said and done in the opportunities and pulpits that have been provided.**

3. Jesus will set up His Kingdom. The preacher, the minister, will be a citizen in that future Kingdom. His place in that Kingdom will in part be based on the preacher's faithfulness in this world.

Preach the Word (v.2) because God is watching. Preach the Word because Jesus is coming. Preach the Word because Jesus will judge. Our service does not go unnoticed. Preachers pray that hundreds, maybe thousands; might hear and respond to their sermons. Only a handful of preachers believe that millions might hear what they have to say.

Paul wants every preacher to know that God is watching and Jesus is paying close attention!

Preach The Word: For Good Reason (v.2)

2Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

Preach the Word in light of eternity. This is perhaps the best reason to make sure you are preaching the Word. This is the revelation of God concerning Christ Jesus. This is the gospel. This is the salvation message.

What is the difference between preaching and teaching? The focus of teaching is the content of the material. The focus of preaching is to create a sense of urgency to believe and act on the message.

All preaching includes teaching. And sometimes teaching may include elements of preaching.

John Calvin wrote; "Preaching is the public exposition of Scripture by the man sent from God, in which God himself is present in judgment and in grace."

Wow. Preaching isn't really preaching unless it is public—and powerful. If the speaker is not sent by God or God is not present in judgment and grace—then the most gracious thing we might call it is a speech or a TED talk or a pod-cast or something else.

The verb Paul uses translated *be ready is ephistemi*—"be instant" here and "is at hand" in verse 6 (same word). It can literally be translated "be on hand". In plays there are often 'understudies' who must be prepared at a moments notice to assume the role.

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What does the expression translated in season or out season mean? We think winter, spring summer or fall! But there is more to these two Greek words (*eukairos*; *a kairos*). In one sense it is a reference to time. In another sense it is a reference to whether or not it is convenient for the person hearing. We might think in terms of welcome or unwelcome; convenient or inconvenient, on duty or off duty. Whether opportunity is made or opportunity seized!

There seems to be good reason to believe that Paul practiced what he himself preached. Take advantage of every situation. Make an advantage of what might not seem to be advantageous.

Paul was nearing the end of his remarkable ministry. No one knew better than Paul that the time for bold, passionate, public ministry is short lived.

What elements are included in the urgent proclamation of the gospel? Urgency. Boldness. Patience. Persistence. Timothy is instructed to patiently correct those who are in error; explaining the truth, helping his hearer to understand the truth and accept the truth. This is the meaning of the word **convince**. **Preaching should be persuasive. It calls for the hearer to make a decision about something.** The servant of Jesus may be called upon to prove or convince and refute false claims.

Preaching includes rebuke. Confront what is false and replace what is false by what is true.

In what sense? For those who are sinning to cease sinning and *explain* the need for repentance from sin. **If a preacher neglects or ignores the topic of sin and the need for repentance it is not really preaching.**

Preaching includes exhortation (*exhort*). This is a word that is ripe with encouragement. We are to encourage those who have come to faith and are growing in their faith with the Lord Jesus Christ. We encourage sinners to believe and saints to keep going forward in Christ!

John Newton said, "My grand point in preaching is to break the hard heart and to heal the broken the one."

Can one sermon do both? If it's a gospel sermon. Someone said, "Preach not because you have to say something, but because you have something to say."

Martin Luther put it this way; "I preach as though Christ was crucified yesterday, rose from the dead today, and was coming back tomorrow." Can you preach with that sense of urgency?

The Puritan Preacher Richard Baxter said, "I preached as never to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

In this passage Paul is a dying man. He has every reason to believe Timothy will live and have have a long and fruitful ministry. One translation has Paul saying to Timothy; "I solemnly urge

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you to preach the message, to insist on proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), to convince, reproach, and encourage, as you teach with all patience” (GNB).

With all long-suffering (or patience). Patience is the glue that connects Pastor to sermon and Pastor to people. Be patient with both sinner and saint. Be patient with people.

The Pastor’s teaching is based on God’s Word; sound doctrine or wholesome doctrine.

The Lord Jesus in one of His post-resurrection appearances told his disciples that the words which he spoke while he was with them must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning him (see Luke 24:44). In Luke’s gospel we read “And *He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.* 46 *Then He said to them, “Thus is it written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,* 47 *“and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* 48 *“And you are witnesses of these things.”*”

The Lord Jesus explains the meaning of His resurrection is found in the Scriptures! You should be surprised. The risen Lord was standing right in front of them! Even then the first line of belief does not lie in their eyes or their experience but the Word of God. The entire Old Testament taken together reveals God’s plan in Jesus. The Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms were the three main divisions in God’s revelation to the people of Israel. The Messiah must suffer (Psalm 22:1-21; Isaiah 53:1-9). The Messiah must rise from the dead the third day (Psalm 16:10; Jonah 1:17; Hosea 6:2). Repentance and remission of sins must be preached in His name to the nations. This whole chapter of Luke 24—**is full of opened things; an open tomb (v.12); an open home (v.29), OPENED EYES (v.31); opened Scriptures (v.32), opened understanding (v.45); and opened heavens (v.51).**

No wonder D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said; “Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.”

The Lord Jesus felt it necessary that they understand the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus interpreted the Scriptures in light of His suffering and His resurrection from the dead. With that in mind Jesus brings up the twin topics of repentance and remission of sins. This must be preached. In His name. It should begin in Jerusalem and end with the nations!

The truth is that no human being will ever enter heaven who is not first convinced that he or she deserves to be in hell. Matthew Henry wrote “*Repentance if it be true strikes at the root and washes the heart from wickedness*”.

In the past evangelists like D.L. Moody preached “Man is born with his face turned away from God. When he truly repents, he is turned right toward God; he leaves his old life.”

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Paul anticipates a time when that kind of preaching will be the exception, rare, precious, unwelcome.

Preach The Word: This Is The Season (vv.3-4)

*3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;
4and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

In this chapter Paul gives two compelling reasons to accept and embrace the charge. Paul anticipates a genuine revulsion for soul stirring, life giving, gospel preaching; the second is that the time of Paul's departure is at hand (vv.5-8).

Paul consistently exposes the false teacher, the false teacher's motive and the false teacher's doctrine. But Paul knows the false teacher's damage would be far less—if he or she does not have a willing audience. **But Paul anticipates a time when large numbers of people, who crave community, who are hard wired by God to worship and fellowship desire worship and fellowship without Christ, and without a cross, and without suffering, and without personal obedience to Jesus Christ.**

Sometimes the fault lies with the Preacher. Sometimes the fault lies with the listener.

Paul sets the scene in the future. "For the time will come".

Paul warns of a time when people no longer want to listen to gospel preaching because the gospel preacher's message to repent of sin and receive Christ and follow Christ and obey Christ would sound absurd and taste sour.

A new generation would demand teaching centered around *their own desires*. That word desires reflects a kind of selfish lust. The lust for inoffensive preaching. The lust for gratifying or novel preaching. This lust for inoffensive preaching is easily found so called by preachers who are cowards. **Cowards. Cowards who are more concerned about offending you than offending God. Cowards who refuse to bring up the subject of sin or the need to repent of sin. Cowards who refuse to defend life and promote religious freedom. Cowards who are afraid you will take your tithes and offerings to another church who will say what you really want to hear.**

The new message must steer clear *from the truth*. But nature abhors a vacuum. And our fallen nature is no exception. In that dark empty hole of the unfulfilled life apostate people will rush to hear and believe *fables*.

The expression "because they have itching ears" is most expressive. The specific word is found only here in the Greek New Testament. It appears to be a figure of speech that means to scratch

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or tickle. Some Greek scholars (Arndt and Gingrich) think it means a figure of speech for curiosity; people who look for spicy or juicy bits of information; or people who want to have their ears tickled (Weymouth).

The Preacher talks over my head. The preacher keeps talking about sin. The preacher makes me feel bad. The Preacher is judgmental. The Preacher is boring.

And the message? Frightening. Terrifying. The Preacher relentlessly declares sin is a terrible problem that left unchecked and ignored results in eternal punishment. The Preacher says Jesus loves me and is willing to forgive me but that I will need to trust Jesus and allow Jesus to be my Savior.

The false teacher's strange myths and fables (1 Timothy 1:4) make sense, seem true, and make me feel comfortable. The harsh reality of the Gospel makes the soft serve ice cream of the false teacher much more palatable.

What are some examples of fables that have been embraced by a lost and dying world? The fable of evolution. The idea that the universe and all living things are a part of unplanned, unguided, undirected, random processes. The fable that human beings are descendants of lower life forms through billions of years.

William MacDonald wrote about this verse; "The lust for inoffensive preaching will cause people to turn their ears away from truth to myths. It is a poor exchange—to sacrifice truth for fables—but this is the wretched reward of those who refuse sound doctrine" (*Believer's Bible Commentary*; p.2125).

We live in a world where the critic, the cynic, believes your Bible is the fable. Your Bible is the myth. Your Bible is a historical concoction of inadmissible assertions that can't possibly be true. Your Jesus if He ever existed can't possibly serve as sin's substitute.

The historical Jesus and the stubborn truth that He died on the cross and rose from the dead continues to plague the casual person that the claims might in fact be true. The unbeliever says "It can't be true." The make-believer says, "It might be true." The sincere seeker says; "What if it's true." The convinced believer says; "Oh My Lord! It is true! Jesus died and rose from the dead. Jesus is alive right now. Right here. If Jesus is all that the Bible claims, He can forgive my sin and cleanse my heart. **Satan says; "Your heart and your life has been broken in a way that can never be fixed." Jesus says; "That's not true. I have come that you might have life and life more abundant (John 10:10). "I am the good shepherd who gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one Shepherd" (John 10:16).**

Conclusion

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Warren Wiersbe told a generation of Pastors; “A sermon isn’t a picture on the wall, hanging there for folks to admire. It isn’t even a window in the wall, giving people a glimpse of a beautiful life that’s beyond their reach. The sermon is a door that opens onto a path that leads the pilgrim into new steps of growth and service to the glory of God” (*Preaching & Teaching with Imagination; p. 218*).

It’s not preaching unless the sinner hears the gospel and is given an opportunity to experience hope. It’s not preaching unless the pilgrim saint sees Jesus and heaven just ahead. It’s not Biblical preaching if we fail to see Jesus crucified for sin and risen from the dead; alive and able to save.