

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: Preach the Word

2 Timothy 4:1-8

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal heart of this passage is the authority and sufficiency of the apostolic word and the certain hope of Christ's appearing. Paul charges Timothy to "preach the word" (v. 2), not human opinion, not what the crowd craves, but the sound teaching delivered through the apostles. Help your class see that faithful preaching and teaching are bound to the content of Scripture itself, and that in an age of "itching ears" the temptation is always to soften or replace that word with messages that please. The aim is to instill a deep reverence for the word and a settled refusal to trade it for anything more comfortable. Alongside this, the passage holds out the Christian's true hope. Christ is the Judge who will appear, His kingdom is real and present even now, and a "crown of righteousness" awaits all who have loved His appearing. This is a future hope of glory, the appearing and judgment of Christ, not an earthly millennial reign.

This lesson also presses two pastoral and doctrinal guardrails worth handling carefully. First, note that Paul says he has "kept the faith" (v. 7). The crown is for those who endure, who love Christ's appearing and remain faithful to the end. This is not the language of a salvation that cannot be lost regardless of how one lives; Paul himself elsewhere warns of being disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27). Faithfulness matters, and salvation is preserved through ongoing faith and obedience. Second, the hope here is the appearing of Christ and the crown of righteousness, not a future thousand-year earthly kingdom. Help the class marvel that Christ reigns now and will appear in glory, and that the believer's longing is rightly fixed on that appearing.

Yet do not let this become a mere exercise in doctrine. Paul is pouring out his life and pointing Timothy, and us, to a finish line worth reaching. The aim is spiritual formation: to stir in your students a love for the truth that will not be traded away, a willingness to endure and finish, and a genuine longing for the appearing of the Lord. Let the marvel of Paul's finish-line faith, fought, finished, kept, awaken in your class the resolve to run their own race well, by the grace and strength of Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul issues his charge "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" (v. 1). What does this solemn setting teach us about Christ as Judge, His coming appearing, and His present kingdom, and why does Paul ground the charge to preach in these realities?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open by feeling the weight of Paul's charge. He summons the highest possible witnesses: "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" (v. 1). Before he gives a single instruction, Paul situates Timothy's ministry under the gaze of God and the certainty of Christ's return and judgment. The charge to preach is not a small administrative task; it is carried out in the light of eternity.

Notice the three realities Paul names: Christ as Judge of the living and the dead, His appearing, and His kingdom. Each one grounds the charge. Because Christ will judge, the word must be preached faithfully. Because Christ will appear, there is urgency. And because Christ has a kingdom, the message has authority and a King behind it. These are not abstract doctrines; they are the foundation that makes faithful preaching non-negotiable.

Take a moment on "his kingdom." Paul does not speak of a kingdom we are still waiting to be set up on earth; he speaks of the kingdom that already belongs to Christ, who reigns now (Colossians 1:13). The kingdom came with Christ and was established at Pentecost (Daniel 2:44; Acts 2), and Christ rules over it from heaven this very moment. What still lies ahead is His appearing, the judgment, and the glory to come, not the establishment of an earthly millennial reign.

Land the point. The reason Paul can charge Timothy so solemnly to preach the word is that the One who gave the word is the reigning King and coming Judge. To take preaching lightly, or to swap the word for something more palatable, is to forget who is watching and who is coming. The certainty of the appearing and the kingdom should steady every preacher and every hearer.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as Judge of the living and the dead (v. 1; Acts 17:31)
- The certainty of Christ's appearing as the church's forward hope
- Christ's kingdom as present and reigning now, established at Pentecost (Daniel 2:44; Colossians 1:13)
- The charge to preach grounded in eternal realities, not human authority
- The seriousness of ministry carried out in the presence of God

Discussion Prompts

- How does preaching "in the presence of God" and the coming Judge change the way we treat the word?
- Why is it important to understand Christ's kingdom as present and reigning now rather than a future earthly reign?
- How does the certainty of Christ's appearing give both urgency and steadiness to our faith?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul charges Timothy to be ready “in season and out of season” (v. 2), faithful whether it is convenient or not. Where in your own life is it easy to follow Christ “in season,” and where do you find it hard to stay faithful “out of season,” when it is costly or inconvenient?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul tells Timothy to be ready “in season and out of season” (v. 2). The phrase means whether it is convenient or not, whether the timing seems favorable or hostile. Faithfulness is not to be governed by circumstances or by how welcome the truth happens to be at the moment. This question invites students to examine where their own faithfulness rises and falls with convenience.

Help them see that most of us follow Christ easily enough “in season,” when faith is encouraged, when the crowd agrees, when obedience costs little. The test comes “out of season,” when standing for truth is awkward, when no one is watching, when following Jesus means inconvenience or loss. Genuine discipleship shows itself precisely in the out-of-season moments.

Move toward the specific. Ask students to identify a season of ease where their faith runs smoothly, and a harder season where they tend to go quiet or compromise. The point is not to induce guilt but to invite a deliberate readiness, the kind that decides in advance to be faithful whether or not the moment is convenient, trusting the same Lord who is always present.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithfulness that does not depend on convenience or favorable circumstances (v. 2)
- The testing of true discipleship in costly, out-of-season moments
- Readiness as a settled disposition rather than a reaction to circumstances
- The constant presence of the Lord as the ground of steady faithfulness

Discussion Prompts

- Where is it easy for you to follow Christ “in season”?
- Where do you find it hardest to stay faithful “out of season,” when it is costly?
- What would it look like to decide in advance to be faithful regardless of convenience?

Question 3**Student Question:**

The charge is to “preach the word” and to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (v. 2). What does this teach about the authority and content of true preaching, and how does it hold together both boldness and patience without sacrificing either?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The central command is “preach the word” (v. 2). Everything else in the verse describes how. The content of faithful proclamation is not the preacher’s cleverness or the audience’s preferences but the word of God itself. This sets the authority and the boundary of all true preaching and teaching: it must be the word, not something substituted for it.

Paul then lists three actions: reprove, rebuke, and exhort. Reproving corrects error, rebuking confronts sin, exhorting encourages toward obedience. Notice that faithful ministry is not all comfort; it includes the harder work of correction. A preacher who never reproves or rebukes is not being kind; he is being unfaithful to the word entrusted to him.

But Paul immediately tempers the boldness: “with complete patience and teaching.” The correction is never to be harsh, impatient, or careless. It is to be saturated with patience and grounded in teaching, so that people are instructed, not merely scolded. Here boldness and gentleness are held together. The truth is to be spoken plainly and lovingly, with the long patience of one who wants to win people, not wound them.

Apply this to the church’s view of preaching and teaching. We honor preaching that is bound to the word and willing to correct, but we also insist that it be patient and instructive. A ministry that is bold without patience becomes a hammer; a ministry that is patient without boldness becomes empty. The biblical pattern holds both together, anchored always in the word of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The word of God as the authoritative content of all true preaching (v. 2)
- The threefold work of reproof, rebuke, and exhorting in faithful ministry
- The necessity of correction, not only encouragement, in handling the word
- Boldness and patience held together, neither sacrificed for the other
- Preaching bound to Scripture rather than to the preacher’s opinions

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that true preaching must be “the word” and not human opinion?
- Why does faithful ministry require reproof and rebuke and not only encouragement?
- How do we hold boldness and patience together when speaking hard truths?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul says people will gather teachers “to suit their own passions” because of their “itching ears” (v. 3). Be honest: where are your own ears tempted to itch, to seek out voices that comfort your preferences rather than confront them, and what would it look like to welcome the word that corrects you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul warns of a time when people “will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (v. 3). This question turns that warning inward. Before we point to a culture of itching ears, we should ask honestly where our own ears itch.

Help students recognize the subtle form this takes. Few of us openly reject the truth; instead we drift toward voices that flatter our preferences, that confirm what we already think, that comfort our chosen sins. The phrase “to suit their own passions” exposes the motive: we want teachers who serve our desires rather than challenge them.

Then point to the healthier path. The mark of a maturing believer is the willingness to welcome the word that corrects, not just the word that comforts. Encourage students to name an area where they tend to avoid the convicting truth, and to invite God to give them ears that gladly receive correction. A teachable heart is the best guard against itching ears.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to seek teaching that pleases rather than corrects (v. 3)
- “Itching ears” as a heart that serves its own passions
- Teachableness and willingness to be corrected as marks of maturity
- The danger of choosing comfortable voices over the convicting word

Discussion Prompts

- Where are your own ears tempted to itch, to seek out voices that comfort your preferences?
- What is the difference between a teacher who challenges you and one who merely flatters you?
- What would it look like to welcome the word that corrects you this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul warns that people “will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (v. 4). What does this passage show about how drift happens, beginning not with open rejection but with no longer enduring sound teaching, and why is the difference between truth and pleasing myths so serious?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul completes the warning: people “will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (v. 4). Notice the sequence. It begins not with a dramatic rejection of God but with no longer enduring sound teaching (v. 3), then turning away from listening, then wandering into myths. Drift is gradual, almost gentle, until one finds oneself far from the truth.

Help the class see that the alternative to truth is not nothing; it is myths. When people stop loving the truth, they do not become neutral; they fill the vacuum with something more appealing and less demanding. A heart will worship and believe something. The only question is whether it will be the truth of God or a comfortable substitute.

Stress why the difference is so serious. Truth and myth are not two flavors of religion; one saves and one destroys. The myths feel pleasant precisely because they ask nothing and confront nothing, but they cannot make anyone wise for salvation. This is why the charge to preach the word matters so much: the word is the truth that anchors us when myths drift by.

Apply it pastorally. Drift rarely announces itself. It happens through small accommodations, through preferring the easy message, through letting the convicting word grow faint. The safeguard is to keep returning to the word, to keep enduring sound teaching even when it stings, so that we do not wander off without realizing it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gradual nature of spiritual drift, beginning with not enduring sound teaching (vv. 3-4)
- The human heart's tendency to replace truth with appealing myths
- The serious difference between saving truth and comfortable falsehood
- Continued exposure to the word as the safeguard against drift

Discussion Prompts

- How does drift typically begin, according to this passage?
- Why does the heart tend to fill the place of abandoned truth with myths rather than nothing?
- What practices keep us enduring sound teaching even when it confronts us?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul tells Timothy to “always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (v. 5). Which of these (a clear mind, endurance in hardship, sharing the gospel, finishing your work) most challenges you, and what would taking it seriously change about your week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul gives Timothy four crisp commands: “always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (v. 5). Each addresses a different aspect of faithful service. Sober-mindedness is clear, steady thinking, not swept along by excitement or fear. Enduring suffering accepts that faithfulness will cost something. Doing the work of an evangelist keeps the gospel central. Fulfilling one's ministry means finishing the task God has given.

This question invites students to find themselves in the list. Some need a clearer, more sober mind, less anxious, less distracted, more focused on what matters. Others need endurance, the willingness to keep going when it is hard. Others need to recover a heart for sharing the gospel. Others need to finish what they have started rather than leaving their work undone.

Encourage specificity. Ask which of the four most challenges them and what taking it seriously would actually change this week. The goal is not vague inspiration but a concrete adjustment: a clearer mind about a particular matter, endurance in a specific hardship, a gospel conversation begun, an unfinished task completed for the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sober-mindedness as steady, clear thinking in the Christian life (v. 5)
- Endurance of suffering as a normal part of faithful service
- The ongoing call to evangelism, sharing the gospel with others
- Faithfulness in finishing the ministry God assigns

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the four (sober mind, endurance, evangelism, finishing) most challenges you?
- What would taking that one seriously change about your week?
- Where do you most need God's strength to keep going in your service to Him?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul describes his own life poured out: "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come" (v. 6). What does it mean to view our lives as an offering poured out to God, and how does that change the way we think about sacrifice, service, and even death?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul describes his own situation with a striking image: "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come" (v. 6). The drink offering was poured out entirely upon the altar, holding nothing back. Paul sees his whole life, and now his impending death, as such an offering, given completely to God.

Help students grasp what this perspective does. It transforms sacrifice from loss into worship. Paul does not view his sufferings and his coming execution as a tragedy stealing his life away; he views them as the final pouring out of a life already given to God. When we see our lives as offerings, service stops being a burden we resent and becomes worship we offer.

Notice too the word "departure." Paul speaks of death not as an ending but as a departure, like a ship loosing its moorings to sail home. For the believer, death is a going to be with the Lord.

This robs death of its terror and fills even the end with hope, because the One we go to is the One we have served.

Apply it gently. Most of us instinctively guard our lives, our time, our comfort. Paul models a life held with open hands, poured out for God. Invite students to consider what it would mean to offer their own lives this way, not waiting until the end, but pouring out daily in service and worship to the Lord who poured Himself out for us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Life and even death viewed as an offering poured out to God (v. 6)
- Sacrifice reframed as worship rather than mere loss
- Death as a departure to be with the Lord for the believer
- A life held with open hands and given fully to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to view your life as an offering poured out to God?
- How does that perspective change the way you think about sacrifice and service?
- How does seeing death as a “departure” to the Lord change the way you face it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul looks back and says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (v. 7). When you imagine the end of your own race, what would it take for you to be able to say those words honestly, and where do you need God’s strength to keep going?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul gives one of the most moving testimonies in Scripture: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (v. 7). Three images, all of completion. The fight is fought, the race is finished, the faith is kept. There is no boasting here, only the quiet confidence of a man who has been faithful to the end by God’s grace.

This question asks students to imagine their own finish line. The three phrases give a useful self-examination: Have I fought, am I engaging the struggle of the Christian life or drifting? Have I run, am I making progress or standing still? Have I kept, am I holding to the faith or letting it slip? Each invites honest reflection.

Be careful to frame this with grace, not anxiety. Paul could say these words not because he was flawless but because he had been faithful, leaning on Christ through every fight and every mile. Encourage students that the goal is not perfection but perseverance, the steady continuing in faith that the Lord Himself enables.

Then point them toward the present. The way to be able to say these words at the end is to fight, run, and keep today. Ask where they most need God's strength to keep going right now, and encourage them that the same Lord who carried Paul to the finish line will carry them too.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian life as a fight to be fought and a race to be finished (v. 7)
- Perseverance to the end as the goal, by the grace of Christ
- Self-examination measured by fighting, running, and keeping the faith
- Faithfulness as a matter of endurance, not flawless performance

Discussion Prompts

- When you imagine the end of your race, which of the three could you say honestly?
- Where do you most need God's strength to keep going right now?
- What helps you keep fighting and running when you grow weary?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul's hope is sure: "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" (v. 8). What does this passage teach about the Christian's true hope, the crown of righteousness and Christ's appearing, and how does "kept the faith" guard us against thinking faithfulness is optional or salvation cannot be lost?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, and it deserves careful, worshipful attention. Paul writes, "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" (v. 8). Here the Christian's true hope comes into full view: a crown, a coming Day, a righteous Judge, and the appearing of Christ.

Consider first the crown of righteousness. This is not a wage Paul has earned but a gift the righteous Judge will award to those who have been faithful. It is the believer's reward and glory, kept safe ("laid up") until that Day. Notice that it is given to "all who have loved his appearing," not to apostles alone. Every faithful Christian who longs for Christ's return shares in this hope. The crown is the language of glory to come, the believer's eternal reward in the presence of the Lord.

Consider next the nature of this hope. It is fixed on Christ's appearing, that Day when the Lord returns, judges, and brings His people into glory. This is not an earthly thousand-year reign; the Christian hope is not a political kingdom on this earth but the appearing of Christ and the eternal

glory that follows (Titus 2:11-13; Hebrews 9:27-28). Christ reigns now from heaven, and what we await is His appearing and the crown He will award. Help your class fix their longing rightly, not on a future earthly scheme but on the glorious return of the Lord.

Now handle the phrase “kept the faith” (v. 7) together with this crown. Paul receives the crown because he persevered, and he says it is for “all who have loved his appearing.” This is not the doctrine that one is saved once and can never fall away regardless of how one lives. Paul elsewhere feared being disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27), and Scripture warns believers not to fall away from grace (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 3:12-14). The crown is for those who keep the faith to the end. Salvation is received by grace through an obedient faith and is preserved through ongoing faithfulness, not presumed regardless of how one lives.

Finally, lead the class to marvel and to long. Paul faces execution with his eyes on a crown and his heart loving the appearing of his Lord. That is the disposition of a healthy Christian: not clinging desperately to this life, but loving the appearing of Christ, running toward the Day when faith becomes sight. Invite your students to examine whether they truly love His appearing, and to let that longing reshape how they live now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The crown of righteousness as the faithful believer’s hope and reward (v. 8)
- The crown awarded to all who have loved Christ’s appearing, not to apostles alone
- The Christian hope fixed on Christ’s appearing and eternal glory, not an earthly millennial reign (Titus 2:11-13)
- “Kept the faith” implying perseverance; salvation can be forfeited by falling away (1 Corinthians 9:27; Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 3:12-14)
- Salvation preserved through ongoing faith and obedience, not presumed regardless of life
- Christ as the righteous Judge who will award the crown on that Day
- Loving the appearing of Christ as the disposition of a healthy believer

Discussion Prompts

- What does the “crown of righteousness” teach us about the Christian’s true hope?
- How does “kept the faith” guard us against thinking faithfulness is optional or salvation cannot be lost?
- What does it mean, practically, to “love his appearing,” and do you?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these eight verses, from the solemn charge to preach the word to the crown laid up for all who love His appearing. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, and one concrete step you will take this week to run your race with greater faithfulness.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole passage. Paul moved from the solemn charge to preach the word (vv. 1-2), to the warning of itching ears (vv. 3-4), to the call to finish faithfully (vv. 5-6), to his own finish-line testimony and the crown of righteousness (vv. 7-8). The thread is faithfulness to the truth, sustained all the way to the appearing of Christ.

Invite students to name what God has stirred. For some it may be a renewed reverence for the word and a refusal to trade it for comfortable myths. For others it may be conviction about itching ears, or a call to endure and finish, or a fresh longing for the appearing of the Lord. The goal is for each person to leave with something specific rather than a general resolve.

Then press for one concrete step toward running the race more faithfully: a hard truth to welcome, a ministry to finish, a gospel conversation to begin, a habit that fixes the heart on Christ's appearing. Remind them that the same Lord who carried Paul to the finish line will give them strength, and that the crown is held out to all who keep the faith and love His appearing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithfulness to the word sustained to the end as the believer's calling
- The appearing of Christ as the goal that shapes how we live now
- Perseverance and obedience as the path to the crown
- Christ as the one who strengthens us to finish the race

Discussion Prompts

- What is the single most important thing God has shown you in this passage?
- What is one concrete step you will take this week to run your race more faithfully?
- How can this class help one another finish well and love the appearing of Christ?