

In the context of 'failure'

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[0 : 00] 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.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

[1 : 32] We are going to begin with a slight sort of cultural competition. I am going to read out some of a speech that should be familiar to some of you, see if you can get the film.

I fight and you may die, run and you will live, at least for a while. Anyone?

Braveheart. Very good. Very good. It's been years since any of us have seen it. You'll remember, he makes that speech when he's in front, they're just sort of riding up and down the front line of the army, and they're about to attack.

It's a great moment. I wonder if that introduction is not brilliant, because it slightly cheapens perhaps the moment that Paul reaches here.

It is in a sense a Braveheart moment, but in a much bigger, more real sense, where Paul, as it were, gets up on his horse for the last time.

[2 : 57] And from the dying apostle to the young leader, he gives him the battle cry of the rest of his life. Do you see that? It's different from William Wallace's in some key respects.

Fewer literal spears and arrows and swords. But just look down at verse 1. 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 words.

Be ready in season and out of season. So our subject today is, in light of the gospel, in light of the return of Jesus, what sort of church should we be?

What should we give our energies and labours to? Because there are an awful lot of options, aren't there? An awful lot of possible priorities to choose from.

We can't do everything. What sort of church should we be? In Dulwich. In light of Jesus' return. What sort of leader should I be?

[4 : 18] What should you want me to give my energies to? What should you want my heart to be in? But it's not just for me. It's for all of us as a church.

This letter is written to the whole church, in the hearing of the whole church, that last word of the whole letter, grace be with you all, plural. Well, the battle cry is refreshingly simple, isn't it?

Those three words in verse 2. Preach the word. But notice that verse 2 comes in light of verse 1. 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.

And so, therefore, in light of the presence of God, Paul says, he is here. I'm speaking in his presence.

And in light of Jesus' return as judge of the living and the dead, preach the word. This is not a suggestion.

[5 : 37] Paul is not giving Timothy an option, but a solemn charge from Jesus himself. Timothy, Jesus is coming back. He's coming back to judge the living and the dead.

That's everyone who's ever lived. This is to be the burden of your life. Grace Church Dulwich, Jesus says, in light of my return, give your lives to the preaching of the word.

And I, as a leader, am solemnly charged with this. This is not a suggestion. It is a matter of obedience to our Lord and Saviour.

Well, we should pause, because it's not, it sort of looks simple, doesn't it? Preach the word. But let's think about what that actually means. What is this word that Timothy is to give his life to preach?

And I think you can see in the context, so chapter 3, verse 16, all scripture is breathed out by God. It must be the Bible. Okay, so the word is the Bible.

[6 : 49] But, I suggest, it is the Bible with the gospel at its heart. So you could put it another way. Preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and do so from all of scripture.

Preach the gospel. Paul has been speaking about the pattern of sound words that he's passed on to Timothy, the good deposit. It is the gospel that Paul wants him to preach.

But preach the gospel and do so from all of scripture. Preach the Bible with the gospel of Jesus Christ at its heart. Preach the word.

And notice that Timothy is to preach it. That word means to declare publicly. He's to be unapologetic. He's not to mumble it.

He's not to suggest it. He's to declare it. With Christ as his strength. There's a hymn that has a great line in it that I came across. You might know it.

[7 : 51] Christ my strength. Christ my right. To him that's based on 2 Timothy. Christ who strengthens us. And Christ who is our right to declare it.

Why? Because he is the Lord, the judge who is to return and judge the living and the dead. Preach it, Timothy. And you can see now, can't you, why Paul was saying at the beginning of the letter, Timothy, fan into flame the gift that is in you.

Step up and step out. And so as Timothy sits in his bedroom in Ephesus or his front room drinking Turkish coffee wondering what to do, Paul says, get up and preach the gospel.

Do it in the marketplaces, in the coffee shops of Ephesus. Do it on the streets. Do it in the pubs. Do it throughout the week.

Not just on Sundays. There's no mention of the Sunday service here. We don't know when they met actually in Ephesus. Preach the word. Not only to the church, Timothy, but to anyone who will listen.

[9 : 03] Fulfill your work as an evangelist. Preach the word. This is how Timothy is to guard the gospel. So remember this whole letter really is about guard the gospel and there are two sides to that coin.

Pass it on, Timothy. Pass it on to faithful men who will teach others and preach the word to whoever will listen. Guard the gospel. And it's just important I think at this point to notice what Paul does not say to Timothy.

He doesn't say heal the sick, cast out demons. Do you notice that? Now if that was to be a priority for the church or a priority for Christian leader, what a great place to put it in 2 Timothy.

It's nowhere there. Yes, the apostles were commissioned to heal and to cast out demons in order to authenticate them as the key messengers who held the gospel.

But notice throughout the New Testament that when the apostles pass on this commission, Acts chapter 20 to Timothy, there's never any mention of go heal the sick, cast out demons.

[10 : 16] That is not to be the job of the church. It's not to be the job of the church leader. Preach the word. It doesn't say transform the structures of society.

He doesn't say save the planet. That is not Timothy's remit. There were all kinds of things that he might have got distracted by that would have invited less criticism from the world and less suffering from people around.

But Timothy was to preach the word. Why that focus? Well, because the salvation that Jesus brings is an eternal salvation that is received through hearing and believing the gospel.

Just think for a moment. Cast your mind forward to that day. Verse 1. The whole world. Everyone who's ever lived standing before Jesus as judge of the living and the dead.

All of this is gone. Gathered before Jesus. On that day what will matter? One thing. Are you forgiven?

[11 : 36] Are you one of his? Have you heard the word and believed? And on that day the life poured out for the preaching of the message of salvation well that is a life well spent.

Actually it's not just a life well spent it's a life rightly spent in obedience to the Lord Jesus. So what sort of a church ought we to be in light of Jesus' return?

There will be all kinds of pressures on us at various points to focus on this, that or the other in Dulwich. And in our workplaces. But we have our orders from the Lord Jesus himself.

We are to be a preaching the word church. That must be our focus. Now I've been scratching my head this week thinking okay it's pretty obvious what that means for me.

What about all of us? In all of our different situations? And I think the answer is that we have the principle that we're to give our lives to the preaching of the words but what this looks like is going to vary according to every different person in this room with our different personality our different character our different giftings our different roles within the church.

[12 : 56] We have the principle we're to give our lives to the preaching of the word. But there's a variety of ways I mean I could stand here and sort of say well it looks like this that or the other but I think actually it's the Holy Spirit who's going to prompt us each in our own different ways and situations that we're in now.

What is this going to look like for me to get behind the preaching of the word? We should all be asking the same similar question how do we get behind the preaching of the word in Dulwich in the city across the world but united in this aim together preach the word and bring our different giftings and opportunities to the table as the Holy Spirit leads us.

So firstly in light of Jesus' return preach the word secondly preach the word in season and out of season do you see that in verse 2? Be ready in season and out of season reprove rebuke and exhort with complete patience and teaching what's this stuff about seasons?

Well there will be times where people will respond well to the preaching of the word and there will be times when they won't. I think verse 3 makes that clear a time is coming when people will not endure it.

We know this actually from history don't we? Seasons and we know it from experience. Timothy is not in control of the seasons.

[14 : 30] God is in control of the seasons. Timothy's job is to continue teaching patiently through the good and the bad. Verse 3 what will out of season look like?

I take it verse 3 Paul fleshes that out. Where it says they will not endure sound teaching literally they will not esteem it. they will hear the healthy teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ who's died for sins who's coming again and they will say well I don't think much of that.

And instead do you see there in verse 3 they will accumulate literally again heap up for themselves a plentiful supply of people who will tell them what they want to hear.

people who will tell them that Jesus came to satisfy our passions and who will clothe approval of sin with Jesus.

It's interesting isn't it? In chapter 2 it was about the false teachers here it's about the church themselves gathering teachers who will tell them what they want to hear.

[15 : 46] And perhaps most painfully verse 4 those who once listened to the gospel will turn away from it and wander off into something else.

And there's not much that's harder in Christian ministry than good friends dear people no longer wanting to walk in the gospel.

And that's when it's hard isn't it? To keep preaching the same old gospel even when it just seems so powerless out of season. People turning away from it left right and centre.

But Timothy was to be undeterred verse 5 as for you always be sober minded endure suffering do the work of an evangelist fulfil your ministry.

well what implications for us from this it's actually very liberating for the Christian leader and for the church to be released from the responsibility of how people respond to the gospel.

[16 : 53] That is not our responsibility we leave that to God. A successful ministry therefore is not about a big church and a positive response necessarily.

I've got a friend who's coming up for retirement and he's been preaching away teaching away for years his church has never really grown.

Paul doesn't tell Timothy how long the seasons may be two years five years a lifetime yeah possibly ambition for church growth ambition for church growth can be a good and godly thing it can be but it

is God who sets the times and the seasons it's not our job and so therefore will Grace Church Dulwich grow or shrink in the coming years?

well we hope it grows but we don't actually know and it's not necessarily a good indicator of success there are times there are seasons well finally it is going to be hard do you see that in verse five Paul does not say avoid suffering endure suffering it is going to be hard but look to that further shore and that's where he goes in verses six to eight for I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come I have fought the good fight I have finished the race I have kept the faith I think I think these are the words of a soldier finally going home after years on the front line in the trenches so I read an account this week of a World War I soldier who actually got through it so he survived the war four years he said over four years he got to go home three times for ten days that was his leave but he described that you can imagine the feeling of getting on the boat sailing back over to to Blighty as he called it and then to get on the train through the rolling green fields of Kent and then to London the first thing he said he did was have a shower which is completely understandable

Paul here is like a soldier finally going home from the front line but for good verse seven my work is done my labours are over I fought the good fight it's time to go home he uses two images for his death do you see that and in neither of them does he use the word death I am being poured out like a drink offering that word poured out is the idea of being spent for God after a life spent for God and vividly in the end as his blood is poured out I am being poured out after a life spent for God he says my time of departure has come that's the second image he uses for death he doesn't call it his death he calls it his departure that word departure it literally is release or to set free it's like you would release a ship from its tethering to set it free as it sails for home so Paul says the time of my release from this world has come my release from this life from this body and I'm setting sail for home for the further shore finally to be home with the Lord if we give our life to the preaching of the gospel we will find ourselves in the trenches now but there is a further shore that we're living for and what will we find on that further shore verse 8 henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day and not only to me but to all who have loved his appearing now this is worth thinking about because not only is Paul looking forward to everlasting life and immortality with God in the presence of God his father and Christ his Lord not only is he looking forward to the joys of the kingdom that Jesus will bring a whole new creation where there will be no more sin or suffering or pain or crying anymore not only is he looking forward to those things that would be good enough and then some but at this point his focus is drawn to a crown as well a crown of righteousness that he knows he will receive from the Lord's hands and you see that also to every

[22 : 29] Christian who has loved his appearing isn't that striking I think every single one of us would probably think okay Paul gets the crown I mean Paul deserves the crown every single Christian to all who have loved his appearing from the least to the greatest from the weakest Christian to the strongest do you see that there will be no one in the kingdom of Jesus without this crown all will be crowned by the grace of God on that day when he returns now what is this crown of righteousness well back then an athlete it's a crazy summer of sport this summer isn't it we've got the Olympics coming up athletes are going to be given medals back then athletes were crowned with a wreath instead of a medal and that is the image that Paul is using here of course he's talking about a race as well isn't he that is the image he's using and so the crown of righteousness is a crown of victory and honour or you might say it is a crown of commendation for the fight well fought for the race won and for the faith kept every Christian now think about this for a second we are all clothed in the righteousness of Christ and that is the basis of our acceptance before God we're all clothed in the righteousness of Christ but Paul isn't talking about that here this is more this is different additionally they will be crowned with a victory crown of commendation and honour from the Lord of the universe it is all the things that they didn't receive in this world and from the world do you see that

Paul's in prison as a criminal no honour no victory no glory all the things that we did not receive in this world as we preach the name of Christ we will be crowned with on that day honour commendation glory you'll know from Matthew's gospel that Jesus will say well done good and faithful servant to all his people well this crown is I think the everlasting well done good and faithful servant that will sit on the heads of every one of his people what will it be like to live forever with the crown of commendation from Jesus well done good and faithful servant Psalm 8 will be fulfilled at

this point finally what is man that you are mindful of him crowned with glory and honour well there's a good fight to be fought now and there is a further shore to live for

I had an email from a friend this week who has been diagnosed with secondary cancer he's a Christian and I was preparing these verses and I thought to myself well if he is going to die it isn't the time of his death but of his departure for the further shore like a soldier going home from the front line because Christians those in Christ don't die they depart I don't usually quote poems but there is a poem that I'm going to read to us and if you're a guest here you're looking into the Christian faith this will give you a great window into what the hope is of the gospel I've put it on your sheets and I think it captures Paul's mindset and ours too light after darkness gain after loss strength after suffering crown after cross sweet after bitter song after sigh home after wandering praise after cry sheaves after sowing sun after rain sight after mystery peace after pain joy after sorrow calm after blast rest after weariness sweet rest at last well I think that just about gets to the heart of it of what Paul is calling

Timothy to we're in the trenches if we're Christian this life we're together in the trenches we have a battle cry preach the word we have a further shore beyond this life where we will finally go home it would make a pretty good few words on the gravestone wouldn't it gave herself to the preaching of the word in season and out of season in obedience to her Lord with eyes fixed on that further shore let's pray preach the word Lord Jesus we hear your words to us this morning we hear your charge your solemn charge to us in light of your return preach the word

Lord strengthen us give us wisdom what that might look like to us in our different situations give us patience to endure suffering and Lord we wonder at this future glory this crown of righteousness we know it's real we know that you're risen from the dead we know there is a day to come an eternity to live for we know that one day we will go home strengthen us we pray to live our lives sold out poured out for you and for your glory and we ask it in your name Amen