

Preach the Word!

2 Timothy 4:1-5

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn to HCC on 10/2/2011

Introduction

- ❖ The story is told of Charles Simeon, the 18th century evangelical pastor, that for the first twelve years of his ministry, as the pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, no one in his congregation listened to him. No one wanted him as their pastor.
 - The previous pastor had recently died and the parishioners wanted the associate pastor Mr. Hammond to replace him, not Simeon. *Why?* Because Simeon was an evangelical. Because he would press the need for a personal conversion.

- ❖ He preached that true Christians are those who have experienced the new birth, who have been born again of the Spirit. It's not enough to just grow up in the Church of England, to be an official church member. You need the second birth.
 - But for the parishioners of Holy Trinity, Christianity boiled down to faithful church involvement and good morals, so all this talk of conversion and the need of a second birth sounded way too fanatical, too extreme.

- ❖ But even though they voiced their opposition, the local bishop insisted on Simeon and gave him the pulpit. He offered to step down, but the bishop told him that even if he declined the position, he still would not appoint Mr. Hammond. So Simeon stayed and prepared himself to preach to a congregation that refused to listen.
 - Now the first thing they did to express their opposition was lock their pew doors. Back then, churches would sell entire pews to wealthy parishioners. The closer upfront, the costlier the pew. Now these pew-holders had keys to lock them. So in a real passive-aggressive manner, these members simply refused to show up on Sunday and thereby prevented others from sitting in their pews.

- ❖ But the church was attracting so many new townspeople drawn to the gospel Simeon preached! So he went out and bought chairs, out of his own pocket, and set them up in the aisles and throughout the nooks and crannies of the chapel. Imagine a jam-packed sanctuary with people sitting and standing in every aisle while every pew is empty! But the following week, the churchwardens removed all the chairs and threw them out. This was the kind of hostile environment Charles Simeon was charged to minister in.

Context

- ❖ But he was not alone in his dilemma. In fact, we learn in today's passage that Timothy shared the same predicament. Like Simeon, he was charged to preach the word to an audience that would not listen -- to people who turned away.

- ❖ If you recall, Timothy was commissioned to pastor the church in Ephesus, which was experiencing opposition from within and without. From the outside, religious persecution was being sanctioned by the state. In fact, Paul was writing this letter from a Roman prison.
 - From within, certain leaders in the church had abandoned the faith and were spreading false doctrine. And now Paul anticipates that even more will turn a deaf ear. Like Simeon, Timothy was ministering in a hostile environment.

- ❖ Friends, I would argue that the environment we live and minister in today is no less hostile. We too have opposition coming from within and without.
 - On the outside, we have secularists trying to curb religious freedom. We have a wave of so-called ‘new atheists’ who want to convince everyone that belief in God is not only ignorant but dangerous for society. Nothing would please them more than to see Christianity along with every other faith eradicated from the public arena.
 - And then from within, we have professing Christians (and sometimes whole churches) who are no longer willing to endure sound doctrine, but instead go out and find teachers and preachers who will tell them what they want to hear -- what suits their own passions.

- ❖ Friends, in this morning’s passage, we are told to ‘*be ready*’ to preach the word ‘*in season and out of season*’, that means whether circumstance are favorable or not -- whether people want to listen or not.
 - *Are you ready? Are you ready to face a constant barrage of opposition to your ministry and rejection of your message? Are you ready to preach the word?* As we study this text, I pray you’ll be both challenged and encouraged to preach the word boldly, faithfully and clearly. I have three points. The first looks at the nature of this charge to preach, and the second and third offer us incentives to press on.

Preach the Word Boldly

- ❖ The first point is this: **1) Preach the word boldly even if nobody wants to listen.** Let’s skip over v1 for now so we can breakdown the charge in v2. “*Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*”
 - The first question we have to ask is, “***What does it mean to preach?***” Is Paul charging Timothy, and by extension every Christian, to prepare a sermon and preach it from a pulpit? That’s typically the first thing we think of when we hear the word ‘preach’, but is that what Paul means?

- ❖ The Greek word (*kerusso*) literally means “*to herald a message*”. So if you were to describe a preacher to ancient Greek, his first thought would not be of a man behind a pulpit. His first thought would be of a town herald -- someone charged with the task of standing up in a public place, like a marketplace, and heralding public news for everyone to hear.
 - Perhaps he’s heralding news of a recent battle won or the news of a royal visit to the city. Regardless of the content, the act of preaching is simply to announce news for others to hear. That’s why throughout the New Testament, *kerusso* is translated either as ‘to preach’ or ‘to proclaim’.

- ❖ So in case you have a hard time distinguishing ‘preaching’ from what I’m doing right now, you can just read v2 as saying, “*Proclaim the word.*” That’s a legitimate translation.
 - Well if *kerusso* simply means to herald/announce/proclaim a message, then in this sense, every Christian is a preacher. Every Christian has this charge. Of course there will always be the need for preachers preaching to a flock gathered for worship.

- But at the same time, every Christian parent is a preacher to their children. Every believer is a preacher of the word to one another, to family and friends, to anyone God puts in your life, including yourself! We're all preachers.

- ❖ Well the next question is, "***What is the word that we're to preach?***" What's the content of our heralding? The word for 'word' is *logos*, and Paul uses it again in chapter 4:15. There he's warning of Alexander the coppersmith who, "strongly opposed our *logos* (message)".
 - In this light, we shouldn't read '*the word*' in v2 as a synonym for Scripture. Context tells us that Paul is not talking about preaching the Bible in general but preaching a message in particular, a message he was persecuted for -- the gospel message.

- ❖ Timothy is being charged to proclaim/herald/preach the gospel! *And what is the gospel?* According to Paul's own words in chapter 1:8-10, the gospel is the good news concerning the grace of God (God's unmerited favor) that is given -- not to those who work for it -- but to those who have been called. And we're told this grace has been manifested in a person, our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light, offering it to anyone who receives him by faith (1:10). That's the *logos* we are to preach!

- ❖ To preach the word means to announce this glorious, good news to others. I want to emphasize that because the idea of preaching to people (at least outside the context of a worship service) has a pretty negative connotation. If you feel like someone is nagging you or riding a high horse and making you feel bad, you might say, "*Stop preaching to me! No one like to be preached at.*"
 - So I wouldn't be surprised if you were to normally think that preaching to someone is a bad thing to do. But let me ask you, "When you think of preaching, are you only hearing a particular voice in your head -- a **voice of rebuke**?"

- ❖ Now according to Paul, in v2, sometimes our preaching needs to take on that tone. Sometimes we need to preach to rebuke. If a Christian friend is walking in sin, it's our duty, as a brother/sister in Christ, to proclaim God's truth and to call out their sin.
 - But preaching is not just aimed at rebuke. In v2 we see that in preaching there is also a **voice of reproof**. If a friend has an itching ear for false teaching, then preaching to reprove is aimed at correcting their error and helping them build sound doctrine.
 - In preaching there is also a **voice of exhortation**. Preaching to exhort is aimed at encouraging your friends by extending to them the gospel of grace and calling them to trust and obey.

- ❖ You see, I'm just trying to redeem this concept of 'preaching to people'. I hope you recognize that Paul's charge to '*preach the word*' is not a charge to nag. It's not a charge to patronize. It's a charge to herald good news. To remind people that God's grace is always available through faith in Christ. That's what Paul means by '*preach the word*'.

- ❖ At the same time, don't just think evangelism. Preaching the word includes evangelism but it's broader than that. To preach the word to one another is to speak the truth in love. It is to proclaim the reality of all that God has done for sinners in Christ and all that it means for the whole of our lives.
 - To preach the word to your friends is to speak gospel into their lives, not just for the salvation but for their growth and sanctification.

- ❖ And I like how Paul reminds us to be '*completely patient*' with people. Don't write them off too quickly. Sometimes the roots of sin run deep in the soul, so just one attempt to preach the word to your friend might not be enough.
 - I also like how he says to preach the word '*with teaching*' (instruction). That means it's not enough to just tell people to stop sinning, you need to explain why in accordance with the truth.

- ❖ Now let's consider Paul's emphasis on being ready to preach '*in season and out of season*'. That phrase is literally '*in good times or not so good times*'. That is, be ready to preach in convenient times or inconvenient times, or as we said earlier, whether circumstances are favorable or not. Now in what sense would circumstances be inconvenient or unfavorable?
 - Look at vv3-4. "*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.*"

- ❖ Paul already warned Timothy in chapter 3 that things will get worse. He anticipates evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse (3:13). And based on the way things are going, Paul foresees that eventually people will no longer ensure sound doctrine.
 - In vv3-4, he warns that people, even people in the church, will get an itch. An itch in their ears. An itch for novelty, to hear something different. They're tired of hearing the same old gospel. They want something that suits their own likings. And if Timothy won't scratch this itch for them, they'll find someone who will.
 - They'll reject '*sound teaching*' and '*the truth*' AND go after their '*own passions*' and '*myths*'. They will turn away from truth-tellers like Timothy AND turn towards people-pleasers who will tell them what they want to hear.

- ❖ Friends, this is a description of the ancient church of Ephesus, but it sure sounds like the state of the church today.
 - **People today will not endure a gospel message that says we're fundamentally sinners and that a Holy God is angry with our sin.** Instead people gather for themselves teachers who'll tell them, "You're not that bad and God is not that mad."
 - **People today will not endure a gospel call to pursue radical discipleship in obedience to Jesus.** Instead they'll find teachers who say all that matters is making a decision for Christ, irregardless of how you live the rest of your life.

- **People today will not endure a call to suffer for the gospel.** Instead they'll handpick teachers who tell them, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will...have health, wealth, and prosperity."
- ❖ Friends, are you ready to boldly preach the word even if nobody wants to listen? Are you ready to accept this charge? It's really going to depend on whether you care more for your hearers to accept *you* OR for them to accept the truth of God. It's going to depend on whether you care more to be a truth-teller OR if you'd rather be a people-pleaser.
 - You can easily get people to listen to you. You can easily draw a crowd. Just figure out their itch and scratch it with pleasant, entertaining words. It's called preaching to the crowds.
 - But preaching the word, on the other hand -- preaching the gospel message -- that requires boldness because you can be sure to face rejection.

Preach the Word Faithfully

- ❖ Thankfully, Paul offers two incentives found in our next two points. **2) Preach the word faithfully because God and Christ are listening.** So even though your hearers may turn a deaf ear and refuse to listen, keep preaching -- stay faithful in the task -- for you know that God and Christ are listening.
 - Look back now at v1, "*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.*"
- ❖ Notice that Paul is giving Timothy this charge in the presence of God and Christ Jesus. Now on one hand, that is meant to strike a holy fear in Timothy. He's being reminded that when Christ Jesus makes his visible appearance (his second coming), his kingdom will have fully come, and as King he'll judge the entire human race (the living and the dead).
 - Now those who trust in Christ have no reason to fear the judgment itself for our sins have been forgiven in Christ and we will stand before the throne covered by the King's own blood and righteousness. As Paul says in v8, there is a crown of righteousness laid up for all those who love and long for Christ's appearing.
- ❖ Yet believers will still have to give an account for how we carried out the duties and stewardships that have been entrusted to us. For example, in James 3:1 it says that teachers will be judged with greater strictness because of the great power and influence that our tongues (our words) can have on people.
 - Friends, this means that one day each of us will have to give an account as a preacher -- as one charged to preach the word -- and you'll be evaluated.
- ❖ But take comfort in this: Christ will not be evaluating you on the basis of how many people you saved with your words. He's not judging to see how many deaf ears you unclogged, how many people turned away from myths to listened to you.
 - No, his evaluation will on the basis of your faithfulness. He'll judge how faithful you were to God-breathed Scripture when you preached the word to others.

- ❖ What that means is that even if no one is listening to you, you can be sure that Christ is listening, and that he is well pleased with your faithfulness to continue preaching the word even when it's out of season, even when times are tough and opposition is strong.
- ❖ **Friends, can there be any stronger incentive to faithfully preach the word than knowing that you are personally commissioned to the task by God himself?**
 - And do you think God is surprised when people turn a deaf ear? No, God, in his sovereign omniscience, knows he's sending you to preach to people who don't want to listen.
- ❖ In the Old Testament, he sent prophets to preach his word to a wayward people. They called God's people to repentance, but they refused to listen. Instead they turned to false prophets who told them pleasant things, things they wanted to hear.
 - Jeremiah was one of those true prophets. At the time of his calling, when he was still a youth, the Lord commissioned Jeremiah to preach his word. And he told him upfront that everyone is going to fight against you, no one is going to listen to you.
 - But the Lord also said, "*But they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you.*" (Jer. 1:19)
- ❖ Friends, let those words bring you comfort and strength to boldly, faithfully preach the word, in season and out of season, knowing that the Lord is listening. Because he charged you for this very task, know that he is with you. He will deliver you.

Preach the Word Clearly

- ❖ Finally, let's consider our third point, another incentive. **3) Preach the word clearly for God's elect will surely listen.** So even though many will refuse to listen, those that God is calling to himself *will* listen, and that should motivate us to go out and preach.
 - Look at v5, "*As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*"
- ❖ There's that Greek phrase *su de* again, 'but you', 'as for you'. In the face of itchy-eared hearers who are so fickle and unstable, Timothy is to be different.
 - But you, '*always be sober-minded*'. Be clear in your thinking, clear in your preaching. While others are intoxicated by every wind of new teaching. You be sober.
 - And '*endure suffering*'. That phrase harkens back to chapter 2:10 where Paul says that he "*endures everything for the sake of the elect, that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*"
- ❖ Notice that the very thing that enabled Paul to endure suffering -- to endure deaf ears and the rejection of his preaching -- was his knowledge that God has an elect. God has a chosen people out there, yet to be found, and if Paul just keeps preaching the word, then God's elect will surely listen and be found.

- In John chapter 10 Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. He says he knows his sheep and his sheep know him. He calls his sheep by name and they follow him *because they know his voice*.
- ❖ **Friends, do you realize that when you preach the word -- when you proclaim the gospel faithfully and clearly -- Jesus' voice actually accompanies your preaching?** When you speak the word, faithfully and clearly, Jesus speaks. So if you continue to boldly speak the truth, Jesus' sheep -- his elect -- will hear his voice and they will listen.
- ❖ If you grasp this concept and believe it, it will lift a huge burden off of you, especially when it comes to evangelism and the salvation of your non-Christian family and friends. For many of you, the fear associated with evangelism has crippled you into inaction.
 - You're scared to share the gospel because you're afraid you won't have the answers. You're afraid of saying the wrong things. You don't want to lead them astray. And most of all, you're afraid they might reject you and reject Jesus.
- ❖ But when Paul says to '*do the work of an evangelist*', the work he's talking about is to preach the word as boldly, as faithfully, and as clearly as you can. And then leave the rest up to God.
 - No one becomes a Christian because they heard your voice, your eloquent words, your sharp arguments, your irrefutable logic. That's not why a person gets saved.
 - No, the only reason a person becomes a Christians is because the voice of Jesus accompanies the faithful, clear proclamation of his gospel. And just like when he spoke into the void and the universe suddenly came into existence, Jesus speaks into dead hearts and new spiritual life suddenly comes into existence.
- ❖ Once you realize that you are utterly incapable of bringing life to a dead heart, once you realize that salvation is of the Lord, that it is ultimately a supernatural work of God, then you can let that burden go. All fear is gone.
 - **God is not charging you to save your family and friends.** That's his job. He is just charging you to be bold, to be faithful, to be clear and to preach the word. He'll take care of the rest.
- ❖ And granted, many will turn away from the truth and gather for themselves teachers who will tickle their fancy. But don't give up. Persevere in your charge. As Paul says, "*Fulfill your ministry*".
 - Commenting on this passage, John Stott wrote, "*The harder the times and the deafen the people, the clearer and more persuasive our proclamation must be.*" Brothers and sisters, times are hard, ears are deaf -- so embrace your charge. Preach the word. Fulfill your ministry.