

2 Timothy 4:1-8

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[0 : 0 0] Now we've been looking in previous weeks and at the end of last year really at Timothy himself and the letters to Timothy that we've been looking at have really been a way of understanding a wee bit more about him.

Of his comparative youth we know, of his upbringing and his background we know, of his devotion to Paul and how Paul wrote for example to the Philippians, I have no man like minded who will care for your estate naturally and so on.

He was Paul's right hand man in so many ways but as we've mentioned in previous weeks there are just little hints that either Timothy was beginning to wobble a little bit or the corrosive effects of false teaching or of false apostles or those surrounding were weakening his position a little.

Perhaps his loyalty to Paul was cooling off a little bit or perhaps he was just snowed under and struggling and hadn't had an opportunity to be in touch with Paul.

We don't know all these details. It's rather like when you hear one side of a telephone conversation and you hear what one person is speaking into the phone but you can't hear what the other person is saying.

[1 : 1 1] And we've got if you like Paul's side of the telephone conversation here but we don't know what Timothy is saying of the other side. And we have to kind of fill in the blanks a little bit.

The solemnity of this charge that he gives Timothy in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 4 almost seems to imply why would he lay this upon him so seriously and so solemnly unless he had some kind of anxiety about Timothy's seriousness and about his steadfastness.

I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead and his appearing in his kingdom preach the word the instant in season out of season reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

Now, of course, we might say, okay, let's get a bit heavy. Why don't you just say to Timothy, keep up the good work and do your best sort of thing. But we've got to take everything in its context, of course.

And notice that there's I charge thee therefore. Now, if there's a therefore, that means that it has direct relevance to what has immediately gone beforehand. And, of course, the originals, as we've mentioned many times in the past, would not have chapters and verses.

[2 : 3 0] So what we would have in the original would be a continuous narrative of the Greek, just ongoing from start all the way through to the finish. Continuous narrative, continuous words.

So what we would have had is, you know, all scriptures given by inspiration of God is profitable for doctrine or a proof. In fact, go back to before that from a child we've known the holy scriptures, which will make you wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scriptures given by inspiration of God. So that the man of God may be perfect, that is, fitted for the task, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. And then I charge thee therefore.

So in other words, what is the therefore referring to? It's referring to the fact that, Timothy, you know the scriptures. You know the word of God. You had them from a child. You know the authority.

You know the power of them. You know the truth of them. And you know that all scripture is given by inspiration of God. And it is of use. It's of profit for doctrine, reproof, correction, for instruction in righteousness.

[3 : 2 9] It's just possible, of course, that some false teachers even then were saying, Oh yes, we take this bit of scripture, but we don't take that bit. We like this bit, but we don't like that bit. And it's amazing how many Christians, even now today, will take that attitude to parts of the Bible.

They'll say, Oh, we don't really like that bit. Oh, we don't really like the God that appears in that bit. But we like this bit. And this bit's nice. You know, all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, fitted for the task, throughly furnished unto all good works.

I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ. You've got the tools. You know the truth. You've got the authority. You've got the background.

And if anybody is fitted for this task, Timothy, it's you. I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Not just who shall judge the quick and the dead as he's appearing.

Although that was mentioned explicitly. But the implication also is who are the authors of the very word in which you trust. The scriptures that you know so well, which are the authoritative source of power and of the message of redemption and so on.

[4 : 48] These are the authors. This is the author of God himself. God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who also would judge the quick, that is the living and the dead, and his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word.

So, in other words, even if you don't take my word for it, Timothy, if you don't want to take it because I say it, the Lord will eventually require of you, what have you done with the tools, with the power, with the message, with the ministry that I gave you.

And many years ago, I remember reading a sort of devotional booklet. Somebody saying that it was talking about a branch of the church for the bishops and, you know, priests under them and so on. And I think it was possibly a part of the Anglican communion or Lutherans or something. But anyway, they said at the ordination of these future ministers, or the night before, somebody was writing to one of his former students.

He says, you know, tomorrow by tomorrow evening, your bishop or your moderator or whatever will have said to you as students, you know, or wilt thou, wilt thou, wilt thou, wilt thou, you know, will you obey the doctrines and teaching the word, will you be faithful to them, will you take up the charge of it, wilt thou, wilt thou, wilt thou.

[6 : 01] But there will come a day when another will say to you at the end, hast thou, hast thou, hast thou. And this is the point that Paul is making, is regardless of whatever I say to you, Timothy, there is one to whom you will answer at the last.

And so I am charging you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead that is appearing. You know, whether we are still alive when he comes back or whether we have already passed from this world into eternity, there is no escape from all appearing before the judgment seat of Christ.

And you too, Timothy, and I and everybody else will stand before that judgment seat. So he will say, hast thou, hast thou, hast thou. Have you done what was required of you?

Have you fulfilled the charge that you were given? Preach the word. Be instant. That's urgent. You know, the presence of urgency. In season, when it's favourable, when it's OK, when the sun shines. And out of season, when there's times of difficulty or problems or people are not keen to hear it. There's also the suggestion, as one commentator has said, that it's not just what's in season or out of season for the audience, but in season or out of season for Timothy himself.

[7 : 19] Somebody once said many years ago that one of the things they found difficult or strange when they finally go into the ministry, was that one of the things of having to preach regardless of how they were feeling themselves.

You know, the Lord's Day would keep coming around or the Midweek would keep coming around and they had to climb into the pulpit and they had to deliver something, whether or not they felt like it. And that is part of the discipline, of course, of regular preaching, whether in the formal ministry or simply a lay preacher.

And this is partly what Paul is saying to Timothy. Whatever you may be feeling like, whatever the audience may be feeling like, whatever the circumstances may be, there is an urgency about this message.

Be instant, in season, out of season. Reprove, that means convict, in the sense of convict the conscience. Rebuke, never a popular thing to do, but it is nevertheless often necessary.

Exhort with all long-suffering patience, in other words, and doctrine. Give them the right teaching. Now, verse 3 also indicates another reason why there is this urgency about it.

[8 : 28] It's not just because, you know, we've only had so many years and then once we're in eternity, you know, we've had all the opportunities what we're going to get to hear the gospel and to respond to it.

There is that side of it, of course. You never know when somebody will potentially be hearing the gospel for the first time or for the last time. So there is that urgency. But also, all the opportunities you have to get it out there, Timothy, to get the message across, you have to do it while you still can.

Or the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. But after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears.

So in other words, then, because of this, anchor them to the sound doctrine. Anchor them now firmly in sound teaching and true doctrine whilst you still have the opportunity.

Because the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. After their own lusts, their own personal desires, they'll heap to themselves and multiply lots of different teachers.

[9 : 35] Everyone a new idea, a new thought, a new presentation. Novelty delights the carnal man. He wants to hear something different, something new.

We've got a hint of this in the Acts of the Apostles when Paul is in Athens, remember? In chapter 17, when at verse 19, they took him and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, where all those feasts is?

For that will bring us certain strange things to our ears. We would know, therefore, what these things mean. For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

And they would tolerate the gospel for a little while because it was a new thing. Because it was something different. And then they get bored and they move on to the next thing. And, of course, when Jesus tells the parable of the seed and the different soils, that's one or two of the different characteristics of some of the soils.

And it spring up quickly. The seed will spring up quickly in it. And it looks so promising. But then the sun scorches and evince the low depth of earth. So it withers away and it fades away. Another springs up with really well and good.

[10 : 42] But there's so much else competing with the pure seed of the word that it chokes it and it doesn't become fruitful. They'll heap to themselves teachers having itching ears after their old us.

And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and be turned unto fables. Now, of course, this talk of fables. There's been much mention of it by Paul, of course, before in chapter 1 of 1 Timothy, verse 4.

Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions on them to godly edifying, which is in faith. So do. And again in Titus, in chapter 1, verse 14.

Not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men, but turn from the truth. It's so easy to fill up the space of a time with that which is simply our man-made stories.

This was part of the difficulty in the medieval church in the Middle Ages, where there was a complete ignorance of the content of God's word. Because people were largely illiterate. And, of course, the Bible was all in Latin.

[11 : 49] Even some of the priests couldn't read it. So they just told stories about the saints. They told stories about saint this or saint that or the next one. And, of course, people like stories. So people would just listen with rapt attention.

But, of course, like with the soap operas and television or whatever, if you're going to hold people's attention, then, you know, the next time you tell the story, it has to be a wee bit more spicy or rich or whatever.

So this saint has to be not just so devout or holy, but, you know, they have to be almost superhuman. They don't just walk miles to go and do some great work. Maybe they walk over hot coals or they walk in water.

Maybe they sprout wings. These tales became absolutely fantastical. They became literally just fables, made-up stories attached to so-called saints.

And this was in the place of preaching. It was in the place of expounding the word of God because people didn't know the word of God. They didn't have access to the word of God. But in God's providence and mercy, of course, we live in an age and a time when we're all taught to read.

[12 : 51] We're all literate. We all have access to the Bible. But, of course, nowadays, so many have no interest in the Bible. So many have turned away the years from the truth and turned to fables or just fantasies or stories or that which is simply of the world.

You know, Spurgeon, I'm a quote here from Spurgeon that says, A time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep, the church will have clowns entertaining the goats. And that is simply an expounding statement of what Paul is saying here about Timothy. Time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. They don't want to hear the truth if it's going to challenge them and if it's going to change the way that they like to carry on with their lives. If it's going to bring them more into line with what God demands because that, remember, is against our old nature. It is against the flesh. To follow the spirit, to follow Christ is always to be swimming upstream.

It's always to be going against the flow of nature, against what the flesh desires. But the false teachers, they want to tickle the flesh. They have itching ears.

[14 : 03] They always want something new. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables. Now, the tragedy of what is described here, as with the opening verses of chapter 3 in 2 Timothy, is that what is being talked about is not simply pagans in the world.

It is those who at one time attach themselves to Christ. But those who at one time followed the Lord, were part of the church, and to all intents and purposes, seemed to be like the seed in the parable of springing up, springing up quickly and enthusiastically and showing great promise. But eventually they get bored, they get fed up, it doesn't satisfy them anymore. They want something that will reach their ears, something that will tickle them, something that will please them. And where they can get that, well, they'll come to that. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things. Endure afflictions.

Do the work of an evangelist. Make foolproof of thy ministry. Use the tools you've got, Timothy. There is an urgency about it.

[15 : 13] Other people will fall away. This is what he's saying. Other people will fall away. You may or may not be responsible for their falling away. But you yourself hold fast to that which is good.

Watch thou in all things. Endure afflictions. Do the work of an evangelist. Make foolproof of thy ministry. And this is one of the things we have to recognize. That much as we might pray for and desire the salvation of many others, including perhaps those very dear to us, dear friends or family members or whatever, there will be situations where they will turn away, perhaps eternally turn away.

But watch thou in all things. At the end of the day, this doesn't just apply to Timothy, as we'll see towards the end, if we manage to get to the end this evening.

But also, we can only ultimately give account for ourselves and our own souls. Yes, we must live as examples of followers of Christ.

We must speak the truth in love. We must be faithful to his doctrine. We must not put a stumbling block in anybody's way. We must seek to be. Advertisements are the truth of Christ.

[16 : 27] For at the end of the day, we cannot answer for another person's soul. They must do that for themselves. And you and I must answer for ours. Whether the crowd will follow the error or whether they will stay with the truth.

Watch thou in all things. Endure afflictions. Because there will be afflictions if we're going to follow Christ faithfully. Do the work of an evangelist. That is, spread the gospel.

People can do that, not simply, but preaching from prophets. In fact, that is probably one of the rarest ways that souls are actually converted nowadays. It's as much by, it's a bit of a cliché gossiping the gospel.

It's by people talking about their own personal experience or testing the way the Lord dealt with them. Because that, nobody can argue with in one sense.

They can't say, oh, I don't believe that's true. That may be true for you, but it's not true for me. Or the most they can say, is it not true for me. They can't say, I don't believe what happened to you. Because the verse 8, well, it did.

[17 : 29] It's real. I know it's real. It happened to me. That testimony cannot be gainsaid. So watch thou in all things. Do the work of an evangelist.

Be prepared, as Peter says, to give a reason for the hope that is in you. Make foolproof of an ministry. And another reason here again, verse 6, why Paul is so urgent that Timothy should do this, is because he himself no longer can.

He himself has effectively done all that he can do. We tend to read these verses that follow as though a sort of last, a triumphant wave of the banner and the flag.

And sort of, here I go out with a blaze of trumpets. But rather, in its context, what it is, is an explanation as to why he is being so firm with Timothy.

And it is the sense that Paul himself can no longer do that which he is requiring of Timothy. Not that he hasn't done it in his day. He has been all over the Roman world.

[18 : 31] He's been all over Europe and Western Asia. He's been proclaiming the gospel. He's been healing the sick. He's been spreading the good news. He's been suffering for it. Shipwrecked and scourging and stoning and goodness knows all what.

He's been through it all. And he's suffered it all. But, eventually there comes a time when he's no longer in a position to be able to do it. I am now ready to be offered.

And the sense of it there is not just, here I am ready if the Lord wants me. The sense is, I am already being offered. The fact of his imprisonment. The fact of his awaiting final trial and execution. Events over which now he has no control. He is not free to go out to even proclaim the good news in Rome. He's not free to travel to the different churches that under God he has founded.

He may be free to write some letters. But, as we said, this is almost certainly the last letter that he wrote that we still have. So, he is not free now to do these things.

[19 : 35] I am now ready to be offered. In other words, I am already in the process of being offered. And the sense is here of being poured out like a libation. An offering that would be given.

The pagans would give to the gods. He poured out wine or something like a libation. Like an offering on their altars or whatever. I am ready to be poured out. I am already being poured out. And the time of my departure is at hand. My libation, my pouring out of myself is at hand. I am even now being offered up.

And the sense is, of course, this is why, Timothy, you must carry on. You don't realize how privileged you are to be able to carry on.

I remember on the night of my own ordination a year ago now, where the minister who had been the interim moderator of the charge was being inducted, who was an old retired minister, and talked about, you know, the hopefulness of seeing what was the young men coming into the ministry and being ordained and so on.

[20 : 40] And he said, I wish if there was one thing, I wish I could go back and start all over again. I wish I was starting tomorrow. I wish I was beginning again. And I, that night, of course, filled with trepidation and fear and trembling, thought, how could he possibly wish that?

I wish I was retired and at the end suit me now, and I'm terrified of all that's ahead of me now and so on. But he was wishing he could do more, wishing he could go on, wishing he could begin again. So much had he loved that to which the Lord called him. Whereas people in the position I was in then were sort of for fear and trembling and uncertain of what was ahead and so on.

But here he was, wishing he could go. Of course he could not. Yes, he could still be used for a group of supply, but he was retired. He was, in a sense, finished his course. And eventually, when the time came, he was called home.

But here we have from Paul, I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. In other words, I can't do any more. There is the sense in verses 7 and 8 here of all three tenses being used.

[21 : 48] I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Past tense. This is a statement of what he has done.

And it's not boasting or anything. It's just saying, look, the fight I fought, it's the good fight. It's not a sense of this is how well I fought it. But rather, I have fought a good fight. It was worth fighting. It was the greatest cause in which anyone could fight.

I have finished my course. That doesn't mean, I'm not clever. Look, I finished the exam. Like these infuriating people when you're struggling with exams themselves. They put the pen down and sit down and look around. They've done the paper.

They're fine, you know. Or else they get up and they walk out. They put the paper in this and this. And you think, oh, I was pregnant like them. And I'd be finished soon. And there you were still slowing away. He's not saying it like that. He's saying, now I'm confined.

Now I can't get out anymore. I can no longer spread this good news. So my course, whether I like it or not, is finished. The Lord has pronounced it complete.

[22 : 47] And I have not embraced the neo-paganism. I have not departed from what the Lord gave me and delivered to me. I have kept the faith. These are not boatings.

They're simple statements of fact. They're stating also to Timothy, now I'm ready to be poured out now. I'm in the process of being poured out. I have kept this faith. I've gone on. I've gone all the way to the end. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. Now we talked about the past tense. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is present tense. It's already there waiting while there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. Which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give future tense. And that day, and not to me only, but unto all them, but also love his appearing. So there's past, present, and future. He has done these things.

[23 : 45] Not in his own strength, but in the Lord's strength. There is currently, as it were hovering over him, waiting to be placed on his head, this crown of righteousness. Not his righteousness, but that of Christ.

Which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only. So he's not saying, because I follow him so greatly. Because not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.

Now, the Bible, of course, tells us, teaches us about the contrast between those who love his appearing. And we think, well, why would you not love the appearing of Jesus? Surely, everybody wants to see Jesus.

Jesus himself tells a different story to that. He is truthful enough to recognize not everyone will greet his appearance with joy. In Matthew 24, verse 30, we read, Revelation chapter 1, verse 7, But there are those who, apart from that contrast, will love his appearing, will long for it, will be delighted by his appearing.

Those who wail, who are terrified when he comes. Well, how can you portray that sinking feeling? The sense that, oh, you thought this wasn't going to happen. Oh, you didn't believe it.

[25 : 28] And suddenly, oh no, it was too. And there's no time, no opportunity to do differently. Once many years ago, it's not the same plane at all. It's not the same level. But just that sinking, sick feeling.

I remember once in that train journey, And I got my ticket, I had it punched and everything, I got to my destination, I thought, well, that's it, and I put it in the bin. And then I realized that since my last visit to that particular station, they had installed now these kind of barriers with sort of, with these clicky past turnstile things, which in order to get past, in order to get through, you had to produce your expired ticket and stick it in there.

And then the turnstile opened, you got through, and I probably stuck mine in a bin. And that sick, sinking feeling, I thought I wouldn't need it anymore. What am I going to do? I can't find it. I can't go back and get it.

I don't know what I did in the end, maybe explained to an official or something like that. I genuinely had bought the ticket. I just made it now. I didn't have it, but I had paid for my journey. But that's the sort of terror that seized me, and that's a tiny, insignificant, worldly thing.

Just imagine the wailing terror for those who, having been told of Christ, or perhaps having never been told of Christ, see this King of Kings coming in the clouds of glory, in the power of all his holy angels and his redeemed, and the terror they will face then, that not everyone will love his appearing.

[26 : 56] But to those who do love his appearing, it is because the Lord has changed their heart. The Lord has caused them to love him above all else and all other persons.

They desire Christ because they love Christ, and they love Christ because their heart has been changed. And if their heart has been changed, they are washed in his precious blood.

They are clothed in his righteousness, and the crown of righteousness they receive is not for their own merits, but for his. Henceforth there is laid out for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also, that love his appearing.

So we see how the past tense, the present, with a crown, as it were, hovering over his head, the future, where the certainty of the presentation are all bound up together into what the Lord himself has done.

Now, I'd love us to carry on here, but I suspect that if I go on to the second part of the last chapter, it will run on for too long. So I think this is probably a good cut-off point here at the end of verse 8.

[28 : 13] So we'll just hold that thought until next time, Lord willing. Of the past, present, and future, I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course.

I have kept the faith. And Paul is not boasting about how good he has been. It is rather about the goodness of the cause. This is a fight worth engaging in.

And I fought it. The course, the Lord brought it to the conclusion. And now I see it's finished. It wasn't down to me. It wasn't my choice deciding to give up. I finished my course because the Lord has brought it to an end.

I have kept the faith because, as he said, first of all in 1 Timothy, I know whom I have believed. Now, there is the false doctrine that tickles the ears. There is the true doctrine that changes the heart.

Timothy knows the one. Paul is only too aware of the dangers of the other. That's why he said, you've got the tools. You've got the means. You've got the commission.

[29 : 12] Hold fast to it and do it while you still can. And because I, Timothy, can't do it anymore, so you must do it because I hand on the baton to you.

So let's pray. Thank you.