

Sermon (Preached first on 27-Mar-2022):

Finishing Well Part 10 – Preach the Word (and Sit Under Good Preaching)! (2 Timothy 4:1–4)

Good evening everyone, please open your Bibles to 2 Timothy 4. As we prepare to bring this “Finishing Well” mini-series to a close we’ve been looking at Paul’s closing exhortations to Timothy, listening in to the solemn charge Paul gave to his young son in the faith, so that we can glean biblical wisdom for how to continue on in our Christian lives in a way that is faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ. If you sit here tonight as a professing believer I assume that you sit here tonight with that very desire in your heart: you want to finish well and hear those prized words at the end of your sojourn, “Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your master” (cf. Matthew 25:21, 23).

Last time we examined 2 Timothy 4:1 together and were challenged to consider who was watching our ministry efforts. Paul’s solemn charge to Timothy was made in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, who will one day appear again as King of kings not only establish His kingdom on earth but to judge the living and the dead and hold each of His servants accountable for how faithfully we have served Him in the things He has called us to. We asked the question, “Will we be found faithful in those things when He appears?” “Will we be continuing in what we have learned, fulfilling our ministries, even in the face of opposition?” “Will we be ministering the message of the King in the manner He would have us to do?”

Remember from last time that verses 1–2 highlighted a specific ministry activity to which Timothy had been called, for which He would be held accountable: to preach the Word. This exhortation follows Paul’s description in 3:15–17 of God’s Word as able to make him and those to whom he ministered wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, and to equip them for every good work they would be called to as they served the Lord. It is God-breathed and profitable for making proficient and equipping the faithful man of God for everything he might be called to. Paul therefore charges Timothy with the Lord as witness, even as he might face opposition for doing so—*preach the Word!* Let me ask you as we begin tonight, what is preaching? What is the Lord’s purpose for it? When Sunday rolls around and you think of the elements of a worship service, what importance to you typically ascribe to the preaching portion of it? Would you be concerned if the preaching was omitted? Do you have a thirst for the preaching of God’s Word, wanting to be challenged and encouraged by it, or are you completely disinterested in it?

Hopefully those questions will engage your minds around the main thrust of the passage we’ll study tonight. Having looked at the start of chapter 4 last time I want to lead us this time through verses 2–4 in greater detail. I want us to see three things from our text this evening: (1) what the faithful man of God should preach, (2) how he should preach, and (3) why he needs to preach it in that way. The application of this text is most obvious for those who preach—we should come away challenged to evaluate our own preaching according to Paul’s instruction to Timothy. But as we seek to apply this text to ourselves more broadly I would submit to you that, if we would be found faithful to Christ, we need to sit continually under good preaching with a view to being challenged and encouraged by it in order to be protected from wandering away from the truth of God’s Word. God preserves His people through the preaching of His Word, so if we would finish well, we should *Preach the Word (and Sit Under Good Preaching)!*

Let’s read 2 Timothy 4:1–5. “4 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: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 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, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

1. What the faithful man of God should preach.

As we consider verses 1–2, please note firstly what the faithful man of God should preach. Starting from the beginning of the sentence we read, “4 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: 2 preach the word;” Clear from this text is what Timothy should do in order to remain faithful as man of God: Paul charged Timothy to preach. To preach is to proclaim something. The Lexham Bible dictionary notes that the word is used “in the NT for proclaiming the message about Jesus, which is fundamentally good news.”ⁱ William Hendrickson says that preaching is “[making] known officially and publicly a matter of great significance.”ⁱⁱ J. I. Packer defined preaching as “the event of God himself bringing to an audience a Bible-based, Christ-related, life-impacting message of instruction and direction through the words of a spokesperson.”ⁱⁱⁱ Preaching is what the man of God Timothy was charged to do. But what is the preacher to preach? Verse 2 tells us: Paul tells Timothy to preach **the Word**.

What is Paul referring to? Considering what we studied previously in 3:15–17 about the sacred Scriptures and the sufficiency of God’s powerful Word; and considering Paul’s exhortation to Timothy to “continue in what you have learned” in 3:14; I think Paul is here telling Timothy to proclaim God’s Word in all of its fullness, including the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what people need to hear. This is what Paul is charging Him before his divine witnesses to preach. The word of Christ is what would transform the people to whom Timothy preached. He wasn’t to proclaim His own opinions, but God’s Word. “Preach the word,” says Paul. **Unbelievers are called by the Father to trust in His Son as the Spirit works through the preacher’s work to proclaim the Word: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).** As the early disciples of Christ preached the word of Christ with boldness souls were added to the church, often in large numbers. Acts 4:4 says, “many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.” Timothy was witness to Paul’s Spirit-empowered, heart-transforming ministry of the word in Thessalonica. In **1 Thessalonians 2:13** Paul says, “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” **The Word of God works, you see; it is living and active, reviving the soul.** Those at Thessalonica were disciples of Christ, those who “became imitators of [Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy] and of the Lord, for [they] received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that [they] became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” (1 Thessalonians 1:6–7). The Spirit’s work through the preaching of the word caused them to “turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). **What was Paul charging Timothy to preach? The powerful, transformative, trustworthy word of God!**

It is with a great deal of thankfulness to God that I can say that Emmanuel Baptist Church is blessed immeasurably with men who both hear and heed that call. I dare say that God’s people elsewhere also benefit from God’s grace to us because of our ability to support other churches when they are in need of someone to preach. Another related blessing is the maturity of our membership in rightly expecting those who stand in this pulpit to preach (and learn to preach), actually preach the word. This congregation rightly expects the preacher to proclaim what God says in any given passage of God’s Word, handling the text in its proper context, without pretext, so that the word is understood and can be properly applied to God’s people who are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ as their minds are renewed. May the Lord continue to protect and prosper that fundamentally important aspect of our ministry!

We, like Timothy, understand to some degree *how* the preacher should preach. In 2 Timothy 2:15 we see that the preacher and teacher of God’s Word is to handle it rightly. As a tentmaker would cut animal skins diligently so that they fit together to form a well-crafted tent, so the man of God should “Do [his] best to present [himself] to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). **But how should he preach it? I mean, In what manner should he proclaim God’s Word? Here I want us to see my second point.**

2. How he should preach.

Look again with me please at verse 2 of 2 Timothy 4 as we answer that question. Paul says, “preach the word [there’s what he should preach, now here’s what it should look like]; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Paul gives here clear direction for how Timothy should preach the Word. What should characterize his preaching?

Firstly we see that he should be willing to preach with readiness and regularity. Phillip Jensen uses the term *constancy*. There should be a constancy in his preaching. What do I mean by that? Notice that Paul tells Timothy, **be ready in season and out of season**. This phrase exhorts Timothy to be prepared at all times as a soldier might be ready for action, but it also captures regularity. Whether it was convenient for Timothy to preach or not, he had to preach the Word. It would be especially inconvenient for Timothy if what he was preaching was inconvenient, or hard to hear, for his hearers. Preaching is hard when those you’re preaching to are rejecting your message! John MacArthur says helpfully, “The dictates of popular culture, tradition, reputation, acceptance, or esteem in the community (or in the church) must never alter the true preacher’s commitment to proclaim God’s Word.”^{iv} Regardless of whether his message seemed popular, his direction was clear: be ready and preach the Word anyway!

So Timothy was to preach with constancy. Secondly we see that he should be willing to preach without fear of confrontation. If Timothy is to preach faithfully he must reprove, rebuke, and exhort. MacArthur notes that to **reprove** someone is to “[correct] behavior or false doctrine by using careful biblical argument to help a person understand the error of his actions.”^v “The Scripture says a loving husband is doing this... but you’re doing this.” “You know, the Scripture holds out such and such for the faithful church member, but this is what marks your life...” The term **rebuke** deals more with confronting someone who is continuing in sin with the goal of getting them to stop. Paul uses the word in 1 Timothy 5:20—“As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.” Rebuke is a strong disapproval, as when Jesus told Peter in Mark 8:33, “Get behind me, Satan!” for not setting his mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Reproof and rebuke are two very important aspects of biblical preaching. Since not one of us is without sin we can expect from time to time to feel the sting of God’s discipline through a hard word proclaimed by the faithful preacher who recognizes that the Good Shepherd “leads [us] in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3). The reproof and rebuke in a faithful preacher’s sermon are used by God who, according to Hebrews 12:10–11, “disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.”¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Be encouraged when that happens as you realize that a loving father disciplines his child. If you’re walking outside of God’s will as one of His children and the preacher’s words prick your heart, don’t wrestle with the preacher as much as the One who gave him the words to bring to your attention that you might be headed in the wrong direction, and rejoice that you’re being disciplined by the One who gave His Son to die in your place that you might be adopted eternally into His family and transformed to look like His Son! A wife might be unloving and antagonistic toward her husband and be reprovved by her pastor’s preaching because she’s failing to love and submit to her husband as she would to Christ. A young Christian woman might have been influenced by her friends and seen fit to engage in rebellion against her parents. They might both feel the sting of rebuke as the Spirit reveals areas of ungodliness in their hearts. Whatever the case may be, it might not feel like it at the time but the reproof and rebuke are gifts of God’s grace, heralding to God’s wayward children that they need to turn back and follow the Lord.

More positively, and just as importantly for Christian growth, to **exhort** is to urge. The Greek word is also translated as *encourage* but given the urgency of Paul’s instruction to Timothy, perhaps the meaning *urge* is better here. Timothy needed to urge his people in a particular direction. As we think about Timothy’s responsibility to preach the Word in the midst of those who may well be drifting away from the truth, we can imagine the urgency required to urge his hearers to persevere in the truth. There’s an

authoritative, commanding element to this word that appeals to the hearer with an expectation they will turn from sin and error toward godliness and truth. The ESV Expository Commentary says, “Such is the difference between preaching and lecturing: a lecture is oriented toward explanation and data, whereas a sermon is oriented toward command and prohibition. Preaching is authoritative, exhorting people about what they ought to believe and do by issuing commands to that end.”^{vi} J. I. Packer’s definition of preaching was so helpful in capturing the reality that preaching involves more than just teaching. Again, according to Packer, preaching is a “life-impacting message of instruction and direction through the words of a spokesperson.” Of course, preaching is never less than teaching. Paul says here in verse 2, “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and **teaching.**” Timothy was to teach the whole counsel of God—all that the Lord commanded—as he reproved, rebuked, and exhorted his people, whether it would be well received or not. **A godly preacher is willing to preach even when he knows people will disagree with everything he says and give him all kinds of trouble for upholding the truth of God’s Word. This is just one reason we need to be praying for our own Pastor(s) as they stand for truth and take flak for remaining faithful to their call.**

Timothy was to preach with constancy and without fear of confrontation. Thirdly we see that Timothy should be willing to preach with patience. He was to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with **complete patience** and teaching. I think we can all appreciate that most people don’t get the message the first time and some even oppose us harshly. As parents how often do we forget that we’re not at all different than our children? “Why can’t you just ‘get it’?” we say, all the while forgetting that sermon after sermon is served to us and we seemingly never “get” what the Lord is telling us to do or not do week after week through the preacher. Timothy would need to preach with complete patience, waiting for the Lord to make His Word produce fruit in the lives of those who heard it. Timothy would have to wait patiently week after week for the Spirit of God to use the Word of God for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16–17), as his people were confronted with their sin, learned how to put off ungodliness, were renewed in their minds, and put on godly behaviour. Timothy would have seen this patience modeled by Paul in the way he ministered faithfully to see Christ formed in those to whom he ministered. Back in 3:10 Paul encouraged Timothy by telling him he had followed (watched and sought to apply in his own life) Paul’s patience as he waited for the Lord to bless his efforts with the fruit of Christlikeness. Timothy would also have witnessed Paul’s longsuffering attitude in the face of harsh opposition. Paul was no stranger to affliction at the hands of angry opponents and had plenty of opportunity to grow in this important element of the fruit of the Spirit and show to the world how the Lord had been so forbearing with him as he persecuted Christ’s body prior to his conversion. Paul told Timothy in the knowledge of coming trials, preach with complete patience and teaching.

3. Why he needs to preach it in that way.

So far as we’ve considered Timothy’s charge to preach we’ve seen the what and the how. Preach what? The word. How? What should characterize this preaching? Reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. Now I want us to see why Timothy should be prepared to preach in that manner. Verses 3–4 describe the situation in which Timothy would be ministering and shed light on why: ³ For [here’s why he needs to preach in that way] 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, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

Verse 3 begins with “for” which connects what he said in verse 2 (the what and how he should preach) to a reason statement in verses 3–4 (why he should preach in that manner). Timothy needed to preach in the way we just saw not only because of the solemn charge given to him by Paul in the presence of Jesus Christ, but because **the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching.** Paul warns Timothy as he did back in 3:1–9 that his ministry will become tough as the environment in which he

ministered grew more and more godless. People will no longer continue in the truth they were taught in the beginning, much like we see in our own day.

Instead of enduring sound teaching (which would lead to greater godliness) they will **accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions**. These folks would desire to follow and be fed by anyone who preached in such a way as to satisfy their own fleshly lusts. They do that because they have itching ears. The text says, “**having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves**” these teachers who preach and teach the things their audiences want to hear rather than the things they need to hear. These folks want to have their ears tickled with things they want to hear. The ESV Expository Commentary provides some helpful remarks on this point. Speaking of those who may be unwilling to hear the faithful preaching of God’s Word, it says:

They will not abide Bible-based exhortations and rebukes, and the reason for this will be very simple: they will have “itching ears” that they want to have scratched. They will not want preachers who inflict more itches. Instead they will want a preacher to tell them what they want to hear—that what they are already believing and doing is just fine. Those in error or in sin often like their sin very much. They do not appreciate a preacher’s meddling with their consciences. Rather than listening to the Word of God that confronts them, they will look for teachers who will forgo the Word of God and tell them happy things—things that confirm their sinful desires instead of contradicting those desires. “They will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.”^{vii}

Are you and I any less likely to follow our own passions as those to whom Timothy ministered? “*That’s describing “them,”*” we might say. But what does Scripture teach about our the state of our immaterial heart? If we would maintain a biblical view of humanity we have to agree with Scripture that we all have wayward hearts to some degree. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?**” So infected by sin are we that, even though the Spirit of God works progressively and powerfully to sanctify our thinking, we find ourselves drifting toward things that have the capacity to make complete shipwreck of our faith. We don’t even realize the degree to which we’re deceived at times. There might be a subtle attraction to material wealth or the acceptance of others. Perhaps a more intense lust that rages within us. Our wandering hearts are easily deceived by sin and we’re often one bad decision away from disaster. Except for the preserving grace of God through sound preaching we might all wander from the fold of God.

Timothy is being reminded that he’ll have to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching because people will not tolerate that which corresponds to biblical truth and they’ll wander away. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:4 that, accumulating for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, these people **will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths**, quite the opposite to what Paul exhorted Timothy (and us!) to do when he wrote “continue in what you have learned” in 3:14. Paul is giving specific notice to Timothy that some of those to whom he ministers will go off after false teachers in pursuit of the myths they teach. Scholars are not entirely clear about the exact nature of the false teaching because we’re only able to reconstruct what it could have been from the various references to it in Paul’s letters. It contained such things as an interest in myths, a tendency toward controversy, argumentation, immorality, harsh asceticism, and a desire to get material gain by means of their teaching. Whatever the exact nature of the false teaching, we know that it was drawing people away from the truth, and according to Paul it was opposed to Christ’s teaching and the apostolic teaching and to the truth.^{viii} Those things impacted ministry for Timothy as people were lured away into falsehood so Paul commanded him, “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

In light of the falsehood without and the passions within, what is the safeguard against a wandering heart? We need to hear the Word of God preached faithfully, regularly, in all its fullness, including the bits that are hard for us to hear.

4. Applications for the preacher and the hearer.

I want to offer some application for us all before I offer it more narrowly to myself and the other preachers among us. First, having seen Paul's reason for what and how to preach, and understanding how easy it is for our hearts to be entangled by the things of the world, I believe you and I need regularly to be reprov'd and rebuked as necessary, patiently taught and exhorted to put off the sin that remains and pursue obedience to the Lord through faithful preaching. Even our new hearts are *"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love!"* Faithful preaching as Paul lays it out in our text tonight is a primary, God-given safeguard against our wandering, because God knows how much we humans love to have our ears tickled.

Brothers and sisters, we need to recognize the importance the Lord has placed on the public proclamation of His Word to reprove, rebuke, and exhort His people. Do you hold the preaching of God's Word in high regard? Do you expect to come at every opportunity to hear the good news of Jesus Christ heralded and be called back to serve Him for all He has done for you? This is the way he leads us in paths of righteousness. If you and I desire to be holy as He is holy, then we need to hold in high regard the preaching of His Word and expect to be reprov'd, rebuked, exhorted as necessary to identify where we need to put off sin and put on righteousness. *It's no coincidence that the Scriptures we learned about as being profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, are the very thing the preacher will herald so that we're confronted with God's will for us and exhorted to obey it. As we've seen tonight, that can sting at times! But if we would be found to finish well we need to sit under good preaching.*

For those of us who preach, our direction couldn't be clearer from this text: we need to preach the Word! The word of God is living and active. The word of Christ brings faith. The Word transforms its hearers as the Lord wills, it never returns to Him void. Let us recognize the high calling to preach not the opinions of man but God's Word, to preach the practical righteousness demanded of God's people in response to the great and gracious salvation offered to us in His Son. We want to see Christ formed in our hearers, don't we? We need to proclaim Him as we preach the Word, to warn and teach with all wisdom, that the people to whom we preach might be presented mature in Christ on the last day (Colossians 1:28). Let us be diligent to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching, whether it's popular or not. A variety of attitudes and levels of spiritual maturity exist in the hearts of the people to whom we preach, and laws now exist in Canada that quite likely require certain passages to be removed from a preacher's sermon plans, things which our hearers need to hear. In spite of this opposition we must be ready to preach the Word in season and out of season. May the Lord find you and I faithful to preach the Word, and preach it well. Let's pray.