

'Preaching the Words & Finish Well'

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[0:00] Well, I don't know if you've been watching the World Cup soccer or whether you've lost interest! after we lost yesterday morning. But there's been some highs and some lows. Some lows are! When someone gets the ball, goes to an open goal and can't finish well like this guy. Take a look.

I recognise it was an opportunity to put some pressure on the England goalkeeper. But Bellingham has threaded it beautifully for Madweke, who is in! No, he's not. And has somehow failed to make it 2-0.

Poor guy. But he's able to smile about it at least, possibly because he remembers it is a soccer, World Cup soccer nonetheless. But the point is, he got the ball, ran away with it, and failed to finish well. And Paul today in our passage is not going to make the same mistake when it comes to the Christian life. Because more is at stake than World Cup soccer.

You see, Paul knows who wrote this letter. He's about to die. Perhaps he's heard that the mad Emperor Nero has ordered his execution soon. Either way, these are his final words, words, as Harry mentioned at the start of the service, to Timothy, to guard the gospel.

And the gospel is the good news about Jesus. How Jesus died for our sins and rose again as our king, so that anyone who believes in him can have the guarantee of being saved from hell for life eternal.

[1:36] And that's just a bit more important than World Cup soccer, isn't it? And it's the big theme of this letter. And so since this is our last one today in the letter, last chapter, let me recap what we've seen so far about guarding the gospel. In chapter one, Paul began by saying to not be ashamed of Jesus and the good news about him, so that we don't shrink back from living for Jesus or sharing about Jesus with others.

And then in chapter two, he talks about enduring suffering for Jesus. We're to be willing to endure suffering for Jesus and entrust the gospel to others, so that can be passed on to the next generation and to the next and to the next. And then the second half of chapter two, we talked about, well, we saw it said about being a useful servant who has a character worthy of guarding the gospel.

And so we saw things like being an approved worker or a cleansed instrument or a gentle servant, that we might always be ready for any good work that loves people and seeks to promote the gospel.

And then last week in chapter three, we saw guarding the gospel meant living differently in these last days. Like that little Scottish boy at the Muslim mosque, if you were here last Sunday. In other words, being a witness to Jesus and to the good news or gospel about him, by living like Paul, despite opposition and living for Jesus, according to the scriptures.

[3:12] And this week, it means to preach the word and finish well, so that the gospel doesn't die out with us. In fact, for Paul to finish well meant using his final words to encourage Timothy to preach the word, which is point one in your outlines and verse one and two on your Bibles or on the screen.

And so our chapter today begins with, Now you can tell these are Paul's final words, because in verse one, he kind of pulls out the big guns, doesn't he?

He talks about in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who, by the way, Timothy, will judge the living and the dead, including you. And in view of his appearing, where he will reward us and his kingdom, which no one can enter without hearing the gospel.

I give you this, not encouragement, but this charge. Can you see how he kind of really ups the ante as he speaks to Timothy? For this is Paul's last opportunity to tell him to preach the word.

And it's this word about Jesus, how he died for us and rose again. It's that word, that message that saves people, as I said, from hell for life eternal when they believe in Jesus.

[4:47] And so Paul wants Timothy to grasp the gravity of this situation. I remember going away with some friends. Michelle and I and the kids went away with another family one year just after Christmas.

And we took all the kids' bikes with us. And it included the brand new bike. It was a Christmas present of our friend's son called Ben. He was about 10 years old at the time, I think.

And we're at this caravan park and some thieves cut the lock off Ben's bike and stole it. And so the next morning, Ben was in tears because his bike was stolen.

And his parents tried to console him by saying, look, we'll buy you another one. It's okay. And when they said, it's just a bike, this 10-year-old kid turned to his parents and said, you don't understand the gravity of the situation.

What kind of 10-year-old talks like that? And that's because he wanted his parents to grasp how important his bike was. Well, for Paul, the gospel is the most important thing.

[5:51] And not because he got it for Christmas, but because it saves people from hell for life eternal. And this is his last opportunity to exhort Timothy. And so he ups the ante that Timothy might grasp the gravity of this situation too and preach the word.

In fact, he's to be prepared to preach it at a moment's notice. The old King James Version actually says instead of be prepared, be instant in a moment's notice.

In the world of instant things like instant entertainment, like Netflix or instant coffee, Timothy was to be an instant preacher, ready at a moment's notice to share the good news of Jesus, even when it was inconvenient for him.

That's what the next bit says, where it talks about in season and out of season. It means whether it's convenient for him or not convenient, whether it's the season for it or not.

And even if it is inconvenient for Timothy, he's still to preach it. And to do so with great patience and careful instruction, it says at the end there.

[7:01] But why is he to be an instant preacher? Well, because people will pursue false teachers who won't preach the true word. Verse 3. For or because, so we're giving a reason now, the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.

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.

And we've seen this in Australia as well. I often meet people who have just come to our country and they think it's a Christian country. I've heard this story many times before.

And you might have even thought that at once upon a time. But sadly, it's not. People no longer want sound doctrine, but something that suits their desires.

And so most recently, it's their desire to marry the same gender or to be whatever gender they want. And so they gather teachers who will say what their itching ears want to hear.

[8:08] And we have that with some ministers here in Melbourne who say that. Next, it will be people's desire to marry multiple partners and even animals. And if you think that's far-fetched, it's already happened.

Back in 2010, a New South Wales man called Joe married his dog in a park ceremony. Here they are, Joe and his dog, Honey. Now, it wasn't legally binding, but it actually happened.

But God's word is not just true. It's actually good for us. After all, God designed us and made us.

And so he knows what's best for us. And statistics and our biology back it up, actually.

The point is because people will pursue false teachers who won't preach the word that saves, Timothy is to preach the word that saves. And so Paul goes on to say, but you, Timothy, keep your head in all situations.

Endure hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Discharge all the duties of your ministry. You see, Timothy is to hold the line. Keep his head.

[9:16] Endure. Evangelize. Discharge. In other words, preach the word. Be an instant preacher who takes every opportunity, whether it's convenient or not. And not just because people will pursue false teachers who won't preach the word, but also because Paul is about to die and then he can't preach the word.

Verse 6 starts with the for or because, giving another reason again. Because I am already being pulled out like a drink offering. And the time for my departure is near.

Paul talks about his death as a drink offering, which was an Old Testament sacrifice that Israel made to God. And so the idea is he is sacrificing his life for Jesus.

That is, his death is because he's a Christian and it will happen soon. As he says, his life is already in the process of being pulled out. And the time for his departure from this world is near.

And so Timothy is to guard the gospel of Jesus by preaching the word about Jesus. Not just because people will pursue teachers who won't, but also because Paul will soon die and then can't. [10 : 29] For us, we're firstly not to be like those itchy-eared people who pursue false teachers to say what we want to hear.

I know there are some things in the Bible which are hard to understand and even hard to accept. But as I said before, God designed us and made us.

And so he knows what's best for us. More than that, he gave his only son Jesus to die for us. That's how good he is. And if he's that good, then don't you think we can trust his word to us?

Don't you think we can trust that it's good for us? Even if we don't always understand it or find it hard to accept it. And so if your ears are itchy, then scratch them with your hand.

Don't go and look for false teachers who will say what you want to hear. We're not to be like those itchy-eared people. Instead, we're to be like Timothy and take the opportunity to preach the word too.

[11 : 33] Now, let me be clear for a moment. We are not all capital P preachers like Timothy. He was given the duty of looking after a church, a bit like me and the other pastors. And so we don't all have the same level of responsibility as Timothy had.

But we are all to be little P preachers. We're all to be instant little P preachers who are to speak the word about Jesus whenever the opportunity comes.

At first to each other inside the church, as Paul says in Colossians, we are to teach and admonish one another. Speak God's word to encourage each other.

But we're also to make the most of every opportunity with outsiders, it says later on in Colossians. Even when it's inconvenient for us.

Like a guy I know called Phil who had just finished a long conference in the UK. I'd boarded his plane for Australia. Sat down and his head just hit the back of the headrest with his eyes closed.

[12 : 36] And then one of those talkers came up next to him. You know what I mean? And sat down and said, gee, I hope God gives us a safe flight if he exists. He was a golden opportunity to say something about Jesus who does show us, by the by, that God exists.

But Phil confessed his first thought was, oh Lord, why couldn't you have given me a quiet one? And then he remembered this verse and took the opportunity. I should also add that this inconvenience is meant to be for us.

I know some eager Christians who are keen to share Jesus sometimes share it when it's inconvenient for others. But it's certainly going to put others off, isn't it?

Rather, we are the ones who are meant to suffer the inconvenience, not them. And so another person I know from church, from this service actually, was recently in hospital, not in a plane.

And she had her Bible out on the hospital table and a nurse commented about it. And so she took the opportunity to say something of Jesus, even though being in hospital and being in pain was not particularly convenient for her.

[13 : 45] I know others who give up their time to preach the word at our kids club that we prayed for before, J Kids or ESL or the Blackburn Markets, even though getting up early on a Saturday morning is not particularly convenient.

Or parents, I know many of parents here who teach their kids by reading the Bible to them each night, even when it's not convenient for them. Either because the parents are tired or the kids are ready.

Or to be honest, it's a bit of both really, isn't it? Despite not being a capital P preacher like Timothy, we are all to be instant little P preachers who take the opportunity to speak the word to one another inside the church and also to those outside the church whenever the opportunity comes, whether it's convenient or not.

Now, I know sometimes we miss the opportunity. It's happened to me as well. I kind of realised after I left the conversation. And so perhaps pray regularly that God would give you eyes to see those

opportunities.

But also remember the gravity of the situation that we might take them. Well, to guard the gospel, Paul tells Timothy to preach the word. And this is part of him finishing well.

[14:58] But Paul doesn't stop there. He continues to model what it means to finish well, perhaps even without realising it, which is our second point for today. So point two, verse seven. He goes on to say, I have fought the good fight.

I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Paul has kept the faith. And not any old faith, the Christian faith. And it hasn't been easy before because he describes it as a fight, doesn't he? Sometimes the Christian life will be a struggle. It will be hard. Whether it's because of opposition or suffering. Or simply not understanding why something is happening in our world or in our lives. Or perhaps because our faith means putting Jesus above other things in life. Whether work or sport or even our family. And putting Jesus first in those situations can sometimes be really hard and costly, can't it?

Or it could be a struggle because running the race means we get tired, like Michelle did in the kids talk. Tired of making time to read the Bible and pray during the week.

[16:08] Tired of coming to church each Sunday. Tired of persevering through illnesses. Tired of serving. Tired of serving. And yet Paul calls it all a good fight.

It's good because it's a fight worth fighting. It's a race worth finishing. Why? Well, verse 8. Now there is in store 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 of us who have longed for his appearing. In 1982, the Commonwealth Games were held in Brisbane.

And Australian Rob D. Casella, if you remember him, ran the marathon. Here he is. But it was a huge fight for him on this particular day. Because he wasn't just tired and struggling with stitches and stomach cramps.

He also developed raised toenails, which rubbed in his shoes as he ran. And he had a spinal disc problem that caused him pain every step he took.

[17:14] And yet as much of a struggle as it was, he kept going. And as he reflected on why and what kept him going, he said it was the end. The opportunity to win gold, which he did.

And put Australia on the map in terms of Olympic Games. Of course, for us, it's the crown of righteousness. Which is actually worth much more than a gold medal.

For it will mean life eternal. In a perfect world to come. A life which is, to be honest, better than what we can possibly imagine. And so it's worth keeping the faith.

Even when it's a struggle or a fight. For on that final day, Jesus will say, Welcome, good and faithful servant. Come and share in my crown of righteousness.

Come and share in my kingdom of glory. Finishing means continuing to fight the good fight. Continuing to finish the race.

[18:14] Continuing to keep the faith to the very end. In fact, you'd actually translate verse 7 as Paul saying, I am fighting the good fight. I am finishing the race.

I am keeping the faith. Because Paul hasn't yet stopped. He hasn't yet died. In fact, he's still going to the very end without even letting things like his approaching death distract him.

Unlike Demas, who is distracted. Verse 9 and 10. Paul writes to Timothy again, Do your best to come to me quickly. For Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Thessalonica. Christians has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. Notice Demas in verse 10. He deserted Paul because he loved this world.

He got distracted by worldly things and fell in love with this world, rather than fixing his eyes on Jesus and the world to come. And so he stops running the race.

[19:16] In an earlier Olympic Games held at St. Louis in 1904, there was another marathon. And this time there was a Cuban mailman called Felix who entered the race.

And he was actually winning the race for the first 18 miles. But then he was distracted by some spectators whom he stopped to have a chat with.

In the middle of an Olympic race, he did. He got back and started running again. And then a little further down the track, he got distracted again, this time by some apple trees in the field next to him.

So he stopped, went into the field and grabbed some apples to eat. They were green ones. But it seems like he picked them up from the ground and from the tree because it turns out that apples were rotten.

And so as he kept running the race, they kind of had a laxative effect on him. And he had to stop to keep going to the toilet. It's a true story. You can look it up. The point being to finish well means not being distracted by the things of this world such that we stop running the Christian race.

[20:26] Felix actually ended up finishing the race, but no surprise he didn't win. Well, for us, distraction can mean falling in love with this world, like Demas did in verse 10, and not finishing the race at all.

And so I wonder what things in this world might distract you from finishing the Christian race. Even good things like work, friends, family, sport, holidays, or perhaps they're difficult things like health issues or a particular predicament that you're facing at the moment.

Now, we all have responsibilities where to fulfill. We all have problems to deal with. And we are all given good things that we are allowed to and should enjoy as gifts from God.

But we're not to let any of those things, whether good or bad, distract us from finishing the Christian race. Finishing means not being distracted by the world, but on the flip side, it also means serving to the end as we're able.

Verse 11. Paul continues by saying, Now, I know these might seem like random names to us, but do you see what Paul is actually doing?

[22:01] He's actually marshalling the troops. He's continuing to keep going in his ministry. Can you hear him? Tick ears, please go to Ephesus and help the church there. Timothy, watch out for Alexander and bring Mark with you because he's helpful for my ministry.

And can you bring your cloak because it's cold in this cell and I don't want to let sickness slow me down. And bring my scrolls and especially my parchments because there's still ministry to do. What ministry?

He's in a prison cell. He's in a dark Roman, disgusting underground cell that would have stunk where there were no prison toilets. And yet he still doesn't let that stop him.

Despite all this, Paul is acting like this prison cell is his ministry headquarters. You know, sending out issues and summons to keep going in the ministry. The point is he may not be able to leave jail, but he's continuing to serve Jesus as he's able to the very end.

I mean, he knows he's going to die, but he's not even thinking about that. This is also what it means for us to finish well. Whether we have Caleb's strength at 85 years old or not in our first reading, or even if all we can do is simply pray for our friends and family and for our church, prayer still counts as serving.

[23:26] It really counts. It's important. And we can all keep doing it. I remember one of our members who was around 85 didn't have Caleb's strength from our first reading, but because of that, he was in aged care accommodation.

He couldn't come to church here, but they had a church service there. He could still walk using a walker. And so every time they had the church service at the aged care accommodation place, he would walk around his level and knock on every door and invite each person personally to come for the church service.

He's a great way of serving as he's able. And he did that, kept doing that until he was no longer able, which was just before he passed. Finishing well means not being distracted, serving to the end as we're able, and lastly, remembering Jesus who's with us, verse 16.

Paul says, At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me, may it not be held against them, but the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever.

[24:45] Amen. In verse 16, Paul was on trial and no one came to his defence at first except verse 17, the Lord Jesus, who stood by his side and strengthened him to keep going.

And verse 18, will rescue him from every evil attack, including his pending execution. Not so much from the execution, but through it and bring him, as he says, safely to his heavenly kingdom.

We're to remember that Jesus stands with us to help us too, to finish well. And so how's your Christian race going at the moment? Are you continuing to fight, to run, to keep, not being

distracted by the world, but serving to the end as you're able.

Remembering Jesus is with you to strengthen you. No matter where we are in our race, whether at the beginning or the middle or towards the end, we're all to preach the word when we can.

And we're all to strive to finish well. So that with Paul, we too can say, I have fought the good fight. I finished the race. I have kept the faith.

[26 : 03] Let's pray we would. Let's pray. Our gracious father, strengthen us to preach the word when we can and to keep striving to finish well.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.