

Paul, Timothy and Troubled Times Part 8

We continue our series as Paul is facing execution and writing his final letter to Timothy. He is encouraging him, telling him what to do in the midst of troubled times. “Timothy, you’re going to have opposition so get ready. You’ll have opposition from within, your own personal struggles to overcome. You’ll need to flee evil desires and pursue righteousness and holiness. You’ll have to push through on the days you want to throw in the towel. You’ll need to endure hardship like a good soldier and exercise self-discipline like an athlete training for a marathon. Keep going. Continue in the faith even when others quit. Guard the truth that’s been entrusted to you, the word of God. You’ll face opposition because you guard that truth. Deceivers and false teachers will try to persuade you to give up the faith, they’ll try to draw others away from the truth and you will have to keep preaching and correcting, refusing to quarrel with them, but instead, with kindness keep sharing the gospel. You’ll be opposed by people who prefer sin, who choose to go their own way, choosing pleasure over obedience to God. But you Timothy, you know the way to go. You know the truth. You know those who taught you. You know God’s word and how you are called to live. Hold on to the truth Timothy.” Now, Paul tells Timothy **“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:” 2 Timothy 4:1**

Paul announces this with great solemnity. “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus.” “I’m telling you this and God the Father and Jesus the Son are bearing witness to what I am telling you.” Notice he speaks of Jesus as the one who will judge the living and the dead. Paul is confident, as are we, that Jesus is the ultimate judge. In Acts 17, in his sermon on Mars Hill Paul says, “God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed and he has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” Paul affirms the dead will be raised and all will be judged. Knowing we will be judged should affect us all. Our sins have already been judged and forgiven through faith in Christ, but our choices and actions will be judged. We will give an account and we should live in light of that reality.

Notice too, Paul places this “in view of his appearing and his kingdom.” Paul sets everything with an eye toward the coming of the Lord. He is certain the Lord will return and it will be a visible appearing. He will return and he will establish his eternal kingdom. We should be as certain as Paul was about the Lord’s return. He will appear again to judge the living and the dead. It’s certain and we are to live our lives in view of this. Paul is saying to Timothy and

to us, you've got all the sin and the trouble and the temptation and the pleasures and the easy, default path and position in view on one side, but you've got Jesus' appearing, his return and his judgment that will come and his eternal kingdom in view on the other. With all of that in view, in the midst of troubled times, I give you this charge. Here is what you need to do Timothy, **“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.” 2 Timothy 4:2**

Paul could have suggested all kinds of things to do from a worldly perspective, but in troubled times the #1 thing Paul tells Timothy to do is preach the Word of God. This is his answer. Don't forget what is of the utmost importance, don't forget our overriding mission, it was, is and will be to proclaim the gospel, to preach the Word to people dying without Christ and without hope.

Timothy knows which word. It is that to which Paul has referred throughout his letter. The Word, God's word, the God breathed, living Scripture, the gospel, the good news, the truth and the sound teaching and the faith that has been entrusted to Timothy. It's the teaching that Timothy has firmly believed and is convinced of. It is the word that gives us life and hope and makes us wise and brings us to salvation. Communicate this word, God's word, not our own invention, but the Word God has entrusted to us through the centuries and generations.

Paul tells Timothy to be prepared, it means to be on standby, ready. One translation reads, “Never lose your sense of urgency.” Be ready at all times to share the good news with everyone. It is urgent because of the message that is being proclaimed. It is the gospel, the only good news able to save people from their sins. Be ready to proclaim it with urgency, recognizing the lateness of the hour and the importance of the message. Paul tells him to be prepared in season and out of season. We should be prepared to share the good news about Jesus, when it is convenient and when it is inconvenient, when it's popular or well received, and when it's unpopular and poorly received. Not everyone will be happy to hear the truth, but our responsibility is to share it. We aren't sent to cram good news down anyone's throat, but we are called to be prepared at all times to share that good news. Keep your urgency. Recognize the importance. It's about eternity and salvation! Live ready, prepared to tell others about Jesus and to proclaim his word.

Not only do we proclaim the truth of the gospel, but he tells us we are to use the word of God as the standard by which to correct those who are in error in their doctrine or their conduct.

Share the word of God in a way that convinces others to follow in obedience to God's word. Rebuke or warn those who ignore the correction of God's word. To live in disobedience to God's word is dangerous. You can't ignore God's word and sin against God or his people and not suffer consequences. We are also to use God's word to encourage those who are discouraged or down. Apply God's word to the needs and circumstances we face in troubled times. God and his word is to always be our source!

Notice Paul tells us how we are to correct, rebuke and encourage: with great patience and careful instruction. Although we are doing all of this with a sense of urgency, we are also dealing with people and Paul says that is going to require great patience. Amen to that! We proclaim the Word and we have to trust the Holy Spirit to produce the results. In the meantime, we are to wait patiently. Notice too, we are to proclaim the word with careful instruction. We preach the word of God, calling sinners to repentance and calling saints to discipleship. We teach the word, making plain and clear the doctrines of the faith to all ages, in ways that all can understand.

Paul had modeled this for Timothy in Ephesus, the very place where Timothy was now pastoring. In Acts 20 Paul reminds the church in Ephesus of how for three years he had "proclaimed the whole counsel of God" and had taught them in public and from house to house, declaring to both Jews and Gentiles that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Timothy knew what Paul was talking about. Teach, preach, with careful instruction and great patience.

Here is another warning to Timothy, another aspect of the troubled times he was living in and that we are living in. It was another reason why the clear, intelligent, reasoned, proclamation of the gospel, not the preacher's opinion but preaching the word of God, why it was so urgent, so important. **"For the time will come when men 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." 2 Timothy 4:3-4**

I think Paul had in mind the near future for Timothy and it is definitely the present circumstances for us. People will not put up with sound doctrine, with biblical truth and instead simply create their own so called "doctrine" but what Paul calls myths. People will suffer from itching ears. Sadly, this appears to be a terminal disease. Itching ears will cause you to stop

your ears up to the truth, to embrace your own version of truth and that can have deadly and eternal consequences. Rejecting the truth of God's word, pleasing yourself instead of obeying God, it leads to damnation. Don't deceive yourself and don't allow yourself to be deceived. I don't care how many preachers you can find that affirm your position, if it isn't consistent with God's word, if it isn't in keeping with God's word, it is sin, it will separate you from God and will lead to judgement and hell.

John Stott writes of these who deny the truth of God, "they do not first listen and then decide whether what they have heard is true; they first decide what they want to hear and then select teachers who will oblige by toeing their line." We've seen it happen in the church world over issues of sexual standards, and that applies to both gay and straight. We decide how we want to live, what sin we want to make acceptable, and then we find preachers and teachers and books to back up our position. It just doesn't work that way. The word of God is our truth, our standard and we cannot back down from the word of God, even when it is uncomfortable or an inconvenient truth. We are still called to take up a cross in our discipleship and say no to our flesh and no to the world and yes to Jesus.

People don't want to listen to the truth. It's easy today, you don't like what the preacher is preaching, there is another church down the street, another online preacher and that church and pastor preaches an easier gospel. We aren't called to preach our truth or convenient truth, we are called to preach God's truth. How is Timothy supposed to respond to this kind of trouble? It's another one of those "but you Timothy" moments. Others are preaching what is popular, others are satisfying itching ears, but in contrast Timothy, **"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."** 2 Timothy 4:5

Timothy, you don't take your lead from the world, from what is fashionable or trendy, you take your lead from the word of God and the wisdom and direction of the Holy Spirit. Keep your head in all situations. It literally says "be sober". Be steady, well balanced, use self-control so you don't get sucked into all the nonsense or the false teaching. While everyone else is running after the newest trendy doctrine and teaching and opening the door to compromise, you keep your head and keep preaching God's word. Keep living according to God's word. It won't be popular or easy, so be prepared to endure hardship. There will be a price to pay for living according to God's word and a price to pay for preaching and proclaiming God's word as well.

Do the work of an evangelist. Evangel means good news. An evangelist is simply someone who announces good news. Paul tells Timothy to make announcing good news the heartbeat of his life. Make announcing good news your life's work, regardless of what you do to earn a salary, be an evangelist and share the good news of Jesus with others. That's for all of us. Be "good news sharers!"

Finally, Paul tells Timothy to fulfill all the duties of his ministry. Even if people leave to find those teachers who will tell them what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear, keep preaching, keep teaching, keep correcting and rebuking and encouraging, keep proclaiming the truth. Quoting again from John Stott's commentary on this passage. **"Those difficult days, in which it was hard to gain a hearing for the gospel, were not to discourage Timothy; nor to deter him from his ministry; nor to induce him to trim his message to suit his hearers; still less to silence him altogether; but rather to spur him on to preach the more. It should be the same with us. The harder the times and the deafen the people, the clearer and more persuasive our proclamation must be." ...John Stott**

God has given us a mission, a ministry, a calling, each of us. It's not just for preachers or teachers, it's for all of us. It won't be easy, that's why he tells us to keep our head, endure hardship, share the good news and keep doing what God called us to do! Live for Jesus. Obey His word. Be faithful. Keep saying yes to God's plan, God's call, God's timing, God's purpose for you! Even in troubled times, keep saying yes! The harder the times, the clearer and more persuasive our message, our proclamation must be, our lifestyle and life choices, our example must be. Keep showing the world what it means to live for Jesus! Troubled times call for a clear message and a clear example of what living for Jesus is all about. Will you say yes to living your life for Jesus?

(Perhaps you are feeling a call to ministry, to be a pastor or missionary, a call to teach to volunteer to serve the church, say yes. The need is greater than ever.)

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen!

During the Sundays of Lent we are celebrating communion together. If you are part of our online service, hopefully you've prepared some bread and juice and the rest should have picked up one of the communion cups in the foyer.

During these weeks we've joined with much of the church worldwide in focusing on repentance and devoting our hearts to the Lord. I've wanted this to be a reminder that we are part of His church, all of us, online, in person, across denominations, cultures and nations. All those who have repented of their sins and made Jesus the Savior and Lord of their lives, we are the church, people of faith and together we come to the Lord's table and together we affirm the essential doctrines of our faith, the teaching of the word of God. With that, I want us to recite together the Apostle's Creed. This ancient creed is a way for us collectively to declare the faith. We may be the church in many places today, but we are the church united in the faith. **"I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into Hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy, apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen."**

O Lord, we thank you for the faith, for this truth that has been entrusted to us the church. May we hide your word in our heart so we will not sin against you, may we carry this doctrine, this body of truth to others, even to the ends of the earth. May we live in light of your truth every day of our lives. We thank you for the gift not only of the gospel truth, but for the gift of your Son, the living truth and the way and the life. It is through Christ and his mercy and grace that we have salvation. Jesus, we thank you that your life was poured out as the atoning sacrifice for our sin, that we might have eternal life and live in fellowship with you. As we gather at your table to receive the gift of your body and blood, make us more aware of the magnitude of your sacrifice and may we be truly grateful. In Jesus name. Amen. For I received of the Lord...