



2 TIMOTHY 4:1-8

A Pastor's Priority

4TH SUNDAY DURING LENT – MARCH 26, 2017 (AM)

This morning we're in the second to last message on 2 Timothy, please turn to chapter 4 with me.

Have you ever wondered what a pastor does all day? I used to wonder what my pastor did all day. Now that I am a pastor, I've been asked by those who wonder what I do all day. This may come from the fact that many people only see their pastor during the week when he has a meal with them, or they only see their youth pastor when he shows up at their track meet or football game. Aside from that, they see him talk for a bit on Sundays but what he does with the rest of his time is a mystery. When some students have asked me what I do all week, I get the sense that they picture me hanging out in the youth room Monday to Friday, working on my ping pong skills and foosball skills.

Believe it or not, there is plenty to keep a pastor busy throughout the week. Many Pastors might say there is too much to do in a week. There certainly are lunches and appointments and gatherings to encourage and counsel. There's the running of the staff, the planning of events, there's the impromptu staff basketball games and paper airplane contests, it's almost too much to keep up with! That is why passages like this one are so helpful, because while there is much to do in pastoral ministry, somethings, in fact, one thing, ought to be prioritized above the others. And the reason it must be the Pastor's priority is because the very life of the church, the eternal souls of the congregation, depends on whether or not he keeps it central in the life of the church.

PREACH THE WORD

So what ought to be a Pastor's Priority?

A Pastor's Priority is to preach the Word, that's what we see in vs. 2 of our passage. John Owen, the great Puritan, said, "The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the

Word¹

This theme of preaching shows up throughout all of 2 Timothy. Earlier Pauls said, “Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim 1:6) We know from 1 Timothy 4 the elders laid hands on Timothy and he received the gift of preaching and this is what Paul is referring to in 2 Timothy 1:6. Throughout the book, Paul is pushing Timothy towards the act of preaching when he says things like, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord” (1:8) and “Remind them of these things, and charge them before God” (2:14) and “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2:15) and now “preach the word” (4:2).

But what exactly does Paul mean when he charges Timothy to Preach? Why doesn't he just say “teach” the word? Why doesn't he say, “Start small group bible studies” or “open a Bible college.” What is so special about preaching?

Preaching is heralding. It is when an official messenger comes bearing the message of the one who sent him. In the church, heralding is the declaration of God's message to his created beings. Modern day preaching is akin to the Old Testament prophecies which ended by saying “Thus Sayeth the Lord.” Thus, preaching is not the same as teaching. It's purpose is not simply to inform, nor is it the place for the preacher to share his opinions, nor is it to an invitation for us to discuss or debate the relevance of a particular topic. Rather, preaching is the declaration of God's message in a way that calls forth a response from those who hear it. In other words, preaching ought to do something to you, and that something is not just make you smarter, or fill your head with more knowledge. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones says in his book Preaching and Preachers: “(A pastor is there) to do something to those people, he is there to produce results of various kinds, he is there to influence people.” (53) Preaching ought to change the life of those who hear it. He goes on to say, “Preaching should make such a difference to a man who is listening that he is never the same again.” (53)

¹ Barrett, Matthew. *Inspiration From John Owen To Diligently Preach the Gospel*. The Gospel Coalition. 2/13/15. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/inspiration-from-john-owen-diligently-preach-the-gospel>. Quoted from: “The Duty of a Pastor,” in *Sermons to the Church*, The Works of John Owen 9, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991)

Now we must ask, “What could Timothy possibly teach that would change the hearts of his hearers week in and week out?” The answer is contained in the charge – preach THE WORD. There is only one way to change the hearts of humanity week in and week out and that is by preaching the Word. We see in 2 Timothy 3:16 The Word is able to “make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” The Word can save you by joining you to Christ! Then in 2 Timothy 3:17 we see “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” The Word can guide and guard and correct you so that you stay joined to Christ! This is what the Word does, the Pastors priority then, is to proclaim the Word, to make it known, and then to call people to receive it and believe it and get their lives in line with it. That is preaching.

The pastor has great help when it comes to seeing hearts changed as he preaches. The effect of preaching does not depend solely on his ability to communicate it. For when the Pastor preaches the Word, the Holy Spirit then takes that Word and uses it speak to the heart of each person in the room. Have you ever had the experience where a pastor’s sermon addressed the exact thing you were struggling with or wrestling with, that is not because your pastor tapped your phone lines, it is because the Holy Spirit is at work in you, and when the Pastor preaches the Word it gives the Holy Spirit opportunity to apply that Word which you’ve heard to your heart in just the way it needs to be applied. Which is why it is so crucial that the pastor preach the WORD, and not his opinions or culture’s values.

Let’s move on how the pastor ought to preach the word. Verse 2 goes on to say, He must “be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” To preach In season and out of season is translated in the NRSV as “be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable.” I believe this is telling us a pastor must not be afraid of persecution. Paul is clear in chapter 1 that it was his preaching that led to his suffering – but he doesn’t go on to say to Timothy, stop preaching the word so that you will save yourself from suffering. Rather, he says, Preach the Word and endure suffering.

The text goes on to say he should reprove, rebuke, and exhort. A pastor can’t be afraid of his hearers or what they will think of him. These three – reprove, rebuke, exhort – mean telling people that they’re wrong, calling sin what it is, and warning of its consequences.

Yet he must do it with complete patience and teaching. A pastor knows his job isn't finished when leaves the pulpit. He can't go to his office and shut the door until next week. Part of preaching is the follow up, part of calling people to get in line with the Word is meeting with them and discussing how they are to apply what they've heard in the sermon. As an aside, this is what we're doing on Sunday Evenings when we open up the floor for questions and discussion. We're giving an opportunity for the pastor to patiently help us apply the sermon to our own lives.

And the basis for why a pastor's priority ought to be preaching is found in v. 3 and 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, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." Timothy is to preach the Word because a time is coming when people will not want to hear the Word. Instead they will hire teachers and leave churches to find teachers who say what they want to hear. We all like to listen to those who say what we like to hear. This is how we choose our news network and we never listen to the opposing teams radio broadcast. But that's a problem when it comes to our hearts in church. As Robert Robinson wrote in his famous Hymn "Come thou fount" we sing "Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." We like to be comfortable and so we like preachers who remove the uncomfortable elements of the Word. Who don't tell us that we're all sinners who need to change, or that God's justice required Jesus to die a bloody and painful death in our place, or that there is no way to heaven but through Jesus, or that salvation can't be earned.

I'd imagine that few things are more discouraging for a mother than to work all afternoon on a well balanced and healthy meal while the kids destroy the house and then serve the meal and the kids refuse to eat. Made worse by their complaints that they are hungry and her finding them raiding the candy drawer just before bed. Paul is telling Timothy he is going to be that mother – and that the response isn't to quit making dinner and just put the candy jar out in the middle of the table each night. He's saying – a time is coming when people won't want to hear the Word, so Timothy – keep preaching the Word! Keep cooking up and serving the Word! Why? What did ch. 3 tell us? The Word is the message that has the power to save us. There is no other message that can do that. So pastors must keep preaching the Word.

Now you may see that there is a lot of application here for pastors, but what is the congregation supposed to take away from this charge to Timothy? How does it apply to those sitting in the pews? First and foremost, it tells us that we as a church must want to hear God's Word. This means that our ears must itch for God's Word. Or another way of saying it, we must have an itch that can only be scratched by God's Word. That itch must be the desire to know God, to Glorify God, to live in the relationship he created us for, to be like Christ, and to faithfully follow him all our days. If our itch is to be entertained, or feel good about ourselves, or to be comfortable, we don't stand a chance in a church that preaches the Word. When we itch for the right things, the Word will be like a soothing aloe to our itching souls. When we itch for the right things, our pastor's reproof and rebuke and correction will be as welcome as a surgeons needles and scalpel as he works to remove our cancer and heal our bodies. So the church must itch for God's Word

Second, we must enter into the sanctuary with certain expectations. We should enter expecting that our pastor is going to preach to us. That he is going to reprove, rebuke, and exhort us. We should come expecting to do battle with our sin nature. Expect that our sin nature might bristle and fight against the conviction caused by the sermon and be ready to submit ourselves to God's Word and resist the flesh.

Furthermore, we should expect him to preach the Word – that the primary content of the message will be God's Word properly interpreted from its context and original intention. He may use illustrations and stories and examples but they are always for the purpose of explaining God's Word.

We should also expect that the Spirit will use God's Word to do a work in us. Isaiah 55:10-11 says "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." And 2 Timothy 3 says God's Word is able to "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" and that it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," and so we ought to expect grace and growth and transformation to take place in this room week after week as God uses our preacher's mouth to make known his Word and then His Spirit applies it and massages it into our hearts and we leave different people than when we walked in.

Which raises the question, what if it doesn't? What if I come in to the sermon week after week and leave feeling more discouraged or empty or unfed. What went wrong? First, ask – Is the pastor preaching the Word? Does the bulletin have a scripture passage next to the sermon title? What do the preaching series called – is it 10 steps to a better you? Or is it called 1 Timothy or Genesis or Christ in the Old Testament? If you find that your church does preach the Word, the next thing you should ask is "Have I come to church with a heart that is ready to receive the Word?" Am I coming with an appetite for God's Word or am I coming to be entertained and have my ears tickled? Am I coming with the posture of a sinner who needs grace and instruction and correction, or am I coming with the thought that I don't really need to change? Am I coming with the expectation that God's Spirit will speak through God's messenger as he teaches God's Word, or do I come in not expecting to get much out of the message?

Another way of saying this is, "Have I come ready to do battle for my soul?" Brothers and sisters, this sanctuary may not look like a battlefield, with us all in our church clothes, politely listening, sitting in straight rows, but it is one. Week after week, the battle for human hearts rages in this room. It's because we have a real enemy who wants to do everything he can to harden our hearts and distract our minds the second we walk in these doors. We have a real enemy who wants us to and keep us from hearing or receiving anything from the Word of God. But we also have a real God whose Word really is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12) This points to the fact that we must be in prayer if we expect to glean anything from the sermon each week. We must pray for our own hearts as well as for our pastor.

FULFILL YOUR MINISTRY

Seeing that Paul's first charge to Timothy is to preach the Word, we see in verse 5 that his second and more general charge is to fulfill his ministry: "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

The first three commands here describe normal pastoral ministry while the fourth encompasses them all. Alistair Begg would say this is Paul's charge to Timothy to "keep your head down" – actually Pastor Begg would say "Keep your heed down" – keep going, fight the good fight, fulfill your ministry.

The reason for the charge is given in the next verse where Paul says, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come." Paul's is telling Timothy "Fulfill your ministry because mine is coming to an end." He's telling Timothy that there is going to be a void to fill, so put on your big boy pants and get to it. (This is what I tell the youth when I'm asked to preach in the main service, I'm wearing them right now) And it's time for some of you to put on our own big boy pants or big girl pants and start praying about which roles God would have us fill. We need to be praying for God to show us what he is calling us to do for His kingdom. Whether it means becoming a pastor, or elder, or deacon, or Sunday School teacher, or Missionary, or as adoption parents, or foster parents, or as a school board member, or a congressmen. When God makes clear what we're to do, we can expect that it won't be easy and it will involve sharing him with others. So we too need to be sober minded, endure suffering, and keep doing the work of an evangelist

Perhaps some of you have felt God calling you to a particular ministry but you've lost focus. Perhaps you've begun to look forward to collecting seashells in retirement or getting on with what *you* want to do with your life. And perhaps you've been neglecting the gifts God has given you. May the Holy Spirit speak to your heart this morning and may you clearly see the role that God is asking you to step into and with Timothy hear Paul's charge to fulfill your ministry. Because a day is coming where we will all realize that our life has come to an end and it is my desire, as one of your pastors, that you to be able to say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness,"

LOVE HIS APPEARING

Prior to his charge to Timothy to Preach the Word Paul says in verse 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." And now at the end of this passage Paul says, "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 but also to all who have loved his appearing." The phrase "by his appearing" and "to all who have loved his appearing" function as bookends on this passage, as if to say, the charge to preach the Word and to fulfill your ministry rooted in the truth that Jesus is coming back, and he is coming to judge the living and the dead. And when he comes there will be two types of people. Those who are filled with love at his appearing and those who are filled with terror and dread.

I did a short stint in the construction industry between College and grad school working for Walker Construction Company. I remember working on a house in Glen Ellyn, beautiful summer day, warm with a cool breeze, we'd stopped for lunch, eaten lunch, and when the time came to get back to work, it just slipped past us in silence and we all continued to sit, and relax, and one or two began to snooze. However, when our boss Todd Walker pulled into the drive, everything changed. Everyone scattered to where they should have been leaving the new guy, me, standing toe to toe with the head honcho. I cannot say that I loved Todd's appearing on that day.

But when I return home from work every day – I am greeted by those who love my appearing. Before I even make it into the garage I often have waist high and knee high munchkins, in diapers and bare feet, running out in 15 degree weather, just to be the first to hug me as I return home. May you, may we, be among those who when Christ returns, we love his appearing.

How do we make sure we love Christ's appearing? We preach and hear the Word. We fulfill our ministry. We fight the good fight, we finish the race, and we keep the faith. For it is unto the likes of these that Christ will bestow the crown of righteousness.

When you think about Christ returning, if he were to return today, to judge you and send you to eternal heaven or eternal hell, how would you feel? What does this stir up in you? Can you say, "Amen, come Lord Jesus"? Or would it be closer to, "God forbid"

CONCLUSION

Friends, we have gathered this morning to hear the word. Hear now what the Word says to you: *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9 – 10) And again: God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. (1 John 4:16-18)*

God loves you so much that he sent his son Jesus to die for your sin, so that if you would believe in him and make him the Lord over your life, you might be saved and love his appearing. If you have not accepted Christ as your Savior, I encourage you to do so today, and then return to be fed by God's word next week as we complete our series in 2 Timothy.

Let's Pray. Thank you Lord for your word. Cause us to be a church that preaches the word and a congregation that thirsts for it. Help us to fulfill our ministries and to fight for our faith and finish the race so that when Christ appears we may be filled with love and not terror.

WORK CITED

Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. Preaching and Preachers. Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, 1971.