

Godly Ministry in the Last Days (Part 2)

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0:00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 18th of February 2001.

The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled Godly Ministry in the Last Days, part 2, and is from 2 Timothy 4, verses 1 to 5.

And you may like to turn in the Bibles to page 968 to 2 Timothy 4. And this is continuing our sermon series, which we began after Christmas on 2 Timothy, which we'll finish next week.

God is here. The sovereign of the universe is present. The one who sees our actions and knows our thoughts is here.

The one who knows the secrets of our heart is present now. And Jesus is here. The one who died and was buried and rose again and ascended to the right hand of God, the Father in heaven, is present here with us.

[1:27] The one who sees our actions and knows our thoughts is here. That Jesus is here now. And though we do not see him now, we will do when he appears to judge us.

For then all will stand before his judgment throne. The living and the dead gathered before him will see him enthroned as judge. And on that day, we all, living and dead, will give account for our lives before him, the judge.

For all our actions and our thoughts and our words. On that day, he will expose our secret sins and our deeds of darkness.

That Jesus is here today. Now. In our midst. And this Jesus, the judge, is coming.

And it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. For as we are told in both Old and New Testaments, our God is a consuming fire.

[2:43] And his wrath and his judgment against sin warrant our fear and trembling. And that Jesus, the judge, is here now.

Today. In our midst. In our midst.

What then shall we do? When the glorious King and Judge of the universe, who knows our thoughts and our actions and our words, is here now.

And is coming to judge. What then shall we do? In the presence of God. And of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead.

And in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you, proclaim the message.

[4:08] There is no more urgent task. There is no greater priority. There is no more important duty for any Christian, let alone a Christian minister, than proclaim the message.

And that is what Paul exhorts Timothy here. Proclaim the message. Not any message. But the message. The gospel.

The word of truth. The body of teaching that Timothy has learned and seen from Paul's own ministry over many years. It is the message of the inspired scriptures, those God-breathed scriptures, that we read about last week.

For it is that message that makes people wise for salvation. It is that message that trains people in righteousness. And it is that message that Timothy is to proclaim.

To proclaim is to herald. To trumpet good news. To do so loudly and publicly. To declare it boldly. Not to hide it and keep it to oneself.

[5 : 16] To proclaim is the language of a press release. With the clicking, flashing cameras gathered around. It is the language of a news conference.

To publish and proclaim and transmit some new idea or message. For it is news, the gospel. The word of the scriptures. It is good news because it makes people wise for salvation.

It is the best news. Because only that message makes people wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. And Timothy is to proclaim it.

Not to debate it. Or to dialogue it. Not to ponder it. Not to set up a committee to discuss it or reshape it. The gospel is for proclaiming.

For telling. For speaking. For sharing. For spreading. Far and wide. At home and abroad. But more than that.

[6 : 18] Timothy is accountable to the judge of the living and the dead. For the gospel. Which has been entrusted to him. He is not accountable to the Christians in Ephesus.

They want him to speak other things. They are resisting him and going off after false teachers and other gospels. Which are in the end no gospel and no good news at all. Timothy is not in the end accountable to them.

Otherwise he would say what they want him to say. But it is before the throne of Jesus the judge and king. That Timothy will have to give account for his stewardship of the gospel entrusted to him.

Timothy. Have you proclaimed the message? Will be what Jesus asks him when he comes in glory. Have you proclaimed it persistently?

Not just once on a good day far ago in time. But have you proclaimed it persistently? The idea is a military term of being on red alert.

[7 : 25] To preach the message. To preach or proclaim the gospel. It's to be on call as though Timothy had a little beeper. That would beep periodically and regularly. To remind him that his task was to proclaim the message.

Have you proclaimed it Timothy? In season and out of season. In good time and in bad time. When it's convenient for you. And when it's inconvenient for you. When it's convenient for your hearers.

And when it's inconvenient for your hearers. When times are favourable. And when times are unfavourable. In hot weather or in cold weather. When you are eager. And when you are not.

When your listeners are eager. And when they are not. Timothy. Have you proclaimed it? It's not. Persistently. You see the urgency of Jesus coming return.

To judge the living and the dead. Demands that the gospel is preached now. Not way off tomorrow or next year. Not at a special time.

[8 : 25] It's not an activity confined for a mission week. Or a good news week. It's not an activity confined to the ministry team. Or the staff or the outreach coordinator. Or the people who seem to be a little bit fanatical about outreach.

It is for all times. And for all Christians. Because Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead. That's why it's so urgent. And that's why it's so important. Because when he comes to judge the living and the dead.

Those who have not placed their faith in Christ for salvation. By being taught the gospel from the scriptures. Will find themselves excluded from the coming kingdom forever.

That's why it's urgent. That's why it's important. That's why we're to proclaim the message in season and out of season. In favourable times and unfavourable times.

Because Jesus is coming to judge. And time is short. How will you give account for the gospel on judgment day? When Jesus asks you, what have you done with the gospel I've entrusted to you?

[9 : 29] Will you be able to say that you've proclaimed it persistently? In season? Out of season? Favourable times? Unfavourable times? When you ring the bank these days and you get put on one of those endless phone queues.

You often get told this call may be monitored for quality control. Jesus the judge is here. Now. He's exercising quality control every minute of our day.

He sees our actions and our inactions. He hears our words and our silences. He knows the thoughts of our hearts.

He knows the thoughts of our lives. He knows the thoughts of our lives. And that Jesus is coming to judge us and all the living and the dead one day. And we will be held accountable for the gospel by him then.

As the Christian church diminishes in the Western world and in Australia, it is astonishing how little it is proclaiming the gospel.

[10 : 42] We have committees and concerts and choirs and conferences. We have all sorts of great activity. But often that's just an excuse not to proclaim the message.

As the Titanic was sinking, the orchestra played. Nearer my God to thee. And down the ship went. And lives were lost.

And it seems no one was proclaiming the message. And in some ways the Western church is a little bit like that sinking ship. Eager to play nice music while the ship goes down.

But silent about proclaiming the message of salvation through faith in Christ. In the light of Jesus coming. Paul does not say sing another hymn.

He says proclaim the message. Persistently. One reason why we're so poor at evangelism and so unwilling to do it is because it is such hard work.

[11 : 48] People by and large are unresponsive. They don't flock to hear the gospel. Our family members who are not Christians consistently refuse to hear the gospel and heed it.

And it dampens our enthusiasm to share it persistently. Rejection after rejection stifles our voices. Paul knew that.

It's nothing new in a modern post-modern age. It's typical of every age in every place. And that's why he exhorts Timothy so strongly here to preach the message persistently.

Because he knows that Timothy will face rejection. Even hostility. Deaf ears to the words of truth. So Paul says to him preach the message or proclaim the message persistently.

Convince people. Literally to convict them of their sins. Show where they're wrong in their thinking and wrong in their behaviour. That's an uncomfortable thing to do and to be told.

[12 : 55] Rebuke them, he says. That is not only show them where they're wrong in their thinking and their behaviour, but warn them to stop their wrong thinking and wrong behaviour and turn to right thinking and right behaviour.

Convince them and rebuke them, he says. Now people don't like to be told those things. In effect, what Paul is saying to Timothy here is tell people to repent.

Show them they're wrong and tell them to stop. Which is in another word, repent. But the gospel demands repentance.

For all people are sinners and need to repent of their sin. And these are hard words and they're words that often fall on deaf ears. But we cannot excise repentance from the gospel.

Because in the end, the rest of the gospel collapses into a marshmallowy goo that is good for nobody. Those who do, and there are plenty of them, cut out repentance from the word of truth.

[14:01] Emasculate the gospel. And salvation becomes nonsense. And there is no gospel left. Paul, in saying to Timothy here to proclaim the message and convince and rebuke, is saying no more than Jesus said in his opening words in Mark's gospel.

The kingdom of God is near, repent. Paul says here to Timothy, in the light of the appearing of Jesus bringing his kingdom, convince and rebuke.

That is, call people to repent. But the gospel is not just hard words and hard ideas. On the other side of repentance is to encourage.

To encourage people to trust Jesus for salvation. To encourage them to find faith in him. Because his death brings them forgiveness and his resurrection guarantees their eternal destiny in heaven.

Encourage them, Paul says. Again, saying little more than what Jesus said in his opening words. The kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the good news.

[15:11] That salvation is found through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul says to Timothy, encourage people. Encourage people to place their trust in Jesus Christ.

Encourage people to find comfort in his gospel. Encourage people to find forgiveness. Encourage people to find grace. Encourage people to find salvation.

Because it won't be found anywhere else than in the word of truth about Jesus Christ. Repent and believe. Timothy is exhorted to preach that.

Now in such urgent times, Paul's next words to Timothy strike us as being a little bit unusual. He says to Timothy, convince, rebuke and encourage with the utmost patience.

When something is urgent, we tend to be impatient. We tend to be in a hurry to get it done. But Paul says, convince, rebuke and encourage with the utmost patience.

[16:20] You see, Paul knows that proclaiming the gospel that will bring people to Christian faith is long, hard labour. Conversions are rarely instant.

And even if one person sees a quick conversion, there's often been seed sowed a long time ago in that person's history and life. One reason why we're so poor at evangelism, at proclaiming the message persistently, is that we give up because we don't see results.

We're too impatient with our friends and our family, our colleagues, our friends at Probus, our fellow students and with others.

Despite the urgency of Jesus' return, Paul says, preach the message with patience. Don't give up on people. Keep on preaching.

Keep on proclaiming the message. Don't give up. But be patient. And to do so with teaching as well. For the gospel is not a simple, straightforward formula necessarily.

[17:27] People require to be taught. For if it's the scriptures that are God-breathed by God to make us wise for salvation, then we need to teach the scriptures.

So that people see what God is on about. And see the salvation that is on offer through Jesus' death and resurrection. The gospel requires teaching. That we may be accurate and faithful in our proclamation of the message.

Another reason why we are so poor at proclaiming the message is because it is so lonely and isolating.

People flock to the feel-good factor. They accumulate speakers whom they like to hear because they make them feel good. That is, they stroke and caress their pride and their egos.

They pander to their desires. They encourage people to think that they've got what it takes. That if only they did something else, they could do whatever they wanted to do.

[18:32] And people flock to hear such messages and such preachers and speakers. Indeed, they heap them up, Paul says in verses 3 and 4.

They heap up preachers who pander to their own desires. But in the end, what they do is they abandon the truth for a lie. They desert the gospel for a myth.

It was true for Timothy in the 60s AD in Ephesus. It's true today. It's true in every era in between. So why is it that we read the rubbish of the myth of God incarnate in last issue of Melbourne Anglican?

It's because sinners like to hear that the message of the incarnation is a myth because it's a means of escape from the demands of the gospel and the cost of discipleship.

Why is it that Bishop Spong is so popular when he doesn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus? Not because what he says is true. But because what he says gives us an escape clause, a safety way out from having to live for Jesus' sake.

[19:44] Rather, we can live for ourselves. It panders to people's desires. Why is it that so many theologians in universities and academic institutions and seminaries around the world are disputing the reliability and historicity of the Bible?

Not because it's unreliable or ahistorical, but because they're trying to find ways out of following Jesus Christ and carrying a cross after him.

If we can somehow deride the words of scripture, then we can evade its moral demands as well. And why is it that so many preachers in pulpits around the world are silent about the coming Jesus who will judge the living and the dead?

Because they know that parishioners squirm so uncomfortably about judgment that they won't darken their doors the next week. I know people who've stopped coming here because of the word of truth and the moral demands that it has.

I know people who've stopped coming here because they don't like being told to repent. I know people who've stopped coming here because they've gone after people who will speak words that their itching ears long to hear because they want to escape the demands of Jesus Christ.

[21:09] And it's sad when that happens and it makes me sad when that happens, but I'm not here to be popular because on the judgment day when Jesus returns, I'm accountable to him for proclaiming the message of truth.

On the day when the judge shall come, and when all people living and dead are called to account before his judgment throne, some will be in for a shock.

There are no more chilling words than Jesus' words, away from me for I do not know you. And that is why we have to proclaim the message.

So the people turn and find salvation through faith in Christ and do not hear those words on that day. The words that our ears should itch for are Jesus' words on that day.

Well done, good and faithful servant. So Timothy, in Ephesus, you are facing opposition and people are flocking after false gospels and preachers.

[22:22] You are being isolated and being ridiculed. You are facing temptation to be ashamed of the gospel and hence silent. But Timothy, don't panic.

Be calm and level-headed. Understand why it is that people are searching after other speakers who pander to their desires. Expect it to happen.

Be sober about this issue. Even be prepared to suffer for it. Keep on doing the work of an evangelist. Don't give up.

Be patient. Keep on proclaiming the message in season and out of season. Even if people are walking and wandering away to myths and things that are not true, keep on preaching the message of truth.

For truth is not democratic. Truth is not determined by where the popular vote is cast. Truth comes because God has spoken. So proclaim his message.

[23 : 28] And keep on proclaiming and doing the work of an evangelist. Carry out your ministry fully. Don't give up. You've started well.

Make sure that you end well. In the verses that follow, which we'll see next week, Paul says to Timothy that he has finished well. He's done the work. He's fought the fight and he's run the race.

Timothy, you're in the race. Keep running. You're in the fight. Keep fighting. For on the day when the judge comes, if you fulfill your ministry to the full, then what will await you will be a crown of glory.

It's easy to start well as a Christian or as a Christian minister. You get out of theological college and you begin full of zeal to tell everybody about all the things that you've learnt for the previous four years.

It's much harder to persevere to the end. It's much harder to carry out your ministry fully. And the same for Christians who aren't ministers. We begin with our new life full of the enthusiasm and zeal for having been converted and finding our sins forgiven and salvation promised for us.

[24 : 43] But then as life goes on and the pressures of life pile up around us, it's easy to falter and stumble in the Christian race. There are few gospel ministries that are successful in the world's eyes because the world doesn't judge success the way God does.

And it's all too easy to give up, to dry up and to burn out as Christians or as Christian ministers. The clergy book of ministers for Melbourne diocese is liberally scattered with the names of people who've given up on the gospel.

Some of them are no longer in ministry. They've lost the gospel. And so they've lost their faith and lost their ministry. Some of them are no longer Christian.

But sadder still, some of them are still in ministry, though they've lost the gospel. That's the same for lay people. Some of them start off full of commitment to the gospel but gradually lose it over the years.

Many of them, of course, stop coming to church. Some don't. Their itching ears attract them to other myths and other gospels and nicer and easier and softer words.

[25 : 54] But what people want is not necessarily what they need. Any parent tells that to their children often. And what is needed in this increasingly pagan society in which we live is the gospel of truth.

Not words that will satisfy itching ears. Not words that will bolster egos and personal desires. But words of truth of the gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

You see, we need Christians to proclaim the message persistently, in season and out of season, in good times, in bad, in favourable times and unfavourable times. We need Christians to proclaim the message to their family, to their parents, to their children, to their uncles and aunts and nieces and nephews, to their God children and their God parents.

We need Christians to proclaim the message to their work colleagues, to their next door neighbours, to their friends at probus and in walking clubs, to their fellow students, to their bosses and to their employees, to the people they meet on the bus or in the train, to the people with whom they walk their dogs.

We need Christians to proclaim the message persistently, all the time, because Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead. And if people have not responded to the message of truth with faith in Jesus Christ, then on the day he comes to judge the living and the dead, they'll be kept out of heaven forever.

[27:14] That's why it's important and urgent. And that's why we have the duty to proclaim the message. And we need churches to proclaim the message, and proclaim the message, and proclaim the message, in season and out of season.

Not just in good news weeks, not just at Christmas and Easter, not just with special events, but all the time, all the time, all the time. And we need dioceses to stop fooling around with bureaucracy and trivia, and to proclaim the message, and to encourage churches and Christians and ministers to proclaim the message in season and out of season, instead of pussyfooting around with all sorts of pomp and glorious circumstance.

And all of that begins with you and me, here and now, in the presence of God, and in the presence of Jesus. For God is here, now, in our midst.

And Jesus is here now in our midst. Jesus, the judge and the king who is coming, is here now. And he sees our inaction and action.

And he knows our thoughts. Jesus, and he hears our words and our silences. And though we cannot see him now, we will one day, when we will be called to account for the gospel that he's entrusted to us.

[28:32] Have you proclaimed the message? Have you proclaimed it persistently? Have you proclaimed it in season and out of season, in good times and bad? Have you convinced?

Have you rebuked? Have you encouraged? Have you done so patiently and with teaching? How will we answer Jesus on that day when he comes?

When he appears in his kingly glory, knowing our thoughts and our words and actions, but calling us to account for them. How will we answer the question? Have you proclaimed the message?

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you, proclaim the message.

Be persistent, whether the time is favourable or unfavourable. Convince, rebuke, and encourage with utmost patience in teaching.

[29:37] For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves, teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth, and wander away to myths.

As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Thank you.