

(6) ... by preaching the word

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[0 : 00] The reading is 2 Timothy chapter 4, which can be found on page 1199. That's 2 Timothy chapter 4.

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 exalt with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but have 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, fulfil 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 : 25] Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Titicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

At my first defence, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it.

So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

[2 : 41] Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Anesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter.

Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Thank you.

Great. Well, Vicki, thank you very much for reading. Today we're going to have the great privilege, really, of looking at the final words that are available to us from Paul in this last chapter of the second letter of Timothy.

We saw in chapter 3 last week that all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

And here we're going to see what Paul has to say to Timothy and to us in this last chapter. And our theme is going to be around proclaiming the word, this scripture breathed out by God, and Paul's encouragement to Timothy to take over his role.

[3 : 56] We're going to look at this in three sections, what Paul means by this proclamation of the word, why this is so important, and how Paul, and subsequently Timothy and we, are to go about it.

And we'll start with what it is. If you keep the Bibles open on page 1199, and on the back of the service sheet you'll find there's some space for some notes.

Now, I expect that some of you have noticed that the Olympics have been taking place over the last few weeks. And some of the final events now in the athletics are the relays, the handing on of the baton.

And in these you can see the importance of preparation, of training, of practice. No matter how good, how fast one person is, even if you're Usain Bolt, you can't run around the whole race.

The team would be disqualified. You have to pass on the baton. And you have to get the baton round. If you're Great Britain, you'll probably start off a bit too soon and never get the baton.

[5 : 07] And if you're the USA, it seems you'll drop the baton. And if they do that, they can't just pick up another one. The race is lost. Well, here in 2 Timothy, we see Paul handing on the baton to Timothy, the next runner in the relay race of evangelism.

And the baton, the baton is even more precious than a relay baton. It's more precious than an Olympic gold medal. It's the word, the scriptures breathed out by God. And who's this message in 2 Timothy intended for?

It's a letter addressed to an individual, to Timothy, with very specific instructions to him, bringing Paul's cloak, his books. But it seems it's a letter intended to be read by the whole church.

And it has a very important message for us today. As you may have heard if you've been here in previous talks, the last line of today's passage, verse 22, the phrase, grace be with you.

The word you in the Greek here is plural, showing that this is meant for more than just Timothy to hear. It's meant for the church more widely to read. And I think it's meant for us today.

[6 : 20] It's been suggested that the book of 2 Timothy wasn't written by Paul. And this last chapter in particular seems rather different.

But I think the very personal requests in this last chapter, the special request for individuals to do tasks, fit with Paul's position in prison in Rome at this time.

And it seems to me, and much more importantly to a number of biblical scholars, to fit with the authorship by Paul. So let's look at the way this last chapter opens, with a command to Timothy, a charge from Paul in these first two verses.

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.

It sounds a little like an oath, as if you were in court, being asked to swear before Almighty God that you will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

[7 : 28] I'm not sure they still do that. Fortunately, I haven't been to court for a while. But no doubt there are lawyers in the congregation who could advise me afterwards for a suitable fee.

The words show that this is indeed a serious charge to Timothy, and it's a charge to us. It's sometimes thought, too, that this passage is applying just to preachers, but I'm going to suggest to you that there's much wider than that, that we all do have a role.

And the word used for preach here, preach the word, means not just to stand up here, as Simon does each week as our minister, but it means to announce like a herald, to shout it out, pronounce it publicly.

Don't hide it away. Don't be embarrassed about God's word. As we saw in chapter 1, verse 8, do not be ashamed of the testimony about the Lord.

And we all need to proclaim the word in this way. It's maybe in Sunday school, maybe at home to our children, maybe at work to our colleagues, at the school gate.

[8 : 40] Even when we're not involved in doing it directly, then as Nick showed us two weeks ago, looking at chapter 2, we need to be praying for those who are preaching the word.

And as we'll see in the final section here of chapter 4, we all have a role in support of this proclamation. Paul's shown too that the hardships that come with this proclaiming the word, the suffering he has been through.

And he makes it obvious that these problems will come to Timothy too, if he is true to the gospel. So if we're not directly preaching, we need to be praying for those who are.

And if we want an example of somebody praying in this way, then we just need to go back to chapter 1, verse 3, where Paul is in prison, in chains, in danger of his life.

And he says, I thank God who am I serve, as did my ancestors with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers day and night. Paul constantly praying for Timothy, for those who preach the word, despite his own predicament at the time.

[9 : 57] So the command is, preach the word. And what was this word for Paul? It was the word of God, the Old Testament scriptures written down at that time, and the words of Jesus Christ and of Paul passed down to Timothy by Paul and those working for him, with him.

The sound words you have heard from me, says Paul, the good deposit entrusted to you. And here in verse 2, Paul tells Timothy to be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching, in season and out of season.

Not just when it's convenient and there's a cozy evangelistic event set up, when you're in your comfort zone, but out of season, when it's inconvenient, when it's awkward, when it's embarrassing for you to do so, because as we saw in chapter 1, this is not a word to be ashamed of.

And Timothy's responsibility in this preaching the word will involve reproving, rebuking, and exhorting. Adapting your approach in proclaiming the word to the situation and to the listener.

Some of those listening may need to think through things again, reproving their faith. Some may have gone astray and need rebuking to bring them back to the word.

[11 : 40] While others may be faltering in difficulties and need exhorting, encouraging. So this work, Paul's saying, needs to be done with firmness and with sensitivity, true to the word of God, but applied as appropriate in the circumstances.

And it's to be done with complete patience and teaching. The second half of verse 2. With complete patience, not thinking it's all going to be easy, not that it's all a quick win.

It may be discouraging. Your friends may need to hear the same things over and over again until they listen. One day, God will open their ears and hearts and your words will bear fruit.

So with complete patience and with teaching, Paul is saying that this ministry needs to be informed ministry of the word. The more you understand the Bible, the better you will be able to talk about it, to answer questions, to be an encouragement.

Once again, Paul shows us what an excellent example of this he is when later in the passage we find him asking for his books, his parchments, for his continued study.

[12 : 59] He has various requests about cloaks and things, but above all, the parchments. So in this section, Paul is asking Timothy and those who will follow Timothy to preach the word.

He is charging Timothy and us to do this because of the presence of Christ Jesus who will appear again, whose kingdom will come and who will be the judge of the living and the dead.

Preach the word because those who hear the word and give their lives to this Jesus have nothing to fear from that judgment and will enter that heavenly kingdom. So that's what this is about and we move to the second section in verses 3 to 8, why proclaim the word?

Why this task to proclaim the word, to preach the word is so important? We're going to look at three reasons which come out of Paul's text. The first fundamental reason which we've just touched on goes back to verse 1.

It's important because of the day that's coming, the time when Jesus will come again and we shall all be judged. Paul and others at that time probably expected that day to be coming quite soon.

[14 : 18] But thankfully for our sake and for the sake of those who haven't yet given their lives to Jesus, it hasn't come yet and there's still time for more people to enter that kingdom, more people who need to hear the gospel preached to them.

And secondly, it's important because of verses three to four, 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.

So here's Paul's description of what's happening in the church in the first century AD, 2,000 years ago. Can't really be relevant for us today, can it? Or can it indeed?

It's more relevant today than ever. Paul has encouraged Timothy to stick to the truth of the word, to stand up against false teaching. So important today when the Bible is sometimes being twisted into a modern context.

Many people seem to feel that we have to change the teaching because it's 2,000 years old. They claim it's no longer relevant today, that we need to have a gospel that fits the 21st century in London, that fits the new global village.

[15 : 44] So the suggestion is that if we want to change the teaching, that's fine. General public attitudes to women, to sexuality, have moved on. And the gospel needs to move on too.

That's what we see in the liberal parts of the church today, in the debates at the Lambeth Conference. people graphically described here as those with itching ears who look for a teaching that suits their needs.

If the teaching they hear doesn't fit their lifestyle, doesn't fit with their view of the world, then let's find a teaching that feels more comfortable. You know what Groucho Marx said when challenged on his principles?

I won't try to do the voice, but he said, those are my principles. If you don't like them, well, I have others. What may be true of the principles of Groucho Marx is not true for the word of God.

This is the true gospel breathed out by God. There's no other. It's not necessarily comfortable. The problems identified by Paul are just as relevant today, probably more so as they were for Paul and Timothy 2,000 years ago.

[16 : 55] Timothy and we are not to be deviated from the truth by modern interpretations. And we come in verse 5 then to another strong instruction to Timothy to be different.

Just as in chapter 3 in verse 14 is, as for you, Timothy, you ought to be different. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your mission, ministry.

Paul has nurtured Timothy and the third reason why it's so important for Timothy to take this on is that Paul needs to pass on the baton. Paul is coming towards the end of his leg of the relay, towards the end of his life and he realizes it.

He needs successors. Here he's making sure that there is a new champion for the gospel to take over from him. 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. The drink offering was expensive wine poured out onto the ground or onto a sacrifice, poured away, Paul being poured away like a drink offering, may be him referring to his life finishing but as we'll see in the later part of the chapter he does have plans for more work and it may be more a reference to his being locked up in prison at the time, limited in his work of evangelism, his time being wasted just as the drink offering is poured away.

[18 : 42] So Paul has fought the fight, finished the race, kept the faith. And he has indeed. What a race, what a fight. Better than the best gold medal performance of the Olympics.

At a time when travel wasn't easy, he's embarked on mammoth journeys, creating and supporting churches across the known world. And he knows because he has trusted in Jesus that when his life on earth does come to an end, it isn't an end.

He has a future laid out in 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 also to all who have loved his appearing. So Paul gives us these three reasons why it's important that Timothy takes on this task.

because it's urgent, because he needs to counter the heresies of the day, the tendency of people to hear what they want to hear, and because of the need for people to carry on the work.

[19 : 48] And the same reasons apply to us today. The urgency to bring people to Jesus. The problem of false teaching, people wandering off to myths, and the need for all of us to play our part in maintaining this legacy started by Paul and continued by Timothy, guarding the gospel.

So finally, let's go to the third part and see how Paul plans to make sure the gospel is proclaimed in the last part in verses 9 to 22.

Now this last section is sometimes looked at as just a list of personal comments, requests, nothing fundamental to the chapter. But there's lots in here to show us how Paul worked.

And how we should be involved in following his command to preach the word. He's seen here working out his strategy. And strategy is very important in making the best use of resources in proclaiming the word.

when Helen and I were in France last year, we went to the village of Cressy. And Cressy was an important battle in the 14th century called the end of chivalry.

[21 : 05] It was a battle in which a small English army of about 16,000, commanded by Edward III, was outnumbered five to one by a French army of 80,000 under Philip VI.

But thanks to the Welsh bowmen and thanks to the French heavy horses and their armoured knights sticking in the mud, the French were defeated and 30,000 French died and 300 English.

And it was a triumph for strategy and for the longbow early in the Hundred Years' War. Well, if you go to the village of Cressy, there's a small display of the battle there and the French display shows that the massacre of most of France's nobility was really a sort of French victory and certainly would have been except for rather unfair English tactics.

And what was unfair about this was that Edward III had been to Cressy once in his youth and therefore he knew the ground. The French, of course, lived there and you might have thought that they would have known the ground a bit better than the English but it was rather as if Manchester United were playing Chelsea and Alex Ferguson had cheated by going and looking at the pitch beforehand.

Strategy won the day. Well, here's Timothy in this last section of the book setting out his strategy. Even though he's in prison, he's facing death, he's still making his plans, he's organising his equipment, getting his forces together.

[22 : 40] Some of the workers have deserted or in other parts of the mission. Demas is in love with this world. He's drifted away. Alexander the coppersmith is working actively against them.

Cressions is busy in Galatia, Titus in Dalmatia and the only trained worker that Paul has with him is good faithful Luke, the physician. But this isn't Paul looking for sympathy but working out how to organise the work.

He's gathering his key members of the team around him to join Luke. He asks Timothy to come to him before winter and to bring with him Mark. The A team is being gathered together.

It doesn't really sound either like somebody expecting to die in the next few days or weeks. Timothy has to travel to Rome from Ephesus, a journey which is going to take him months.

And Paul wants to make sure he has the equipment organised. The cloak he wants is thought most likely to be a sort of travelling cloak, not something just to keep him warm in prison.

[23 : 46] He could have got that through Luke in Rome. But a good quality travelling cloak for the next stage of mission. And even more important, Paul says, bring me my books and above all the parchments.

The books may have been papyrus made from plants while the parchments were dried animal skins. They may have been Paul's Old Testament scriptures together with his notes or perhaps early narratives of the life and sayings of Jesus.

Whatever they were, here's evidence of Paul getting properly prepared, wanting to study, wanting to work on his material. So he wasn't just a man of action rushing on journeys all over the known world.

He was a scholar and a thinker. And in this last section we see Paul getting ready for the next challenge, for the work of spreading the word, telling people about the good news, organising his equipment, preparing his message and picking his team.

And having established what he's teaching and what he wants Timothy to do and why, here he is thinking strategically how this can be done to greatest effect. And that's where I think the message is for us in this final section, in this last part of the passage.

[25 : 07] We need to be part of that organised approach to ministry. Yes, we need to take up opportunities as they arise, the unexpected question, the chance to tell someone about Jesus in season and out of season.

We need to be planning strategically too. This letter may be addressed to Timothy and to those who preach the word, but we're all needed. Even if our role is just to fetch the cloak, to pass on the message, to carry the parchments.

Perhaps the modern equivalent is to make the coffee, to play in the music group, to supervise the creche. But it's all needed in the strategic approach to evangelism suggested here by Paul.

So we need to be strategic to use our resources well, but Paul also makes it clear who is really in control. Verse 17, he says, But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

[26 : 23] Paul needs to plan his strategy, but God is in control, choosing his workers, sustaining them. The lion's mouth in verse 17 is likely to be a description of the danger that Paul's been in.

It's probably not a real lion in the Colosseum. Paul's a Roman citizen, and although that sounds like a sort of graphic description, it's unlikely that he would have been subject to that. It's probably the real dangers of dying in prison, of being sentenced to death.

But Paul knows that God is sovereign and that his own fate in this world is not the important issue. As Paul wants to be alive, he wants to stay alive to continue his ministry, but he knows his real future is not here, but in God's heavenly kingdom.

And he's planning for God's work to continue here by passing the baton on to Timothy. So what do we need to take away from this passage?

What we have to do to proclaim the word in season and out of season, and to support those who are involved in doing that. And why we need to do it?

[27 : 36] Because there are people who need to hear that word, who are in desperate need of it, and who are being given a distortion of the truth. And how is it to be done?

Under God's control, by being organized, strategic, by supporting the effort, even if all you do yourself is fetch someone's cloak. And how is it to be done in my mind, so that you don't think that's what they are doing.

That's all right, as always. And I hope the prayer is that's being made within it, and because the prayer has been made to go begins and meet to have to go.

So I know you and view on. And you can say on the map, you can be to live of and to