

Proclaim the Gospel Until the End

2 Timothy 4:1-8

¹ I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom: ² Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching. ³ For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. ⁴ They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths. ⁵ As for you, keep a clear head in every situation. Bear hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry. ⁶ You see, I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. ⁸ From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will give it to me on that day, and not only to me but also to everyone who loved his appearing.

The apostle Paul, in writing these final words to a younger pastor Timothy, offers sound guidance in how all ministers of the true Word of God, and those who support their ministry should conduct themselves to the end. It could be the end of time when Jesus reappears in judgment. It could be the end of life when we receive the crown of eternal life, based solely the merits of Christ Jesus. Paul sees his own life drawing to a close. So he urges Timothy to remain faithful in proclaiming the Gospel. Paul also reminds us of the goal that we all hope to reach when we leave this world. So Paul urges Timothy and all of us to take these words to heart and proclaim the Gospel until the end.

Paul urges Timothy, *“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching.”* This is a solemn responsibility that Paul gives to Timothy. Paul calls on God as a witness that Timothy would carry out this responsibility. Paul doesn't call Timothy a hero, but a herald. He is to faithfully share what the King wants proclaimed. Timothy is to carry out this responsibility whether the opportunity is called for or not. Not all preaching is done in the pulpit. It can happen in offices, in factories, around the dinner table and across backyard fences. Since the good news about our Savior is for all people to hear, gospel proclaimers will never limit it to a certain time, place, or style of communication. The more we are rooted and growing in the Word, the more prepared we are to proclaim the gospel when the time seems inconvenient.

We must be prepared to share the truth because not only is it inconvenient for some. Some may not even tolerate it. Paul writes, *“For there will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires. They will also turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”* Sadly some people will not put up with sound teaching. They desire something that suits them better. Their ears are itching for something to tickle their fancy. They will find plenty of teachers to tell them what they want to hear. Paul tells Timothy, *“Make sure you're not one of them. You preach the word faithfully. You don't add*

to it. You don't subtract from it. You teach it faithfully, gently, and carefully." People don't always understand what the Word teaches or commands. They may be dull in spiritual matters. Telling them what the words says only once is often not enough. Patient repetition and explanation is called for. Precious souls are at stake.

Today's myths include that there are many ways to heaven besides the way to the Father through Christ. There will never come a time when all error will be exposed and rejected and people will flock to hear the truth. But we keep preaching the word and nothing but the word. Paul tells Timothy, "*As for you, keep a clear head in every situation. Bear hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry.*" Being alert is the ongoing responsibility of those entrusted with the care of souls. Throughout this letter Paul has urges Timothy to remain strong. Those turning away from the truth to lies would only cause harm. All who want to live godly lives will be persecuted. Spiritual leaders will be the first to experience such evil. In our Gospel reading Jesus said, "No servant is above his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you." So we go on preaching the word. God's Spirit will make us strong to endure hardship. God's Spirit will give us patience to offer careful instruction.

And what instruction must they hear. If they feel there are many ways to heaven, they must hear the only way is through Jesus. Jesus entered our world because we could never reach heaven on our own. God demands perfection. We could never offer that. Our attempts have failed miserably. But Jesus lived the perfect life that God expects. And Jesus made the one sacrifice to cover all sin. Because of Jesus we are right with God. Jesus did that for us. He did it for everyone. And everyone needs to hear it. That is why he's left us hear. To tell everyone in our life that Jesus is the way to the Father. And people need to hear that until the end of time.

And time does have an end. Whether it's time for the world or our time in this world. Paul knew his time in this world was drawing to a close. He mentions it in our text when he says, "*I am already being poured out like 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.*" It is appropriate for Paul to call what happening to him being poured out like a drink offering. Pouring wine after an animal was killed and place upon an altar as a sacrifice was the final act in bringing the sacrifice. So for Paul, giving up his life was the final act in his earthly service to his Lord. Dying as a believer, no matter what the manner may be, is as much a service to the Lord as living to do his will. If our Lord helps us to see that then it will help us to overcome the horror of dying. Living and dying are both wonderful opportunities to show what a wonderful Lord we have. Paul put it this way, "*Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or by death*" (Philippians 1:20).

Paul's statement: *the time of my departure* has the idea of a ship being loosened and setting sail for a distant harbor. Think of death as leaving the shores of this life to head to the safe harbor of eternal life.

Looking back over his life Paul uses the picture of an athletic contest. The effort Paul put forth to be faithful in performing his duties and putting up with the hardships that came his way looked good to his Lord. Paul then uses a running race to describe it. From the moment

he starts, the racer has one goal in mind, to be first in reaching the finish line. Paul in all his toil and stress and hardships had kept his goal in mind, the time when he would be called from this earth to be with his Lord in heaven. Now as he's ending this letter, he's about to cross the finish line and leave all his toil and stress and hardships behind.

Then Paul says, "*I have kept the faith.*" Paul had guarded the truth that had been revealed to him against any error. He guarded his personal faith against every temptation to give in to doubt and indifference. This entire verse is a shout of triumph. What Paul had done was not due to his own efforts. It was the grace of God that enabled him to fight the good fight, to finish the race, to keep the faith.

And what was waiting for him as his life drew to a close? Paul tells us, "*From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will give it to me on that day, and not only to me but also to everyone who loved his appearing.*" Having reviewed his life, which was about finished, Paul looks ahead. He looks to the day when he will receive a crown. It's the crown of righteousness that the Lord had set aside for him. Paul knew his sinfulness all too well, just as we know ours. Still he knew that on the Last Day none of that would remain. It had all been washed in the blood of Christ. His verdict will be righteous. And the righteous will go away to eternal life.

That day does strike terror in the hearts of some. When the judge appears their idea that they are good enough will disappear. They'll be standing before a judge who knows everything they've ever done wrong or failed to do right. And their record will show they must depart from his forever.

But for Paul and all who share his faith, the fact that the Lord is a righteous judge will hold no terror. Yes, they are sinners. They have sinned more often than they care to admit. But this judge has taken care of the problem. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). The blood of Jesus, God's Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:7). The judge himself in his dying moments had declared that his work of saving sinful mankind from the guilt and punishment of sin had been finished (John 19:30). The Father added his approval when he raised Jesus to life. So Paul was convinced that the judge would stand by his earlier verdict and grant him the crown of righteousness.

Paul is quick to add that this crown of righteousness will be given not only to him but also to all those who have loved his appearing. All believers look forward to the day when Jesus will reappear. They love his appearing. This was something that began when they first came to faith. It continues throughout their lives and will still be true when they stand before the judgment throne.

I've used these final words of Paul to bring comfort to a family who has lost a loved one. We meet in private before I lead them to the funeral service for their loved one. I quote these verses from Paul: *I have fought the good fight...* Then I assure the family they have not seen the last of their loved one. They will see him or her again in glory. What comfort Paul has left us. May we use our remaining days to grow in faith and then share that faith.