

MBC – 4/25/2021 Pastor Doug Thompson preaching
 2 TIMOTHY – THE LAST WORDS OF PAUL
“Preach the Word”
 2 Timothy 4:1-5

- 2 Timothy 3:16–4:5 ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (Therefore) ¹I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Review and context: how will Timothy continue Paul’s work?

I’ve called this series on 2 Timothy, “The Last Words of Paul,” because he knows that his earthly life will soon be over. He will soon be face-to-face with the Lord Jesus whom he served so faithfully for over 30 years without any vacation or sabbatical. And his great, overwhelming concern as he writes to Timothy is that he will continue the ministry of the Gospel after Paul is gone.

- When we were with our grandsons in Idaho we went with them to AWANA and I watched as they ran the relay races. The team that won wasn’t necessarily the one with the fastest runners, but the one that could pass the baton without dropping it!

That’s what Paul wants from Timothy: to take up the Gospel, and keep running, and pass it on to faithful men who will be able to pass it to others also (2Tim2.2) until Jesus comes again. He can’t afford to take a break or flake out. He sums up Timothy’s charge in v.5: *“fulfill your ministry:”* bring it to completion, Timothy. Don’t stop short. Do it all, all your life, to the very end.

- And there is not one word of comfort that it will be easy or get any easier. From the moment Paul planted Timothy in Ephesus, he had opposition: false-teachers who came from the outside, and false-teachers who rose up from within their own church elders. He says here that many in the flock wouldn’t tolerate sound doctrine, and would rather listen to myth than truth. And empire-wide persecution of Christians was ramping up – that’s why Paul is on death row – and people were defecting from the faith right and left to save their own skin.

How in the world is Timothy going to keep his head and keep going?

- It’s *all here* in these 5 verses. This passage speaks to any man who would desire to shepherd the flock of God. And I pray that God would use this Word, this morning, to call some men to the ministry of proclaiming God’s Word. Even if they happen to be my grandson who listens to grandpa’s sermons!

But God is going to speak to all of us this morning because *every* child of God is called to the work of the Gospel ministry – without exception. So *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

I’m going to show you 4 things that the preacher must remember—

I. Remember the seriousness of your charge.

Listen to Paul's tone here. He couldn't be more serious and solemn. And that's just the way Timothy heard these words—

- 2 Timothy 4:1 ¹I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus – Stop. This is legal terminology. It's like he has his own hand on the Bible, saying, "God is my witness, Timothy, in the charge I am giving you!" "And I give you this charge in the presence of --
- ". . . God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:"

The motivation for Timothy's ministry goes past this age to the next age—

1.) Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead. I.e, every person Timothy preaches to will stand before Christ as the Judge: to those who rejected Christ and His Gospel, the sentence will be eternal judgment, but for those who received Christ and His Gospel, they do not come into judgment, but have already passed from death to life.

- Do you see how *serious* the Gospel ministry is? It's not about having a happier life and nicer friends. It's a matter of where you will spend eternity. Beloved, the church is about preparing people for the next life. What could be more important than that? And even more so when there is a virus going around that can hasten that day! It's no time for the church to retreat and hide. Richard Baxter preached during a great plague in the 17th century. He said, "I preached as never sure I would preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

Those words ring in my ears: "A dying man, to dying men," because *I am, and you are!* And every shepherd will give account to Christ for His blood-bought sheep at Jesus' appearing—

- James 3:1 ¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.
- Hebrews 13:17 says that Christ's under-shepherds "keep watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account."

So Paul reminds Timothy: "Remember that your ministry takes place in the sight of the One to whom you and all of your flock will give account. When Jesus appeared the first time it was to save, when He appears the second time, it will be to complete that salvation for His people, but to punish all unbelievers."

*Doesn't that raise the stakes of ministry? Is there any place for lightweight, superficial, man-pleasing, weak-sauce preaching and ministry? None. Everything we do as a church whether it's weeping together or rejoicing and celebrating together should be done with earnestness and seriousness—

Brethren, see poor sinners round you
slumbering on the brink of woe;
Death is coming, hell is moving
can you bear to let them go?
See our fathers and our mothers

and our children sinking down;
Brethren, pray, and holy manna
will be showered all around.

So Paul has Timothy's attention: "Timothy never forget how serious your ministry is!" And second—

II. Remember the priority of your ministry.

And here it is, in 3 words—

A. What to do: *preach the Word.*

"*Preach the Word.*" Why? Because—

- 2 Timothy 3:16–17 ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Preach the Word because, *what the Bible says, God says*. Preaching lets God speak rather than man, because it declares God's own Word. Preaching the Word brings us under the Lordship of Christ, the Head of the church. How does Jesus lead and feed and guide His church? First and foremost: through the preaching of God's Word.

This isn't all the shepherd does, but it's the most important thing he does. It must be his first priority, because everything else in his own life and in the lives of his flock, flows from the preaching of God's Word. It is God's Word alone that sanctifies the believer and is sufficient to equip him with all he needs for life and godliness.

Think back to our study of Acts. The Apostles were faced with a very practical problem: some of the widows felt they were being neglected, which led to hurt feelings, resentment, no doubt, gossip. . . typical church stuff, right? But they had the holy boldness to tell the church in Jerusalem—

- Acts 6:2–4 "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. (You all choose some godly men to handle this) ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

And this wasn't insensitive, it was the most loving thing they could do because "*man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God!*" Whatever else a church does, the preaching of God's Word should be front and center. Not programs, and activities, not even outreach or missions, or meeting needs, because all of this flows from hearing God speak to us through His Word! And Paul says to *preach* the Word.

- "Preach" is that Gk. word *kerusso* which means to herald it – announce it as news – shout it out as a living word from the living God. There is urgency to it. There is authority to it. Preaching isn't debating or dialoging. There is a time and place for that – we do that in our home studies. But preaching is a *monologue*, and God is the One speaking! When the Word is preached, we sit in humility and silence to receive His Word. Honestly, beloved, even as I am the one speaking, I am in that same posture.

And when Paul said “preach the Word,” he meant all of it. Remember what he told these same Ephesian elders in—

- Acts 20:27 ²⁷for I did not shrink from declaring to you *the whole counsel of God*.

All of it, as God gave it to us. This is what we call *expository preaching*: book by book, verse by verse, explaining and applying the passage. I’ll never forget having lunch with Jay Adams, a great preacher, author, and theologian. And he said, “If you want power in your preaching, make the Holy Spirit’s point in the passage, the point of your sermon!” That’s the definition of “expository preaching.” And when you preach that way, you avoid getting sidetracked by your own pet doctrines and issues.

- And all of this goes back to 3:16-17: If we believe that the Bible is God’s revelation of Himself, then we need all of it: every book, chapter, verse, and word, don’t we? The whole Bible makes whole Christians! But if I try to cherry-pick what I think you need to hear, then I’m saying I know better than God. I am censoring God.

Charles Spurgeon said, “I would rather speak five words out of this book than 50,000 words of the philosophers. If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God’s Word into our sermons.”

*So to any man who aspires to be a pastor I would say what Paul said to Timothy back in 2:15 ¹⁵*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* That means, sweat in the study, then sweat in the pulpit – then stand back and watch the Word do its work. Then he tells Timothy *how* to preach God’s Word—

B. How to do it.

1.) In season and out of season.

That means that you preach it when it’s popular, and you preach it when it’s unpopular. When you’re preaching to a crowd or to a camera. When people want to hear the Word and when they don’t – as in vv.3-4. You preach the Word when you are on a spiritual high, but you still preach it when you are discouraged and low. You preach even when you have COVID, and have to sit down to do it. It’s your job, it’s your calling from God. It’s what you do. But it’s also a holy compulsion. You *have* to speak God’s word. Paul said to the Corinthians, *“Woe to me if I don’t preach the Gospel.”* Jeremiah *always* preached out of season. He said—

- Jeremiah 20:9 ⁹If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”

Like brave pastor James Coates up in Edmonton, who was thrown into jail for preaching the Word – went right back to preaching as soon as he was released, and then when the govt. put a chain link fence up around his church, he gathered the church in a secret location and kept right on preaching! That’s what it means to preach the word in season and out of season.

- On Thursday I got an email from our brother Stephen Williams in India. Most of you remember that we have prayed for the man his church sent out and supports who is in the north east part of India. This man and his family have been attacked and persecuted for preaching the Gospel – to the point that they sent their 6 year old daughter to a boarding school just so she would be

safe. Stephen's letter asked for prayer for this man and his wife: "details are sketchy, but the same group that has been hurting them today entered their home and beat them with iron rods. It sounded like he has broken bones, and his wife has a head injury. It was a planned attack, there will be legal harassment as well."

And Stephen said that as he talked to this brother on the phone, there was no fear in his voice. Beloved, when you are obeying the will of God in your life, you have nothing to fear! Like the hymn says, "The flame shall not hurt you, I only design, your dross to consume, and your gold to refine!" Preach the Word, do it in season and out of season, and as you do—

2.) "Reprove, rebuke, and exhort."

And isn't that just what God's Word does? It is "*profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness.*" If God's Word is faithfully preached – all of it, it will confront His people with their sins, and it *will* call them to repent and change course. You don't have to force it in your sermons, and you dare not leave it out of your sermons.

It's not my job to say, "Our church family needs to hear a series of convicting sermons," or "I think we need to hear some encouraging sermons." No, my job is to preach God's Word and let it do its work on His people, because God knows your hearts, and I don't! And this is why I have told you to have your antennae up when you see churches that do a whole lot of topical sermons – that's a signal that the pastor is preaching what *he* thinks his people need to hear – or maybe what his people have told him they want to hear. But *God* knows what His people need to hear – and it's the whole counsel of God!

- I read stuff like this on church websites under "What to expect:" (that's a very common tab on church websites) "When you show up here on a Sunday you will notice the atmosphere is casual, the people are friendly, the music is upbeat and contemporary, and the sermons are positive and uplifting!"

If you read that, it's an admission of guilt: that pastor is unfaithful to his call to preach the Word, because sometimes, God's Word cuts us open and exposes our sins. Sometimes it lifts us up and we feel the cool breezes of heaven, but other times we feel the flames of hell on our feet. But it is always exactly what we need to hear. I love the illustration John MacArthur has always used of the preacher. He says, "I'm like a waiter: My job is just to deliver the meal to the table, and not mess it up along the way!"

But Paul does give Timothy two heart-attitudes that every preacher needs to have as he delivers the Word—

3.) With complete patience and instruction.

This is so important: We have to give the Word time to do its work in the lives of God's people. Preachers are like farmers: they sow the seed, but only God can cause the growth. Impatience is a lack of trust in God's timing.

But Paul also says, preach the Word "*with all patience and teaching.*" Give the biblical support for what you are preaching – make the case from God's Word. We saw this over and over with Paul in the book of Acts: he would preach the Word – declare it – but he would also teach and reason from the Scriptures. And biblical preaching should always include teaching.

- I think a test of whether or not a man is doing his job in the pulpit is this: is the flock becoming more *biblically literate*. Are they learning their Bibles? Every Sunday they should leave with more theology and doctrine under their belts. And I'll take it step further: after hearing how the preacher handles the Scriptures, they should leave better equipped to study the Bible on their own.

My advice to young preachers is, with every sermon, put as much Bible as you can into it!

In v.3 we see why Paul is so serious and urgent in what he says to Timothy: it's because he knows the context in which he will be preaching—

III. Remember to please God, not man.

- 2 Timothy 4:3 ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,

Now if you remember what we saw in 3:1-5, Paul was describing a present reality that would become even worse in the future – and that's true here too. Timothy was being charged to preach God's Word in a world in which there is no promise of eager response from God's people!

Well that's cheery news!

But it's always been true: many people will not endure – *tolerate* – sound teaching, for the simple reason that sound teaching exposes their sins. And that's not comfortable. Is it? And all God's people said, "Amen." Paul said, "Preach the Word anyway." He said that to Jeremiah—

Jeremiah was just a teenager when God sent him to give Judah the last warning before He sent them into captivity in pagan Babylon. And then He adds this—

- Jeremiah 7:27 ²⁷"So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you.

He preached for 40 years, and saw no fruit – talk about preaching "out of season." Same thing with Isaiah. He was to tell the people—

- Matthew 13:14–15 "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive."

Preach the Word anyway. You say, "Even when it's not doing anything?" Oh, it's doing something. God's Word is always doing something! It *always "accomplishes its purpose and succeeds in the thing for which He sends it"* (Isa.55:11). Sometimes God sends His Word so that those who are blind may see. And sometimes He sends it so that those who think they see, may become blind. You just speak the Word and trust God to use it to fulfill His own purposes.

- And beloved, that's not just for preachers, that for every one of us. Speak God's Word, regardless of how people seem to hear it or respond to it. We don't know how God is using it their hearts. But it never returns void.

I want you to look again at v.3. Paul isn't putting the blame on false teachers here. He is putting the blame on the people for listening to them – do you see that?

- ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having *itching ears* they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,

It's supply and demand: people *want* teachers who will preach to their flesh – and they are out there, and ready to oblige, right? What are “itchy ears?” Is there a prescription for that? It's when people turn from sound teaching that exposes their sins, and they turn to those weak-sauce preachers of pablum who tell them only what they want to hear. Again, this was true in Jeremiah's time—

- Jeremiah 6:14 ¹⁴They (the false prophets) have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace. And God said—
- Jeremiah 5:30–31 ³⁰An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: ³¹the prophets prophesy falsely, and . . . my people love to have it so!”

And people love to have it so – today. Amen? I won't give you all the examples. You know who they are: they fill auditoriums with 10's of thousands of people, and they come out wearing their \$5,000 sneakers, and designer jeans to put on their show. And people laugh and applaud. And maybe the Scriptures are even read – but they aren't explained and applied as Paul is charging preachers to do. “And the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.”

- And most times in Scripture, it's those preachers who are to blame for their disobedience. But here, it's those in the congregation who are to blame, because they are getting what they asked for.

I actually think that some of these preachers have deluded themselves into believing that they are having a great ministry because of the crowds they can gather. Let me read you something that just blows me away, every time I read it, that describes what is actually going on in so many of these huge auditoriums on Sunday mornings right here in America—

- Ezekiel 33:31–33 ³¹And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. ³²And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it.”

Wow. So what is Timothy to do, when he has people in his church who are just like this? Put out his resume' and see if he can find a church where the people will respect his leadership and listen to expository preaching?

No. Preach the Word, in season, and out of season. Stay right where you are in Ephesus, at that imperfect church. God has His people there, and His Word is at work in them in mighty ways that you can't even see. So, #4—

IV. Remember the commitment required.

- 2 Timothy 4:5 ⁵As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Stay the course, Timothy. Hang tough. Even if the flock is going through turmoil – or even a pandemic—

1.) Be sober-minded. I.e., keep your head when the people in your flock are not. You be stable and calm, and don't be thrown off course by criticism and controversies.

I can't tell you how many times over 37 years of being a pastor people have said to me, "Oh, pastor Doug, the church is in an uproar! People are talking. People are not happy with this and that. People are talking about leaving. Oh, oh. . ." And yes, whenever I hear that I pray, "Lord, teach me! Humble me." And if something needs to change, then you change it. But if you're on course and doing what God commands you to do, then you *don't* change – you dare not change, for anything or anyone. Shepherds must keep their heads, even when the sheep don't.

2.) Endure suffering. It's going to come, and you do a whole lot better when you expect it, amen? And when it comes because of the truth of God's Word, don't succumb to the temptation to compromise it or mute it to avoid more suffering.

- Again I think of GraceLife Church up in Edmonton, Canada, where their pastor was in jail for weeks, and now the govt. has surrounded their church with a chain-link fence so that they literally can't get into their church – that's persecution, and that's suffering for the Gospel. And God doesn't promise His people that it will go away. He says, "endure it." And He gives this promise to our brothers and sisters up there. And to you and me—
- 1 Peter 5:10 ¹⁰And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

3.) Do the work of an evangelist. He means that in Timothy's preaching of God's Word, to always point people to salvation in Jesus Christ. All preaching should be Gospel-centered preaching because Christ is the focal point of all of Scripture. Jesus said that all the Scriptures speak of Him, if we understand them correctly. Let me read a famous quote from Spurgeon—

- "I believe that those sermons which are fullest of Christ are the most likely to be blessed to the conversion of the hearers. Let your sermons be full of Christ, from beginning to end crammed full of the gospel. As for myself, brethren, I cannot preach anything else but Christ and His cross, for I know nothing else, and long ago, like the apostle Paul, I determined not to know anything else save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. People have often asked me, "What is the secret of your success?" I always answer that I have no other secret but this, that I have preached the gospel,—not about the gospel, but the gospel,—the full, free, glorious gospel of the living Christ who is the incarnation of the good news. Preach Jesus Christ, brethren, always and everywhere; and every time you preach be sure to have much of Jesus Christ in the sermon. You remember the story of the old minister who heard a sermon by a young man, and when he was asked by the preacher what he thought of it he was rather slow to answer, but at last he said, "If I must tell you, I did not like it at all; there was no Christ in your sermon." "No," answered the young man, "because I did not see that Christ was in the text." "Oh!" said the old minister, "but do you not know that from every little town and village and tiny hamlet in England there is a road leading to London? Whenever I get hold of a text, I say to myself, 'There is a road from here to Jesus Christ, and I mean to keep on His track till I get to Him.'" "Well," said the young man, "but suppose you are preaching from a text that says nothing about Christ?" "Then I will go over hedge and ditch but what I will get at Him." So must we do, brethren; we must have Christ in all our discourses, whatever else is in or not in them. There ought to be enough of the gospel in every sermon to save a soul."

That's good advice for all of us, amen? Whatever ministry God has given to you: do the work of an evangelist: always be ready to give an account for the hope that is in you. Always be ready to point people to Christ. And this last phrase sums it all up—

4.) Fulfill your ministry. Complete it. Finish it. Don't run away from it. The glitz and glam preachers are just a flash in the pan. But Paul says, "Stay the course. Be in it for the long haul."

Do you know the average length of time that a pastor stays at a church? 4 years. That's not fulfilling your ministry. But I often remind myself what Jesus said – *often*—

- John 10:12–13 ¹²He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

Dig in. Stay put, stay faithful. Fulfill your ministry. John Calvin said this—

- "The more determined men become to despise the teaching of Christ, the more zealous should godly ministers be to assert it and the more strenuous their efforts to preserve it entire, and more than that, by their diligence to ward off Satan's attacks."

Count Zinzendorf, the leader of the Moravian brethren summed it up:
"Preach the Gospel. Die. Be forgotten."

But the Word of God will live on in those who have heard you speak it.