

I don't know about you, but goodbyes are particularly difficult for me. My wife and I are in the process of saying goodbye to something. We've been spending a lot of time with our girls, trying to make as many memories as we can because we are saying goodbye to our family four. Soon we will be a family of five. Our son is due any day now.

I try to avoid goodbyes. Sometimes, I'm successful. If you asked me, I couldn't particularly tell you why I have so much trouble with them. I'm not sure if it's the difficulty that comes with change. Or maybe it's the knowledge that with each small goodbye, another chapter is complete. Maybe it's just that there's so much weight in saying goodbye, because you know it's these small final moments you have with someone that might leave the strongest impression. No matter the difficulties you've had in the past, a joyous goodbye can cover over so much that went wrong. But whatever the reason, goodbyes aren't my strong suit.

I preached a funeral yesterday that was so beautiful. The lady who had passed had lived a long, full life. She had placed her faith in Christ long ago. Her children, sitting in the front row, were a demonstration of God's grace in her life. They also are believers. After the service, we left the chapel and they gathered family members around outside and three of her great grandchildren released doves into the air to represent the Triune God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It was amazing how these doves flew in unison with one another. Then the daughter released a fourth dove, representing her mom. And the bird flew off to meet the first three and, gathering together in the air above us, they flew off in the same direction. I had never seen something like that after a funeral – it was beautiful. What an amazing way to remember and say goodbye. But in the midst of the beauty, the smiles during the fond memories, the funny stories, and the release of doves, there was still a tinge of grief, of mourning. What a strong mix of emotions.

Saying goodbye to someone has to be so difficult, so I can't imagine the emotions going through Paul's mind as he began the final chapter in his final letter to Timothy. This was it – these were Paul's final words. He was in prison in Rome; he was dying. We don't know for certain if Timothy made it back to see Paul before his death, so what we have here in this chapter is the closest thing we have to Paul's goodbye.

Everything we've read in 2 Timothy up until this point in time culminates with the first five verses of chapter four. Paul takes everything he's written and reminded Timothy about and sums it up right here. Paul began chapter one reminding Timothy of his heritage – the faith that had been passed down from his grandmother to his mother to him. Paul tells Timothy in chapter one to fan into flames the gift of God that had been granted to him not just through his family, but also through Paul's ministry. He tells Timothy to not be ashamed of the gospel. No matter what comes, no matter what the Roman government does, no matter what suffering befalls Timothy, guard the gospel. There is a pattern of doctrine that has been passed down from Christian to Christian, over generations and centuries for 2,000 years and Timothy was a part of that passing of the baton in the early church. Guard that doctrine – the gospel – and pass it safely on to the next generation.

He goes on to remind Timothy of how important it is to be disciplined as a believer. He uses metaphors of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer to illustrate what true discipline looks like in the life of someone who follows Christ. And the focus of the discipline – the central figure of the Faith – is Jesus Christ, Himself. Jesus is the reason Paul endures suffering. He proclaims the glory of our Lord, reminding Timothy that even when we are faithless, Jesus is faithful. And when we endure, we reign with Him.

And after Paul reminds Timothy of all of these things – of his heritage, his faith in Christ, and the gospel, He tells Timothy to remind everyone else of these things, too. He tells Timothy to remind everyone in the church to not get too involved with quarrels and needless controversies, but instead to work together in unity, pursuing righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Paul writes that everyone needs to cleanse themselves of what is dishonorable in order to be useful to God for every good work.

Paul reminds Timothy that it is so important for him to cleanse himself and pursue righteousness because the church existed in the context of a culture full of people who were lovers of self. Because we live in a culture whose focus is on self and not God, we have to build healthy relationships with other mature believers where true accountability can flourish. We have to remember that it is during times of resistance to our faith we will find ourselves growing in our walk with Christ. And Paul reminds Timothy that those who trust in Christ are equipped for every good work through God's word – the Bible.

And all of this leads right up to our passage today, 2 Timothy 4:1-5. These five little verses encapsulate the entire letter thus far and constitute Paul's final charge to Timothy. In this small passage, we see Paul issue nine different imperatives to Timothy – nine different things Paul tells Timothy to remember to do in his ministry. And these aren't just simple recommendations; they are emphatic instructions. So, as you read these verses, don't read them apart from the depth of emotion that Paul must be feeling as he writes these words. Paul is saying goodbye, and this is his final reminder to Timothy. Read along with me:

"I 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: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For 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, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Paul manages to take everything and boil it down to these verses here. And look how he begins – look again at the first verse: "I 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..."

Paul begins with the motivation that accompanies his charge. Paul's final words aren't simply something communicated from one friend to another. They're not even a charge from one mentor to his son in the faith. This charge has grave and serious implications

because this charge calls upon God the Father and God the Son as witnesses. But not only does Paul call upon their presence as witnesses to this charge, Paul also evokes the role that Christ will play at the end of time when He comes again to act as our ultimate judge.

It's as if Paul is telling Timothy, "Start with humility." ***Start with Humility.*** If anything that comes after verse one is going to take root, it must start with humility. It must start with recognition of who God *is* and who God *is not*. Timothy has to remember what his role is as it relates to God's role in the world. God is sovereign; Timothy is not. God is omnipresent; Timothy is not. God is the ultimate judge; Timothy is not. God is God; Timothy is not. This is the essence of humility. When we properly assess our own limitations and keep from thinking too highly of ourselves.

Timothy had witnessed Paul do amazing things. He had been a believer nearly his entire life and was probably the expert, as it pertained to Christianity, in the city of Ephesus. He understood the culture, his context, and was in a position to influence a lot of people. But in order to do what God had called him to do, in order for him to live out his God-given purpose, he had to live out his God-given purpose with humility *In Christ*.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus will return at the end of time. And at that time, he will judge everyone – those who are alive and those who have passed. And in performing as judge, not only will He declare who will be with Him for eternity; He will also hand out rewards to those who have lived a faithful life. Paul is not issuing some guilt trip to Timothy. This isn't Santa Claus we're talking about. Paul is not saying, "God knows when you are sleeping, God knows when you're awake, God knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness' sake."

Paul is saying, "Our savior is present! He is here. And we know that He is coming again. And when He comes, He will judge everyone and extend a reward to those who have persevered in the faith." And this judgment wouldn't be just for Timothy – certainly this verse should be a motivator for Timothy knowing *he* would receive judgment from Christ, but it's also a motivator for Timothy because the final judgment is for all of the people in Timothy's church. And the final judgment is for all the people in the culture who are not in the church. For those who hate Christians, for those who question Christianity, for those who are suspicious of Christianity, for those who think Christians are great, but still aren't Christians, themselves; this judgment is for everyone. And because everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, Timothy's work is vitally important. Timothy must start with humility.

Paul goes on to give the charge to Timothy, and the first three words are the most important part of this entire passage. Paul says, "Preach the word." The very first imperative that Paul lays down for Timothy is to preach the Word. And here, "the word" is representative of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it's not just preaching, but being ready to apply the truth of the gospel to any and every situation. In short, Timothy needs to be all about the gospel. ***Be All About the Gospel.*** Only when Timothy starts with humility can he

be all about the gospel. When we remember who God is, His power, and how He can use us, we can be all about the gospel.

And Paul gives details about how to be all about the gospel. First, he tells Timothy that he has to be ready in season and out of season. In other words, there are going to be times when Timothy is expecting to preach the word, or to share the truth about Christ with someone, but there will also be times when Timothy will find himself in a situation that he wasn't exactly expecting. But either way, the Good News that is the gospel of Jesus Christ, is so vital for everyone to hear, we must be prepared for any and every opportunity.

And we have to remember where this gospel finds its foundation; in scripture. Remember at the end of chapter three, Paul writes that all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training for righteousness, and we see the same sentiment here in verse two, where Paul lays down three more imperatives: Timothy, in the presence of God and Jesus Christ, has to reprove, rebuke, and exhort.

To reprove means to show someone where they've gone wrong. To rebuke means to challenge someone to turn from their wrongdoing. And to exhort means to encourage the person as they do a 180 and start down the path of righteousness. These details are a picture of the life and forgiveness that is in Christ Jesus. Our Lord accepts us wherever we are, but He is not content to leave us there! And He uses us to help one another see our sin, challenge one another to pursue righteousness, and to encourage one another in our journey.

And Paul ends this verse with this exceptionally important detail: we have to do all of this with complete patience and teaching. Because being all about the gospel, in season and out of season, helping people see the error of their ways and directing them back towards Christ *takes time*. This is not an overnight process. Becoming more and more like Jesus takes time. It requires a great amount of patience and teaching.

So we see Paul tell Timothy to Start with Humility and then to Be All About the Gospel. And in the next two verses, we see Paul remind Timothy of what he's up against in the culture, namely the false narratives of truth flying around that run counter to the gospel. Paul is reminding Timothy the enemy is ready. ***The Enemy is Ready.***

Note the progression in these two verses. First of all, the people in Ephesus, even people who may be attending Timothy's church, will be tempted to grow apathetic towards the good news of the gospel. They simply won't be able to endure the sound teaching. When that happens, these people will seek out different narratives of truth – alternate realities that suit their selfish hopes and dreams. If the gospel of Jesus Christ indicates they have to change the way they live or abandon a certain way of life, they will be tempted to find someone who says it's okay to continue the way they are living. And when they find that teaching, they will turn away from the gospel and wander down the road into those myths.

This isn't difficult to see in our own culture. There are hundreds of narratives that run against the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are hundreds of teachers who offer a different understanding of truth, different heresies. These teachings are found in the music we listen to, the movies we watch, the politicians we vote for, and even the celebrities who, once a year, hand out their favorite things. You get a heresy. And you get a heresy. You all are going home with heresies! Now to her credit, I've seen Oprah also give the floor to Christians. In fact, I saw a pastor on her show just a few weeks ago lay down the truth of the gospel to her in a way that would have made Paul so proud; he honored Christ. That man was ready. He started with humility and he was all about the gospel.

But we have to remember that the enemy is ready. And because he is pushing, we have to remain steadfast and double our efforts. Because the enemy is ready, we have to be ready in season and out of season. Because the enemy is ready, we cannot shy away from showing people the love of Jesus Christ and reminding one another what it means to love God and to love others. This is the essence of the gospel.

So we start with humility. We need to be all about the gospel. We need to remember the enemy is ready. And, as we see in verse five, we need to get to work. Brothers and sisters, it's time to **Get to Work**. Verse five says, "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Paul lays down four more imperatives here for Timothy, beginning with "always be sober-minded." If we were to translate it into today's language, Paul might say, "Brothers and sisters, keep your cool." We have to stay alert. We have to be spiritually aware. We can't become spiritually apathetic. We have to be the literal opposite of the people described in verses three and four who grow tired of the gospel. We have to keep the truth about Jesus Christ, His life, His death, and His resurrection in front of us at all times. And when we keep the gospel in front of us, we keep our cool and we are able to get to work.

And Paul concludes this charge with three final imperatives: endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill your ministry. The theme of suffering has had a consistent presence throughout this letter. In light of the culture, Timothy would meet resistance. But when he comes up against some pushback, he isn't to give up and go home, but to keep his cool, endure the suffering, and keep going.

As we keep our cool and endure suffering, we are to do the work of an evangelist. That is, we are to preach the word – the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this is what it looks like to fulfill our ministry. If we can keep our cool, endure suffering, and do the work of the evangelist, we will have fulfilled our charge in the presence of God and Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead. Our mission will be complete.

This whole week, I've been thinking of these verses in light of Tuesday night. The results of the election threw nearly everyone for a loop. We've all been taking our cues from the same polls and pundits for months, and those pundits and pollsters were off by just enough to get everything wrong. And then the election statistics started coming out on Wednesday. The racial breakdowns of voters demonstrated a sharp division in the electorate. I suppose that wasn't a surprise. The age breakdown of voters demonstrated a sharp division in the electorate. As a pastor, the breakdown I had my eye on the most was the religious breakdown.

In a church as diverse as ours, I know our congregation was all over the political map on Tuesday. I know there's a good portion of you who were all in for Trump, almost from the beginning, or at least after he became the Republican nominee and you can't understand how someone else in this congregation could vote any other way. I also know there's a portion of you who were #NeverTrump. And you can't understand how anyone could ever vote for him. Two groups of people. Gathered to worship Christ. In the same church. With diametrically opposed political points of view.

And then I also know there's a good portion of people in the middle who either chose not to vote, or they voted third party, or you stared at your ballot, filled the bubble for one of the major party candidates, and then walked away wondering if you had done the right thing. But no matter how you voted, or even if you didn't vote at all, the results of Tuesday night likely caught you by surprise. I was in shock. I couldn't believe what had happened. I watched the debates, followed the news, and kept an eye on the polls right up until the end. I thought I knew what was going to happen. I was wrong.

And here's where this charge from Paul really kicks in.

How do we, as a congregation, respond to one another in the aftermath of what may be the most polarizing, disgusting election in the history of our country? I mean – forget the people out there for a second. Forget the protestors who have taken the streets every night since Tuesday. Forget the media. Forget the loudmouths on Facebook. How do we respond to one another? To our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Start with humility. Start with humility. Before you say anything, remember that you are in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead. Start with humility. Empathy is hard. Putting yourself in someone else's shoes is difficult. But it starts with humility. If you're sitting there and can't understand why someone would be so afraid after this election, do your best to be humble and listen. There are people in our congregation who are absolutely terrified right now, and if you don't get why, you have to listen to them with humility so you can understand. Don't yell at people to get over it. Is there a more unchristian thing you could say to someone? Do you ever see Jesus Christ telling someone to "Get over it" in scripture? Start with some humility.

I'll tell you what I've heard. The reason I've heard some of our friends in the black community, the Hispanic community, the LGBTQ community, and others are afraid is

because there is a sense that our President-Elect's candidacy emboldened evil people. Evil people who wish to say and do evil things. There is a sense in the refugee community – a deep concern – because there is deep uncertainty as to what will happen to them. No one knows what's going to happen. And for all of these communities, there was a sense of security on Monday and Tuesday that was not there on Wednesday and Thursday. And when your security is stripped away unexpectedly, it's scary. It's maddening. It makes sense that they would be angry. What is your response to someone who is legitimately afraid?

Maybe you're sitting there and you can't fathom why anyone could be excited about Donald Trump's presidency. Start with humility. Listen to a brother or sister and discover how he or she came to a decision to support him. It's Veterans Day weekend and the majority of veterans voted for Trump. Ask them why they sense this country will be more safe and secure with Trump as Commander in Chief. We have to have empathy. And empathy starts with humility. And – please – have patience with one another. Let me remind you of Paul's words. Preach the word with complete patience and teaching.

If we cannot start with humility in here, we certainly won't be able to have humility out there. And, church, we have to do a lot of soul-searching as we relate to the world now. I really dislike labels, but there is one label that we need to be paying special attention to because it has become a focus in the election aftermath. The label we need to pay attention to is *evangelical*.

I spoke about the religious breakdown of the vote. Over 80% of evangelicals voted for Donald Trump. Over 80%. And the rest of the country is confused. Whether or not you voted for the President-Elect, you need to recognize the position we, as evangelical Christians, are in right now. Regardless of whether or not you support his policies, he has said and done a lot of things that do not align with our faith or our values. And the list isn't small. Unless you've been in a bunker for the last year and a half, and frankly I wouldn't blame you, you know exactly what I'm talking about. So – again – whether or not you voted for him, you need to realize that our church is now linked with a candidate who has said disgusting things about women, minorities, those with disabilities, and illegal immigrants. And our society doesn't understand how we, as Christians, could look past all of those things and support him. Because there is very little overlap in the values we stand for and the values President-Elect Trump has lived out in his lifetime.

In our society, our church and evangelical churches across the country are now more identified with a politician than with Jesus Christ. You let that sink in. This should alarm you. You should find that notion terrifying. That our church would be known for anything other than love for God and love for people. It should really bother you. Even if you love Donald Trump and danced around in your living room at 2:30am on Wednesday morning, you should be nauseated that the first thing an outsider thinks of when they think of evangelical churches like our own is our support for a political candidate and not Jesus.

How do we respond to a society who questions our motivation? How do we rebuild our witness? We must be all about the gospel. Start with humility. Be all about the gospel. Paul told Timothy to be ready in season and out of season. Ladies in gentlemen, we are in season. For 2,000 years, Christians have run to those who are in the margins. They have aided the disabled, loved the refugee, cared for the sick, visited the prisoners, and provided homes for the orphans. In short, they've been all about the gospel. Their faith wasn't something they talked about, it was something they lived.

How can you help? Maybe minister to the refugees who live right near the church. They're terrified right now because they're not sure what's going to happen to them. If you want to minister to them, you could serve in the Melting Pot, which is our church's resource center for refugees in the Vickery area.

Or you perhaps you could serve the students and faculty of nearby Conrad High School, a school where 82% of the kids are considered at-risk. Or maybe you could minister to prisoners through our prison ministry. For information about any of these opportunities and other ways you can serve, just visit the Hub on the first floor.

Paul's final charge to Timothy echoes into today. There is a tremendous amount of work for us to do. If and when the government cuts off aid to refugees, will we run to those in the margins, or will they be left to fend for themselves? When those whose hearts are filled with hate attack the minorities in our midst, will we stand up to defend and condemn the hatred, or will we shrink back and hide behind the President-Elect whose candidacy emboldened them in the first place? Will we stand up and fight for religious freedom for all, or will we accept the limitation of others' freedom and just hope they stand up for Christians ten years from now when the government comes after us? Will we demonstrate the love of Christ to the communities who are the most afraid, or will we stand on our side of the wall and tell them to get over it? We have some soul-searching to do.

"I 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: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For 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, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."