

## **Preach the Word**

### **Word of Power**

It has always struck me as strange that some of my greatest heroes, especially the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, F. F. Bruce and James Montgomery Boice, rarely referred to themselves and their own experiences in their sermons. As I pondered this, I thought, if we preachers were going to err, it would be better to err on the side of too little reference to ourselves than too much. I do not regularly tell stories of my life, because it is the Word of God that has power. I don't tell stories about my family because I do not want to embarrass them or receive my children's ire. I feel that godly men whose writings have enriched my life would agree with me that what carries authority with power in the pulpit is not the preacher's experiences but the Word of God. To that I say, Amen!

However, I believe it does something good for us when God inspired the apostle Paul to lift the curtain on his own life and ministry and suffering. Which is what he does in a number of places in his writings and here in verses 6 to 8 of this text. But, just as we would expect, these experiences of Paul are not the main point of the text. These experiences support the main point.

We can see this is true because verse 6 begins with "for" or "because." "**For (or because) I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.**" Paul is saying, my death is at hand, Timothy, my course is just about over and my reward awaits me just over the horizon. Therefore, verse 5 says, "**As for you, Timothy, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.**" Then verse 6 responds, *because*, Timothy, I have done what I am telling you to do, I have fulfilled my ministry as laid out in

verse 7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Paul is saying to Timothy, I want you to know that, as you face your trials and persecutions that finishing well is worth it. A crown of righteousness awaits me. Not just me, Paul writes in verse 8, “not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” That includes you, Timothy and all who read this letter and by God’s grace know Jesus as their Savior. So do not give up. Be faithful Timothy as Paul commands him in verse 5, “fulfill your ministry!” Paul was not only writing to Timothy, but also all the elders in Ephesus and because God choose to place this letter into His Bible, Paul is telling all Christians for all time to “fulfill their ministry” as directed by God.

### **Fulfill Your Ministry**

The structure of verses 5 to 8 shows us that verse 5 is the main point or prime directive “fulfill your ministry.” So, Timothy and for all of us, fulfilling your ministry requires one to be sober-minded, and endure suffering, and do the work of an evangelist. Verses 6 to 8 give the supporting argument from Paul’s experiences; I have fulfilled my ministry and as I stand at death’s door, I want you to know – it is worth it! The reward I am about to receive is incomparable to all suffering and persecution. I have run the race and the victor's wreath is about to be put on my head as I reach the finish line. Paul addressed this very thought in his letter to the brethren in Corinth. “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. <sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. <sup>27</sup> But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:24–27) Timothy you are in the race that requires training and discipline in order to endure. It is a marathon not a sprint. Running the marathon of a life in Christ is worth all the discipline, all the training in

righteousness and all the suffering. Timothy you need to endure suffering and fulfill the ministry Christ has given you. This is the flow of thought Paul writes in verses 5 to 8.

The way verses 1 to 4 fits into this flow of thought is that verse 2 gives more details of the broad exhortation from verse 5, “[fulfill your ministry.](#)” Verses 3 to 4 gives another argument for why Paul should press on through hardship in fulfilling this ministry of the word.

Verse 2 says, “[preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.](#)” This is detail on what it means to fulfill his ministry and our ministry. One is to tirelessly preach and share God’s Word. Then the argument in verses 3 and 4 is totally different from the argument in verses 6 to 8. This argument is not the positive kind, that a great reward awaits you, but the negative kind, that great opposition awaits you.

Paul commands for the Word of God to be preached and then gives the why. Read verses 3 to 4 with me, “[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,<sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.](#)”

There is the big picture of today’s text of 2 Timothy, chapter 4, verses 1 to 8. There is one broad, overarching exhortation to Timothy and it is found in verse 5 “[fulfill your ministry.](#)” Paul precedes this command several details of what this means, “[always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist.](#)” Earlier in verse 2 we read, “[preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.](#)” Study God’s Word, know it, live it and use it, as a tool to change your life and then you will be able to use it to change the lives of others.

Undergirding this broad and overarching exhortation to fulfill your ministry one must understand there are two arguments; one negative and one positive.

Negatively, in verses 3 to 4, Paul is saying, press on in this word-saturated, gospel-laden, preaching and teaching, Timothy, because the day is coming when people will no longer accept your teaching and will leave your church and go find teachers who scratch where they itch. This will lead to them eventually wandering off into myths. Timothy, keep your focus and don't let this deter you. It is not a sign of your failure so don't quit. Stay the course God has set before you, “[fulfill your ministry!](#)”

Now the positive argument is found in verses 6 to 8. Paul writes, Timothy, press on in this word-saturated, gospel-laden preaching and teaching, “[fulfill your ministry](#)” because I have fulfilled mine. Paul is saying, I know what it cost me to finish my race and fight the good fight and keep the faith. Timothy, I promise you, it will be worth it. The crown that awaits us on the other side of death will compensate ten thousand times over for any suffering in the service of Christ.

What I think would be most helpful now would be to say a few words of application about these two arguments which relate directly to you as hearers of the Word of God and then close with a final focus on the most prominent exhortation to Timothy, namely, “[preach the word](#)” found in verse 2.

First, let's look at Paul's argument from experience found verses 6 to 8. The reason one can suffer all these things is that Paul is persuaded a great reward awaits those who fulfill their ministry. Reading 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.](#)” He has just referred to fighting the good fight and finishing the race and the crown he has in mind is the kind that was awarded to those who won the fight or won the race as we read earlier in 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

## Finish For The Crown

Paul identifies this victor's crown as the "crown of righteousness." Whether that means that we are rewarded for being righteous as found in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Or, the reward is the final and perfect righteousness of Hebrews 12:22-23, "You have come...to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect." Considering Paul's writings both of these are true.

We will be perfected in righteousness when we die and we will be rewarded for the measure of righteousness God has worked in us in this life. We also have confidence in this because of Christ's perfect righteousness is imputed to us through faith as we read in Philippians, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." (Philippians 3:8-9)

What is the key to attaining that crown? It is something very beautiful and perhaps surprising. Paul says in verse 7 that what is being rewarded is "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." What good fight? It is, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." (1 Timothy 6:12)

What race? The race of faith, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by

faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

What have you kept? I have kept the faith as we saw in verse 7. In other words, what is rewarded is a life of faith in Jesus. Trusting Jesus. One constantly welcomes and treasures Jesus in their heart. Which sounds like loving Jesus with a deep life changing love.

### **Love His Appearing**

Which is exactly where Paul goes when he applies the reward of righteousness to all believers. Reading 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 (*will the Lord give this crown*) but also to all who have loved his appearing.” What does it mean to love his appearing? It means you love Him in such a way that you want Him. You are thrilled that He appeared the first time and you are eager to see Him and be with Him when he appears the second time. To love Christ’s appearing is to desire Him, to long for Him, and to treasure Him above things in this world.

What is it that the righteous judge rewards with the victor’s crown? It is the fight of faith, the race of faith, the keeping of faith or to put it the other way, the desiring Jesus above all things. That is what God rewards. God rewards the enjoyment of Jesus and the desire that will be consummated with His coming. This is what the essence of faith is.

One must also consider the application of the negative argument for Timothy to press on through hardship to fulfill his ministry, namely, verses 3 to 4, “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,<sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” Paul is telling every preacher, don’t be surprised if some people leave the church because they don’t like

what you teach. I want to apply this mainly to you the people of Canyon Bible. This is not only an encouragement to Timothy and preachers to finish their course in spite of opposition. It is also a warning to congregations.

Here is the warning I want you to understand. Those who desire teaching that suits their own passions and reject sound teaching, wander off into myths by which they encounter not just intellectual and emotional problems but also spiritual problems. Paul does not say they will not endure sound teaching because of doctrinal confusion but because of itching. They leave because they itch as it says in verse 3 and Timothy is not scratching where they itch. Paul does not say they accumulate teachers to suit their own ideas; he says they accumulate “[teachers to suit their own passions](#)” or desires.

Underneath rejection of truth is always something deeper; namely, people’s desires and passions are being threatened, this is the itch. So don’t just fight for truth at the intellectual level, one must fight also at the heart level. Pray that God would give you desires that welcome the eternal truth of God.

### **Preach The Word**

Finally, focus with me on what I think is the most prominent particular in Timothy’s fulfillment of his ministry, found in verse 2, “[preach the word.](#)” When I say it is the most prominent, I don’t mean to discount any of the others found in verse 2 and 5. I am arguing that the first one, “[preach the word,](#)” is the most prominent in Paul’s mind.

Preaching has been prominent at Canyon Bible. It has little to do with me, and everything to do with the prominence of preaching and the centrality of the Word of God preached. In the history of the church preaching has been prominent when the church has flourished and this has been true from the very beginning. Where

preaching has been diminished from this prominent, central role in the worship of God's people, the strength of the church as the pillar and bulwark of the truth, then the church has languished.

Nowhere else in the Bible that I am aware of another intensifying introduction to a command quite like this one in verse 1. Paul introduces the command, “**preach the word**” in verse 2 with five preceding intensifiers in verse 1. Each of them is chosen to strengthen and deepen and heighten the seriousness of the command to follow. Let me quickly look at each of these five. Go with me to verse 1.

1. “**I charge you ...**” If you truly believe in Jesus this is a prime directive for your life! Paul is saying as believers we must obey God's command.
2. “**... in the presence of God ...**” Paul is saying, I do not speak in any ordinary way, with ordinary seriousness or ordinary authority. I am telling you this in the very presence of God. Hear this command, Timothy, what I say comes from God.
3. “**... and of Christ Jesus ...**” Both the Father and the Son have a great concern in this matter of preach their Word. All who preach must understand that the authority behind the words they preach comes through the name of whom they preach – God the Father and God the Son!
4. “**... who is to judge the living ...**” Of the hundreds of things Paul could have said about Jesus, he says this. The point seems to be that when it comes to preaching Jesus Christ raises the stakes to life and death, and beyond life and death on earth He raises the stakes to the final judgment. This is why the office of preacher is vastly more important than that of mayor or governor or senator or even president. A preacher deals not just in life and death on earth but eternal life and death.
5. “**... and by his appearing and his kingdom ...**” What a weighty intensifier this

is! “I charge you . . . by the appearing and the kingdom” of Christ. Preacher, keep this in mind; you herald the word of the coming King of the universe. For now He may seem distant because He has not yet come again. But I am telling you to preach, knowing and never forgetting Christ will appear and when He does He will be King and his kingdom will be openly established. At that time all the truth you ever proclaimed will be vindicated and all those who have turned away with itching ears will be put to shame.

Therefore Timothy, once more, “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: <sup>2</sup> preach the word!” That kind of intensifying introduction of the command shows that this first command, “preach the word,” is preeminent in the fulfilling of Timothy’s ministry and the ministry of all pastors.

### **Defining The Word**

This begs the question, “What is the content of the preaching and the nature of the preaching?” Paul says, “preach the word.” What is the word?

Ignore the man-made chapter division between chapters 3 and 4, and I think the content of this “word” becomes clear. Paul’s thought begins in 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16–17) Paul’s thought continues in 4:1, “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: <sup>2</sup> preach the word!”

Paul says to preach is to herald the Scriptures. God inspires all Scripture and all of it is profitable. God’s Word makes us wise unto salvation through Jesus Christ and His gospel. A preacher is to preach the whole counsel of God, and show the people

that it comes from the mind of God and His words are His gift to mankind.

What is the nature of this preaching? The word “preaching” means to “herald.” One who in the days before Internet, TV, radio, telegraph and newspapers, would be sent to proclaim news or was called” the town crier. He was not mainly a teacher. He had news, not a lesson. He lifted up his voice and said, Hear ye. Hear ye.” Listen to the message from the King. On this day your King summons all who have hated him, demeaned him, conspired against him, to come and lay down the arms of your rebellion, and turn from your sedition and swear loyalty to your King, by which, because of the sacrifice of His own Son, He will grant to you full and free and everlasting pardon. Listen, on a day, appointed by His secret counsel, He will come and live with you and give you every blessing in His treasure. This is the word of the King!

Paul exhorts Timothy and every preacher and every believer to “[fulfill your ministry](#)”, live for Christ and “[preach the word](#)”. This is the command of God. Hear it and obey it and live it! Amen!