

Preaching the Gospel

2 Timothy 4:1-2

11 November 2018 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Idea: Preach the word.

Big Question: Why does God want preaching to be an important part of Timothy's ministry?

Introduction

One night, William Farel received news that a man was unexpectedly going to be staying in town.

The traveller was on his way to Strasbourg, but was forced to change his route because of a local war.

Only a couple of months earlier, Farel had led the city of Geneva to separate from the Roman Catholic Church and join the Reformation.

Farel knew this traveller was the author of a book called *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a bloke named John Calvin.

So he went and bailed Calvin up and began trying to persuade him that he should stay in Geneva and help out.

Calvin wasn't interested – he was just passing through.

And besides, he was quite a shy and reclusive kind of guy – much better suited to being a scholar or writer than a pastor or preacher.

When arguing with him didn't work, Farel threatened Calvin, telling him that if he didn't preach, God would curse his studies.

I'm not sure that's a model of how to go about things.

Calvin was pretty shocked, but he was also convinced.

He ended up staying in Geneva and began a gruelling program of preaching two different sermons on a Sunday and every second week, he'd preach every single day.

He *averaged* 170 sermons per year.

He managed to do it because he'd written scholarly commentaries on everything he preached and also because the guy had a brain the size of a small planet, so he only needed an hour to prepare each sermon.

It makes me tired just thinking about it.

When Calvin preached, he didn't just give dry lectures, preaching like a scholar.

He wanted people to hear God speak and be changed by it.

He tried to preach so that people would grow in their love for and faithfulness to Christ.

This is what he said:

“When I expound Holy Scripture, I must always make this my rule: That those who hear me may receive profit from the teaching I put forward and be edified unto salvation.”

Calvin originally studied law and if he was alive today, he almost certainly would've graduated with first-class honours.

He could've made motza, which is exactly what his father wanted for him.

Why did this intellectual giant give that up?

Becoming a Christian scholar would've been bad enough, but many people would think that being a preacher was beneath him, a waste of his great gifts.

Although he was bullied into it to start with, Calvin came to see preaching as an important part of his ministry.

He invested a lot of time and energy into preaching.

It's his sermons, as much as his other writings, that continue to affect people today.

Outline

It's been a while, but we're returning to the book of 2 Timothy this morning.

We're going to finish it off over the next couple of weeks before we start our Christmas series early next month.

The book of 2 Timothy is all about being entrusted with the gospel.

You might remember that Paul is coming to the end of his ministry.

He wrote this letter to his ministry apprentice – Timothy – because he knew that his card was marked, his days were numbered.

Stuck in gaol – chained, shamed and abandoned – it's clear that he didn't expect to ever get out.

And so it was time to pass the gospel baton on to a younger man who'd continue on the ministry.

The whole letter's been building up to this point.

Timothy shouldn't be ashamed to the gospel.

He needs to remain faithful to the gospel message, sticking to the truth that was passed down to him.

And now we arrive at the bit where Timmo receives his final commission from Paul at the beginning of chapter four.

This's a chapter that's all about what Timothy must do.

We find five commands in the first two verses.

We're going to look at these verses through five questions: who, why, what, when and how.

The Who: God's commission

Our first question is the who?

Not the English rock band from the '60s – who is giving Timothy this commission?

As a church we've spent a fair amount of time in this letter, which means we already know that it was written from the Apostle Paul to his son in the faith, Timothy.

When the older man commissions the younger man for ministry though, it's just as clear that the commission doesn't just come from Paul.

In the Ancient Greek culture, witnesses were often called at instalment ceremonies.

These witnesses were there to verify and endorse what was being said and done.

Paul pulls out the big guns on this occasion.

The witnesses for Timothy's commissioning are none other than God the Father and God the Son, verse 1.

What he's saying is serious.

This isn't just something that Paul's asking Timothy to do – it's a God-given commission.

It's not a suggestion, it's an obligation.

As we go about our week, we hear all kinds of different voices telling us what we should be doing.

Everyone has an agenda for our lives, their own take on how we should be spending our time.

From "Don't leave your clothes on the bedroom floor" from the people we live with to, "Could you just quickly do something for me?" from the people we work with.

There are all sorts of demands on our time and energy.

And unfortunately, it's the squeaky wheel that gets the oil.

It's the voices that we hear most frequently and loudest that we pay the most attention to.

Tim can't see God, but can see other people.

And we know from the letter so far that he's experiencing people putting all kinds of pressures and demands on him.

Paul knows just how easy it's going to be for him to listen to those voices and forget about what God has said.

Yet it's God's voice that he needs to hear most of all.

The most important thing he can do is what God has told him to do.

And it's no different for most of us, is it? We feel the same pressure.

It's easy for us to lose connection with the Lord because he isn't right there in front of us.

Other voices get our attention.

But as Bette Midler famously sang, "God is watching us, from a distance."

He's always present, with us, even though we don't see him.

Only we don't listen.

The reality for many of us is that we're not hearing from the Lord on a daily basis.

We might get a boost on Sunday morning and Wednesday night, but often God seems very distant.

And so we forget.

The result is that His voice becomes weak and unclear.

The consequence is that God's commission to us as disciples gets pushed to the side when we have so many competing priorities.

Having time in the day to listen to God speak as we read the Bible and pray doesn't happen without a fight.

We need to be intentional though, otherwise we forget what God has said to us.

Timothy needs to remember that his commission comes from God himself.

The Why: The Urgency of the Mission

The second question is: why?

We still haven't got to what it is that Timothy needs to do.

Paul mixes it up a bit.

Instead of giving a command and then explaining the reason for it, he explains the reason first.

The reason is that Timothy is being sent on an urgent mission.

There is a day coming when Jesus will come back.

Just like his disciples saw him ascend into heaven, one day the whole world will see him return.

And when he does, he will establish his kingdom forever.

We are waiting for the day when Jesus will come back and his will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

We don't know when that will be.

We don't know the time or the hour of his return.

Jesus' disciples tried to pump him for that info before he was lifted up to heaven.

But Jesus told them that they didn't need to know that answer to that:

Acts 1:7 (NIV11) ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

It could be in a 1000 years' time. It could be next week. It could even be this afternoon.

We don't know.

What the New Testament does repeatedly tell us though, is that the important thing is to be ready.

Because when Jesus comes back, he will judge both the living and the dead.

In John 5, Jesus says that it's not the Father, but himself who will judge people:

John 5:22 (NIV11) ²² Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,

Everyone will be judged by king Jesus.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV11) ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

This means that Timothy's ministry is going to come under scrutiny.

He'll have to account to Jesus for how faithful he was.

We will all have to give an account to Jesus for how we used the time that he's given us.

When Timmo gets to heaven, what's he going to say to Jesus?

What will define him being faithful and successful in his ministry?

Is he going to rely on the fact that he ministered thousands of people week in, week out?

Should he trust in the fact that he ran a very successful building campaign?

Should he rely on the fact that he managed to get massive home group participation.

As we'll see in a few moments, none of those are the things that Jesus wants his people to be measuring their success by.

At the same time, there's an urgency to ministry because time is short for the people he's ministering to.

Without a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they are headed for eternal damnation.

Unless they trust in him, they will be separated from God forever.

Because there is nothing we can do to make ourselves right with God.

We can never meet God's perfect standard on our own.

Which is why we are so thankful for God's grace.

Grace is when someone doesn't give you what you deserve and instead gives you something better, that you don't deserve.

Grace can't be earned. It's a free gift.

Jesus died so that our sin can be forgiven and we can return to God.

The only way to be right with God is to repent of your sin and trust in him.

That's our only hope.

People matter. Their lives are at stake.

It's easy to just go through the motions and forget that sense of urgency.

We're not playing a game.

The gospel really is life or death.

So, there's an urgency to share with people before it's too late.

That's the motivation behind Timothy's commission.

Do we need to be sensitive to people as we minister to them? Yes.

Do we need to be winsome in the way we share the gospel. You bet.

We need to be careful that the messenger isn't turning people away from the message. Absolutely.

At the same time, it's too easy to let these concerns stop us from speaking of Christ.

And we get caught up in life, don't we?

Sometimes it feels like it takes all our energy and focus to put one foot in front of the other.

Jesus hasn't come back in the last 2000 years.

We might know he's coming back, but we don't really think he's likely to.

It's all too easy to live like he isn't coming back.

They say that familiarity breeds contempt.

It can also breed complacency and indifference, which is often much worse because we're not even aware of it creeping up on us.

The gospel is something we'll get to one day, we think.

But one day might be too late.

Here's the "why": there's an urgency to the mission that Timothy's been given because people's lives are at stake.

Their eternal destiny is in the balance.

The What: Preach the Word

With our third point, we finally get to the point of this sentence.

What's the big, take-home point, the cash value?

What is it that Timothy needs to do?

There it is at the start of verse 2: Preach the word.

"Preach the Word" and all of God's people nodded their heads vigorously... at least on the inside.

"Preach the word," it sounds like a pretty good bit of Christian jargon.

But what does it mean?

Preaching is more than just teaching.

Teaching is an important part of preaching, but that's not all it is.

Preaching means proclaiming something.

It's like the town crier standing in the middle of the marketplace shouting out at the top of his lungs so that everyone can hear.

What's Timmo to preach?

When Timothy preaches, he's meant to preach the Word.

It's interesting that Paul doesn't just say "preach the Scriptures".

He talks about the Scriptures in 3:16.

I think he deliberately doesn't do that here.

The written word is where we have to start.

In fact, it's the basis of what we do.

In the words of Calvin,

"[T]he preacher's primary task was to expound Holy Scripture, which is, so to say, the voice of God himself."

Preaching the word means more than just teaching the Old Testament Scriptures though.

I don't mean to suggest that we don't find the Old Testament pointing to Jesus.

But it's more than just the Old Testament

To understand what Paul means by the word, we need to look at how Paul uses the word "word" in other places in the letter.

He talks about God's word (2:9) and the word of truth (2:15).

Perhaps most importantly, the "word" is the pattern of sound teaching in 1:13.

That's what the "word" is – sound teaching.

Sound teaching is compared to the words – or teachings – of Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:17).

Alexander the metalworker opposed Paul's words (4:15).

Preaching the word means preaching the whole gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's the whole package of apostolic preaching that's been passed down to Timothy.

Everything that Paul has taught and trained him in.

It's the good deposit – the sound teaching from chapter 1:13-14.

It's about preaching Christ to people both inside and outside the church.

That means that preaching isn't about the preacher.

When we preach the word, we don't get to invent the message.

We're not free to make up whatever we want.

We pass on what's been passed onto us as we speak what God has spoken.

Proclaiming the good news – a message people need to hear.

You mightn't realise what a relief that is for someone like me.

I'm not that clever or funny or wise enough to be able to make things up for myself.

So, it's good it doesn't depend on how clever my stories are or how good I sound.

Preaching isn't about coming up with little pithy sayings that you can tweet, or a study of philosophy, or detailed study of culture even.

Preaching the Word puts the focus on Jesus and what he's done.

You can use the Bible and not preach the word.

The way to do that is by not preaching the Bible in context.

People can use the Bible to justify just about anything.

You can only do that if you start to take things out of context or importing a context that doesn't actually exist.

Which is why we need to be careful of twisting what the Bible says, even when we're not meaning to.

And it's why we work through the Bible, rather than just looking at verses out of context.

Preaching the word is also more than just explaining the Bible.

You hear people say that sometimes, don't you?

I'm guilty of saying something like, "So and so will come up and explain the Bible."

Preaching is about more than just passing on new information.

I heard someone once teach about preaching that he was always looking for a new angle on things – something new to teach people.

That alone isn't preaching.

It's bringing the word to life.

I like what Luther has to say about preaching.

“Because heresies threatened the living apostolic message, it had to be recorded in a book to protect it from falsification. Preaching reverses this process of conservation again, allowing the Scriptures of the past to become the tidings of the present . . . The Gospel has been committed to lifeless paper; fresh words can transform it into glad tidings again.

Perhaps we should talk about someone opening up the Bible for us, not just explaining it.

Preaching is applying the gospel to our lives.

Showing how it matters and how it changes the way we live.

And that has to start with the preacher’s life first.

It’s critically important that I apply God’s word to myself before I preach it to you.

Preaching can like formally teaching the Bible up the front when we gather for worship, like I’m doing now.

But preaching happens in heaps more occasions than that too.

You’re don’t get out of this one just because you’re not up the front on a Sunday morning.

Preaching can be on the street corner, sharing with anyone and everyone who walks by.

You can proclaim the gospel wherever your frontline is.

It can be around the kitchen table as you share Christ with your family or friends.

Preaching can happen over coffee in a café.

The important thing is that we proclaim the word of Christ.

The When: Always

When must Timothy preach? The answer to this fourth question is: all the time.

He doesn’t need to be a motor mouth who’d talk under wet concrete with a mouth full of marbles.

However, he always needs to be ready to preach the gospel.

Like a good scout, be prepared.

Paul tells Timothy to be ready to preach the word in season and out of season.

Or more literally, at good times and at bad times.

It’s hard to know exactly what Paul meant by this.

I suspect that he might have both options in mind.

On the one hand, he could be talking about how much the people he's talking to are willing to listen.

There are times when preaching is popular and other times when it's deeply unpopular.

There'll be times when people want to hear.

And there'll be times when they don't want to hear.

We know from the letter so far that trouble and persecution were part of Paul's ministry experience.

And Timothy should expect exactly the same thing.

So, it shouldn't surprise him that there are times when people don't want to listen.

It doesn't matter.

Timothy needs to preach regardless.

He needs to share the gospel even when he has an audience that's against him.

On the other hand, he could be talking about preaching when Timothy just doesn't feel like it.

There are times when preaching is just plain inconvenient.

Sometimes though, it's when you least feel like it, that it's the best time to preach the word.

We know some missionaries that were on holidays in another part of the country they were ministering in.

They were really looking for a good break after a tough season of ministry.

So they went for a holiday, meeting their extended family in a very popular tourist area of that country.

As Aussies, the locals were very surprised when they heard them speaking the local language.

And it meant that a whole help of opportunities opened up.

At the time, it probably felt like the last thing that they wanted.

But they faithfully responded to the requests and the Lord blessed their efforts.

I was caught out this week too.

Usually, when you tell people that you're a pastor, you watch their eyes glaze over.

I was talking to someone and I was waiting for "the look" and that honestly would've suited me fine because I really just wanted some mind-numbing nothing talk.

On this occasion though – and it really shouldn't, but it surprised – the person wanted to ask more.

I wasn't really ready for it!

We can't always pick the times that we're going to have to talk about Jesus.

It's good to be intentional about trying to talk to people about Jesus.

But often, you end up having the conversation about the Lord at the times that you least expect.

Whether the timing is good or bad. Convenient or inconvenient

So, you need to be prepared.

Can you explain the gospel in 30 seconds, if that's all you've got?

If you have a five minute conversation, what would you say to someone?

Are you able to tell your story of why you're a Christian, your testimony?

Stories are powerful.

The research shows us that younger generations are interested in what works, more than they're interested in what's true.

How are you prepared to give a reason for the hope you have, as 1 Peter 3:15 tells us?

That's what being ready in season and out of season means.

We're in a spiritual battle and you don't prepare for a battle at the last minute.

When does Timothy need to be preach? Always.

The How: Preaching for Life Change

Finally, there are three things that Timothy needs to do in his preaching.

Three commands about how to preach.

Preach for life change.

When I was talking about the difference between preaching and teaching earlier, it might've sounded like preaching is completely different from teaching.

Some people have understood that preaching shouldn't have any learning component to it.

And so they've thrown out the proverbial baby with the bathwater.

Sadly, it's not unheard of for preaching to be devoid of any content and dumbed down to the point of being nothing more than just Christian clichés.

At the other end of the spectrum – and this is much more likely to be a problem in a church like ours – is for preaching to be all about content.

As if knowing stuff is all that's important.

Have the right doctrine and everything will be set.

As long as you believe the right things, then everything will be okay.

No, as we see here, preaching is about life-change.

The whole point of preaching the word is so that people's lives will be changed.

So that we'll find new life in Jesus and become more like him.

That means that preaching will sometimes be challenging.

Lots of people want to come to church to make them feel better.

To get a pat on the back and a pick-me up at the start of a new week.

That's not altogether bad, yet that's not the first two things on the list of commands that Paul gives about preaching.

The first thing Timothy's to do is rebuke people in preaching.

Preaching should encourage us to think differently.

It's his job to help people realise that they're sinners.

Unless you correctly identify the problem, you won't find the right solution.

The second thing is correcting.

This is about actually changing behaviour.

What we believe influences what we do, so you need to be convinced that you're in error first.

But it's not enough to just have better beliefs.

Someone who's in sin doesn't just need to know that they're sinning.

In the power of the Spirit, they need to stop sinning.

The preacher's job isn't to get a kick out of telling people what to do.

No, he can't be a bully.

Paul has already told the church in Ephesus:

Ephesians 4:15 (NIV11) ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

At the same time, you can't back away from saying the hard stuff.

However, a very important part of the preacher's job is also to encourage, to build people up in Christ.

Especially those who have doubts and fears.

This isn't just about building up people's self-esteem, but offering the lasting hope that we have in Jesus.

To point to the Saviour who forgives our sins and gives us life.

I mustn't just leave you just with the message that you're a sinner.

A preacher hasn't done his job, I haven't done my job, if I simply leave you convicted of your sin.

You also need to clearly see Jesus, the answer, the one who will forgive your sins and give you a fresh start.

You need to see the amazing glory of what Christ has done on the cross.

It all sounds kind of straightforward and easy, doesn't it?

Yet I think it's a warning from Paul that this needs to be done with patience.

That might sound like a contradiction to the urgency we talked about before, but it's not at all.

It's easy to try and manipulate people into a decision.

We need to wait for conviction from the Holy Spirit which might not happen when we want.

The word can also be translated as endurance.

The idea is that you don't give up just because it's difficult.

Preaching the word will take persistence.

Much more easily said than done!

But the goal is life change.

Conclusion

At the heart of what it means to be entrusted with the gospel is to be someone who preaches the word.

Proclaiming Christ to all with urgency to everyone.

Being ready in season and out of season.

And waiting expectantly to see God change people's lives.

That's the God-given commission to those who've been entrusted with the gospel.

Preaching the Gospel

2 Timothy 4:1-2

11 November 2018 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Idea: Preach the word.

Big Question: Why does God want preaching to be an important part of Timothy's ministry?

Discussion Questions

1. Why does it matter that Paul gives this commission to Timothy "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus"?
2. What stops us from living as if Jesus could really come back at any time?
3. What is the "word" that Timothy must preach?
4. Are you ready and prepared to share "out of season"?
 - a. Why don't we like practicing sharing our faith?
 - b. Can you share the gospel in 30 seconds?
 - c. What points would you want to explain if you had 5 minutes to explain why you're a Christian?
 - d. Can you explain how Jesus has been at work in your life?
5. What does it mean to correct and rebuke?
6. Why is Timothy going to need patience?