

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy

Lesson 12: Preach the Word -- 2 Timothy 4:1-8

There are moments when a person gathers all their authority into a single sentence, and you can feel the weight land. Paul is at such a moment. He is near the end of his life, and he reaches for the most solemn witnesses he can summon: “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” (v. 1). Before he tells Timothy what to do, he reminds him who is watching. This is not advice traded between friends over coffee. This is a charge given under heaven, with God Himself and the returning Judge as witnesses.

And then comes the charge itself, four short words that have shaped faithful preaching ever since: “preach the word” (v. 2). Not your opinions. Not the latest trend. Not what the crowd is itching to hear. The word. Be ready in season and out of season, Paul says, whether it is convenient or not, whether people are eager or hostile. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort, but do it “with complete patience and teaching.” There is steel in this charge, but it is wrapped in patience, because the goal is never to crush people but to win them to the truth.

Paul knows why the charge is so urgent. “The time is coming,” he warns, “when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (v. 3). Picture it: a congregation shopping for a message that scratches the itch, hiring voices that tell them what they already want to hear, until truth itself feels like an intrusion. It is a haunting description, and it is not only ancient. The pull to trade the hard word for a comfortable one is in every age, and in every heart.

But the passage does not end in warning; it ends in glory. Paul looks back over his whole life and says, without boasting, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (v. 7). And then he looks ahead: “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). There is a finish line, and there is a crown, and it is held out not only to apostles but to everyone who has loved the appearing of Christ. As we study these eight verses, let us ask God for the courage to love the truth, the stamina to finish the race, and a heart that longs for the appearing of our Lord.

Group Discussion: Paul warns of a time when people “will not endure sound teaching” but gather teachers “to suit their own passions” and chase what their “itching ears” want to hear (vv. 3-4). Where do you see that pull at work today, and why is it so tempting, both for hearers and for preachers, to trade the hard truth for a message that simply pleases?

Personal Reflection: Paul could say at the end, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (v. 7). If your race ended today, which of those three could you say with confidence, and which one is God calling you to give more attention to right now?

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 20:26-27, Paul declaring the whole counsel of God; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, running to win the imperishable crown; 2 Timothy 2:15, rightly handling the word of truth; Hebrews 9:27-28, Christ appearing a second time to save those who wait for Him; Titus 2:11-13, awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of our Savior.