

Preach the Word!

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[0 : 00] All right, well this morning as we come to the Word of God, we are starting off the final chapter in Paul's second letter to Timothy. The Apostle Paul has been writing to encourage Timothy.

We remember that Paul at the time of this writing is in prison. And Timothy right now is one of the leaders in the region of Asia Minor, which is today the country of Turkey. Timothy has been working with the church of Ephesus there in Asia Minor and likely with the other churches in the region. But now, the place where Timothy has been living and working has become a difficult place to be, a Christian.

Persecution is happening. False teachers are beginning to arise. Self-interested pretenders are beginning to cause trouble in the churches.

While the world around them is becoming increasingly intolerant and hostile towards the followers of Jesus. And so Paul is writing to encourage Timothy.

[1 : 14] He's writing to remind Timothy of what's true. He's writing to help Timothy overcome his fears. He's writing to help Timothy. He's writing to help Timothy remain faithful and push forward in the cause of Christ.

The last thing that we heard in chapter 3 was Paul reminding Timothy about the reliability and helpfulness of the Holy Scriptures.

It's faith in those scriptures. It's faith in those scriptures which has prepared Timothy to receive the good news about Jesus.

And Paul reminds Timothy that the scriptures which were in his time primarily the ones of the Old Testament. The scriptures, all of them, he said, are God-breathed.

They come from God. And they are useful for the work that God has given you to do as a leader in the churches. With that said, Paul now comes to the climax of his instruction to Timothy here in chapter 4.

[2 : 30] Let me read the first two verses for us this morning. This is Paul addressing Timothy. He says, Be prepared in season and out of season.

Let's start by noticing the imperatives here.

There are five. Preach. Be prepared. Correct. Rebuke. And encourage.

These are five things that Paul is telling Timothy to do. But now let me ask you a question. Judging by what's written here, what's Paul's tone as he gives this charge?

There's a funny thing that happens often between parents and their children. Father says to his son, Can you go and brush your teeth? Or can you go and take out the garbage?

[3 : 59] And sometimes we parents are met with a response like, I could do that. And a blank stare.

Like, Dad, are you asking if I'm capable of doing it? Because, yeah, I'm capable of doing it. But do I have to do it? Have you parents ever experienced this before?

It's as if a child detects a bit of wiggle room in our language, in the way that we asked for them to do something. And they're now pushing to see how far they can exert their will in the opposite direction.

Does Dad's politeness and tone of voice mean that this task is up to me if I want to do it? Can I respond with, Nope.

Can't do that right now, Dad. I'm busy playing with Lego. What's the tone here as Paul tells Timothy to do these five things?

[5 : 03] To preach, to be ready, to correct, to rebuke, and to encourage. Look at how Paul leads up to these imperatives. Look at how he introduces what he's telling Timothy to do.

He says, In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge.

Preach the word. How much wiggle room is there? None. Not even a little bit.

In fact, this is the strongest and most serious way of telling someone to do something that I have ever heard in my life. There are moments in our society where someone may question how serious we are.

There are moments when our words matter so much that we take an extra measure to ensure that what's being spoken or agreed to is accurate.

[6 : 17] Think of a courtroom. Before giving a testimony, it is a tradition that a witness be solemnly charged to tell the truth and then swear an oath to tell the truth.

And in those moments, a person often appeals to something valuable or precious or sacred to them or to a higher authority or power.

It's done to add weight and seriousness so that what they are about to say is true. A similar sort of thing is happening when we do up a legal document like a will or a purchase offer for a house.

These are things in which the terms of the arrangement matter so much that we call someone else to be the witness to the arrangement, to the deal, to the contract, so that there can be no questioning what was said, what was meant.

We call someone as a witness. These things are the kind of things that Paul is doing here as he charges Timothy.

[7 : 37] It's almost as if he's in the courtroom. The language, I give you this charge, is the kind of thing that we might expect in a courtroom.

According to one Greek lexicon, that word for charge, I give you this charge, was used to exhort with authority in matters of extraordinary importance, frequently with reference to higher powers. The old English word that we rarely use anymore would be, I adjure you. I solemnly charge you. That's how Paul is speaking here.

And then we see how in giving this solemn charge, Paul calls God himself and the Lord Jesus as his witnesses to the words that he's writing to Timothy.

It's as if Paul is sitting there in his jail cell writing this letter and nobody else can see me or hear me or knows what I'm writing on this papyri right now except you, God.

[8 : 51] But Timothy, as I write these words to you now, God is watching me write them. Jesus Christ is watching me give you this command and charge to preach the word.

And so when you receive this letter and read it, don't think for a moment that you can just crumple up this letter and stuff it in a hole and then walk away because things are tough right now.

When we come to stand before Jesus on that final day, Timothy, and our lives and everything that we've done is open before Jesus, you will not be able to say, Paul never told me that I had to do this.

It's amazing. Paul calls God himself and Christ Jesus himself as witness to the command he is giving to Timothy. And in the midst of this call, he reminds Timothy that Jesus Christ himself will be the one who judges everyone, both the living and the dead.

In other words, Timothy, if I'm executed in a short while here, you're not off the hook from this charge. Jesus himself is the judge and he is my witness as I say these things to you.

[10 : 13] He will hold you to account as to whether you do this or not. He will judge us all at the end, on that day when he appears. He will be judge of those presently alive and he will be judge of those who died before his return just the same.

So Paul just piles so much weight onto this charge. It really is the most serious command a person could ever receive from someone. And if that weren't all enough, Paul piles even more onto this with God and Jesus Christ as my witness.

But I also give you this charge with the reminder that Jesus is coming back. I give you this charge in view of his appearing.

He will appear once more. So preach the word. And in view of his kingdom, he is coming back to rule and to reign.

The kingdom of God is coming. And so I charge you to preach the word. I don't think I know of any other commands given in the Bible which are set up with this same level of seriousness.

[11 : 36] Calling God and Christ as witness with a reminder of Jesus' return and kingdom and judgment. What should we understand from all this?

We should understand that the preaching of the word is of the utmost importance. Based on how Paul just introduced this, it is to be among the highest priorities of a church leader.

It is to be among the highest priorities of the Christian church. If not, why set it up like this in his charge to Timothy?

Why say all this? Why add all this weight? Let's examine this charge to preach the word more closely.

The word for preach in the original Greek means to announce, to proclaim, to declare out loud. This was the word that was used for the town criers and the town heralds.

[12:45] The guys who say, hear ye, hear ye. His royal majesty has issued a decree. So Paul is charging Timothy here to be vocal and to proclaim, to declare out loud, even publicly, the word.

This word for preach is also used to describe what John the Baptist did as he was preaching in the wilderness. It's used to describe what Jesus did as he was proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God going from place to place.

It's used to describe what Jesus told his disciples to do when he sent them out. This word for preach is also used to describe what Jonah did to the Ninevites and what Philip did in Samaria in Acts chapter 8 and what Paul began to do in the synagogues after he became a believer.

And so there can be little doubt about what it means to preach because the New Testament is full of accounts of men who preached. And not just that they preached but also what they preached. the very words and contents of their proclamation. Next we notice what Paul tells Timothy to proclaim.

[14:10] Preach. Proclaim the word. Now most of us recognize intuitively that the word is shorthand for the word of God.

the word of God. The word of God refers to the things that God has spoken whether through the prophets of old or the apostles.

It includes the things Jesus himself spoke when he walked the earth. And for us today we have the word of God written down in our Bibles.

the God breathed scriptures as Paul was telling Timothy about reminding Timothy of before this in the previous verses. So this is the prime directive.

This is the main thrust of Paul's solemn charge. Declare. Proclaim the words of God. This should be one of our highest priorities as a church.

[15:13] Regularly declaring the word of God in our midst. And to our community around us. For me these words are so helpful when it comes time to sit down and decide what to say on a Sunday morning.

Or for those of you who are teaching alive on Sundays this is helpful as you prepare what to teach. For all of us as we interact with others in our community this is helpful as we consider what to say. What is the content of our preaching and of our teaching to be? Preach the word. The word of God is what we are to declare.

people may think we are crazy for our relentless persistence in taking people back into the Bible to hear what it says.

People may think we are crazy for actually taking the words in the Bible seriously and believing them that they're true. But regardless of what people may think of us these words are true.

[16:31] true. This is the word of God and this is what we have been charged in the presence of God and in the presence of Christ Jesus to proclaim.

This is to be our message. This is to be our curriculum. This is our gospel our good news. God we are not charged to come together and enjoy some good stories or jokes.

We are not charged to go out and share some wise and persuasive words the kind that we think people will agree with and appreciate. We are not charged to share what we have learned from our experiences in life.

We are not charged with sharing our best sounding apologetical arguments for the existence of God. in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead and in view of his appearing in his kingdom I give you this charge preach the word preach the word of God.

Now don't get me wrong there is a time to address certain issues or to share wisdom and counsel or to debunk modern false teachings but the main content of the sermon of the lesson of our evangelism must be the words God has spoken.

[18 : 04] now we've already talked about how the word preach means to proclaim or to declare and so let me ask this what's our tone to be what's the manner of our message to be it's to be proclamation not just suggestion proclaim proclamation not just suggestion not just here's something for your consideration not just well you know this is what I believe here's some human level arguments for why you might consider this faith for yourself no declaration is to be our tone is to be our manner of presentation now this doesn't mean that we should be people who go around shouting in the faces of others we are to proclaim

Christ with gentleness and respect but proclamation means that we are not just suggesting we are confidently asserting the word of God as fact as truth in fact earlier in the letter what did Paul call the word of God if you look back to chapter one verse chapter two verse 15 he said there do your best to present yourself to God as one approved a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth sometimes we hear unbelievers say things like stop preaching at me sometimes preaching is equated with being arrogant and there certainly are people who have acted less than Christian in their preaching perhaps they are arrogant or argumentative or hurl insults and slurs at people and call them stupid well that's not good at all but those things aside we are called by God to proclaim his word proclaim not just to share it but to declare it and declaring things to be true to people who don't agree with or believe in our source will be offensive to some but that in itself is not arrogance or pride true humility is not doubting the truth in fact it takes even greater humility to assert the truth and proclaim the word of truth when the truth is unpopular and so as we proclaim the word of God some will respond negatively some will be offended but we cannot let that response of some cause us to turn down the volume from proclamation to suggestion or from declaring aloud to whispering behind closed doors as Jesus said to his apostles Matthew chapter 10 verse 26 do not be afraid of them for there is nothing that is concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known would I tell you in the dark speak in the daylight what is whispered in your ear proclaim from the rooftops now let's acknowledge the reality that this is not easy this is not easy for Timothy in his day and time where persecution is growing and it's becoming unpopular in the culture to be a Jesus follower people in Timothy's day are being arrested and the more they proclaim Christ the bigger the target is getting on their backs yet Paul doesn't say just preach a little quieter turn the volume down a bit take a break from preaching the word until things cool off in your region no he's telling Timothy here to turn the volume up to let the word of God ring out from your lips I know it's hard Timothy I know it's unpopular I'm sitting in a jail cell right now in chains because of it but don't let that stop you and just so you know Timothy it's only going to get harder verse three for the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine says Paul instead to suit their own desires they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths so we cannot judge the effectiveness of proclaiming

God's words simply by the outward visible results of it because in Timothy's day Paul said that the results he could expect would be increasingly disappointing public appreciation for the word of God is going to decrease to the point that many won't put up with listening to your preaching they will have an itch to hear something else something different something new something perhaps more interesting to them or entertaining that desire will be like an itch and you'll find that preaching the word of God will not be scratching the itch for them many will turn their ears away from you Timothy and the truth that you are declaring and will give their ears to a great many teachers who will say what their itching ears want to hear in

[25 : 09] Timothy's days it would be myths they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths said Paul but it's amazing just how relevant and how true these words ring in our day today almost 2000 years later I mean there once was a time not too long ago when most Canadians went to church most Canadians sat through sermons week after week but now we followers of Jesus find ourselves increasingly in the minority many have turned away in our day to myths of a different variety and follow after the voice of a great many teachers who tell them what they want to hear whether it's the ideas of another world religion or the supposed joy of being set free from religion altogether or perhaps it's the hollow and self oriented ideas of finding your authentic self or mindfulness or maybe it's the myth that you can be your own god and ultimately you can determine your own reality while the rise of the internet and social media has its many blessings and benefits it has also made it even easier for people to find those who are saying exactly what their itching ears

want to hear but don't let that discourage you

Timothy even if almost no one is listening don't let this become a reason you stop proclaiming the word of God it will become more difficult but you keep your head in all situations endure hardship do the work of an evangelist discharge all the duties of your ministry so keep on proclaiming the word of God Timothy keep a level head keep your hands steady on the wheel endure hardship when it comes your way continue the work of proclaiming the good news of Jesus that's what do the work of an evangelist means that word evangelism meaning bring or announce the good news keep on ministering

Timothy and serving in all the ways that God has given you to serve and to minister who do you ultimately want to please with your life and your words Timothy that person who might be offended by the Jesus that you so confidently declare or Christ Jesus himself whose throne we will all soon stand before now you may wonder how does this all apply to me I mean we know that Timothy was a leader in the church and so naturally we tend to see a passage like this as being for pastors or elders how does all this apply to me I think there are two considerations here and I can't unpack this all fully this morning but I would encourage you to take some time to reflect on this this week the first consideration we may not all be church leaders pastors elders or even teachers but all of us are called to proclaim the word of God and to minister in some measure to some people we are all called to proclaim the word of God whether to our children or to the neighbors around us and proclaim as I said earlier doesn't necessarily mean shout or give a sermon it means to declare the truth of God's word we didn't even get to these other imperatives like correct and encourage but these are things that can happen in daily life with our children and with each other we are to bring the word of God into our parenting correcting our children training them in the instruction of the Lord and there's lots of other places in the Bible where we are called as followers of Jesus to encourage one another we are all called to proclaim the good news of Jesus to the people around us whether our unsafe family or friends or neighbors or coworkers and so proclaiming God's word and things like correcting and encouraging and these are not just things for pastors to do in sermons they are things we are all called to do in our everyday lives and in our relationships we're called to do these things in love for the benefit of others Paul tells Timothy to be ready in season and out of season so proclaiming God's word isn't just for Sunday morning sermon time we should aim to be ready to declare the word of God to proclaim Christ at all times even when we're not expecting it that's the first consideration we may not all be church leaders pastors elders or even teachers but all of us are called to proclaim the word of

God and to minister in some measure to some people second consideration here it is good for us to recognize that there are different roles and responsibilities and ministries in the church and that each of us participates in those differently Timothy was a church leader the people in Ephesus and the region were looking to him about how they should follow Jesus in these increasingly difficult times they were watching Timothy is he going to turn the volume down or preach more quietly is he going to start changing the message now that it's becoming unpopular so this is absolutely a charge to Timothy specifically and it does apply directly to church leaders today who minister in the same ways that Timothy did it applies directly to pastors and elders

[32 : 11] Paul says to Timothy discharge all the duties of your ministry but then as we think of how there is more than one ministry and role and responsibility in the church in the household of God we can ask the question what's the ministry that God has given me to discharge in this body to carry out if I'm not an elder or pastor or someone who gets into a pulpit well what needs has God uniquely gifted and equipped me to meet what are those things that I may find difficult or challenging hard wearisome but maybe for different reasons than Timothy as Jesus parable of the talents made clear we will all have to someday give an account before the king did we use that which was entrusted to us for him or did we just bury it in the sand so

I want to encourage you to talk to the Lord about this this week and to reflect on it how these words to Timothy apply to you what is the ministry that God has equipped and gifted you for in this church and in this community we we're going to go to the Lord's table now the Lord's table is something we do each month to remember our Lord Jesus the one Paul spoke about to Timothy the one he called as witness to the charge we remember the Lord Jesus whom Paul said would judge the living and the dead whom Paul said would someday appear we remember the Lord Jesus who is Christ that is king of the coming kingdom we remember the word of God that

Paul preached as he traveled all over the Mediterranean world and what did he preach he preached Christ crucified he preached in his words the word of the cross this is the amazing truth of God's word the king of kings the one who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears the one who is coming to rule and reign over earth's last and greatest kingdom that one came into our world and gave his life for ours he suffered and bled and died on the cross as a sacrifice to God for the forgiveness of our sins he came and he offered us citizenship in heaven in his coming kingdom and eternal life as a gift completely free for all who believe in him that's what this table is all about it's about the king who died to bring us into his kingdom the judge who came and took the punishment we deserve who served our sentence so we could go free the bread that we partake represents his body which was broken for us as he died on the cross and the cup represents his blood which was shed for us and us eating and drinking of these things is a sermon that we preach for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes let's take a few minutes to pray quietly now and reflect on what Jesus our king has done to save us and then the elders will come and pass out the elements and we'll wait until everybody has been served and then we'll eat and drink together