

PREACH THE WORD

2 Timothy 4:1-8

INTRODUCTION

Think with me for a few minutes this morning, whether you want to or not, about the things that most fear you. It's very common, in fact quite normal for being human, to have at least one thing that fears you to a greater degree than something else. Sometimes our fears are justified; other times they're just weird!

You may have a disproportionate fear of darkness - whenever the lights go out, your heart begins to race and you quickly move to find a flashlight! You likely have a night light in every room of your home that immediately turns on when the light is turned off. You may have a fear of flying. John Madden, who recently died, was an ESPN football analyst for several decades. He would travel all across the country to announce games, but he never flew by airplane! He always traveled by van! He only ever flew one time and he had a major nervous breakdown because of it. He vowed never to fly again. Related to this is a fear of tight spaces. For those who grew up in a youth ministry, do you remember sitting in the back row of a 15 passenger van? For some people, they just can't do it! I was in one of those vans in high school one time when a kid in the backseat threw up! It quickly led to a chain reaction with 2 other people throwing up before we could get off the highway!

It's only appropriate that I share with you my one disproportionate fear: Melissophobia. No, that's not a fear of people with the name Melissa. It's a fear of bees! I'm terrified of bees, wasps, and hornets! It was one of the few reasons I wasn't excited about moving to FL. Anytime I see a bee or wasp, I take off running! One time, there was a wasp in my car. Thankfully no one was on the other side of the road because I was quickly over there!

Everyone has something they are afraid of. You can see from this list I put up on the screen right now the top fears of humankind. These results are based on findings from a worldwide study: Heights, flying, claustrophobia,

zombies, drowning, bugs! But notice what the first one is: *Public speaking*. ***Of all the studies I looked at this past week, they all had social phobia as the top fear.*** In fact, up to 12% of Americans suffer from social anxiety. This covers a broad range of situations in which people are afraid to interact with others due to a fear of judgment. People are afraid they won't find the words to say, say something stupid or be laughed at.

This is an especially relevant concern when we consider the charge we receive in our passage for today. ***The main thrust of our passage that everything leads up to and to which everything falls back on is simply this: PREACH THE WORD.*** The Greek word, κηρύσσω, means "to proclaim, to publish, to publicly herald." In New Testament times the herald would be an imperial messenger who would go through the streets of a city to announce new laws or upcoming special events, such as the arrival of the emperor. The word does not only refer to a traditional sense of preaching the Good News from a pulpit. It can be boiled down to a simple public sharing of the Gospel, even if it were with just one other person.

Yet this is precisely where some of us, maybe most of us, would freeze up! There is a natural fear associated with sharing the Gospel with others. We don't deny that it's important - we know it's the primary way people come to the faith. But we can be quick to put the responsibility on other more gifted, better trained, more experienced speakers. You might say you don't have a gift of teaching and you wouldn't know what to say, so it's simpler to not face one of the greatest of your fears.

According to a recent study by LifeWay, they found that 80% of those who attend church at least once or twice a month believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith. Yet despite this conviction, 61% have not told another person about how to become a Christian in six months.

And according to a different study performed by the Jesus Film Project, they found that the number one reason why Christians are not sharing their faith is "fear." (The second reason, following somewhat closely behind, is "lack of opportunity.")

What does all this mean for the future of Christianity? The stark reality is that less and less unbelievers are entering the church doors on a Sunday morning looking for answers. ***If they are not coming into the church, the only way we can reach them is outside of the church!*** This provides the foundational principle of our series: ***We must train our disciples to take the Gospel out to the lost.***

My desire for this morning is to look at this text and see why we can't settle to camp out in fear and never move out in confidence and conviction to share the Gospel. There's more at stake here than just the potential criticism or judgment we receive. ***So in our text we will see four simple ways we must share the Gospel.*** Connected to each way is a reason. The reason provides the antidote for the fear we might have.

How must we share the Gospel? ***We must share the Gospel urgently, because Christ is coming back soon.*** Notice in the opening verse that what is given is not a suggestion, but a charge. It's given to Timothy as a leader of the church and it's given to us as ambassadors of the Gospel. ***The charge is to preach the Word.***

What is the Word? Is it your personal wisdom, is it just your testimony, is it a Bible verse that made you feel good that morning. ***No, the Word is the totality of the Good News as delivered in the Holy Scriptures!*** There is no higher authority! And Paul has just given his reason why the Word is exalted the way it is: In v.16 he said that ***"All Scripture is breathed out (inspired) by God and is therefore profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."*** ***When you read Scripture, it is the same as having God Himself in the room verbally speaking those same words to you.*** This confirms its complete truth, its trustworthiness, its sufficiency, and its value in the life of others. This is why Paul comes with such a strong word as a "charge" for us to preach it.

But notice too he gives some qualifiers for why we are to preach it. First, we see that our sharing the Gospel is qualified by the current presence of

God the Father and Jesus Christ. We should share the Good News because the founder of that Good News is always watching us and is always with us.

But more than the current presence of Jesus, Paul qualifies it with the coming return of Jesus. Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. He will come to separate the wheat from the tares. Right now everyone is mixed together. We cannot truly tell who is a believer and who is not. But when Christ returns, he will unveil the true condition of every person, resulting in a final destination, one way or the other, for all people.

This is going to happen, as our text says, at His appearing. The Greek word used here is ἐπιφάνεια. It literally means “a shining forth.” It was used at the time of the Roman Empire to refer to a Roman emperor’s ascension to the throne - his ἐπιφάνεια, his shining forth, his revelation to all present that he is indeed the King. → ***Jesus will soon do the same. He will shine forth and be revealed to all people. All will know Him as not just Jesus, but KING JESUS.*** The fulfillment of Philippians 2 will take place, when Jesus’ highly exalted position will be manifested to all flesh. ***And every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

It will be then that He will set up His kingdom on earth. From there His people who received Him by faith on earth, will now rule with Him over the renewed earth, both during the 1,000 year reign of Christ, and into the eternal state that follows.

Oh, Christian, do you believe that this is going to happen? Do you believe that Jesus is coming back soon? ***How does His coming connect to your current living?*** His return is imminent! ***Do you believe His imminence should change your level of confidence?*** In Paul’s letter to the Thessalonian church about the coming Day of the Lord, he says this in 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8 - ***“4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep,***

as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

The application of this passage, along with the main passage for today, ***is that Christ's imminent return should stimulate us to quick obedience.*** It should create a fervency and an urgency to share Christ with anyone and everyone dropped along our path.

I'm sure most of you are familiar with the Great Chicago fire of 1871. It lasted from around 9pm on Sunday night, October 8th until early Tuesday, October 10th. It destroyed roughly 3.3 square miles of downtown Chicago, left over 100,000 homeless, and killed approximately 300 people.

D. L. Moody held his usual service that Sunday evening when the fire broke out. At the close of the service, he asked his congregation to evaluate their relationship to Christ and to return the following week to make a decision. This, he thought, would give them time to really think things over and result in a lasting decision. He wanted to make sure that they were sure about accepting Jesus Christ, not wanting to pressure them into making a decision they wouldn't stick with. Sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

While they were singing the closing hymn, it was drowned out by the sound of fire trucks and church bells. To his dying day, Moody regretted delaying their decision to the following Sunday.

It would be a Sunday that many in that meeting hall would not live to see. Within a matter of hours, many of those who sat under Moody's words were dead. There is no way of knowing how many that night could have gotten their hearts made right with God had an altar call been given, and there is no way of knowing how many that sat under Moody's voice that night died in the fire and were not ready to meet God.

Moody would never be the same after that incident. He became very ill because of the guilt he carried. As a dedicated soul winner, D.L. Moody took such missed opportunities very, very seriously. He recalled later, *“I have never since dared to give an audience a week to think over their salvation. If they were lost they might rise up in judgment against me! I have never seen that congregation since. I will never meet those people until I meet them in another world. But I want to tell you of one lesson that I learned that night which I have never forgotten, and that is, when I preach, I press Christ upon the people then and there and try to bring them to a decision on the spot. I would rather have my right hand cut off than to give an audience a week to decide what to do with Jesus.”*

Church, we never know when people might die or when Christ will return. What people come to mind that you would bear guilt over if you never got another chance to share the Gospel? We want to share the Gospel urgently because Christ is coming back soon.

We also want to share the Gospel continually, because Christ is always working. Following Paul’s strong charge to preach the Word, he couples it with a need for readiness: *“Be ready in season and out of season.”* This is relieving; there are only two times we need to be ready to share the Gospel: In season and out of season!

The root of the word “ready” often connotes suddenness. It’s used in Luke 2:9 when an angel *suddenly* appeared to the angel keeping watch over their flocks by night. It’s used in Acts 12:7 when an angel *suddenly* appeared to Peter while in prison. It’s even used in Luke 20:1 to convey an unexpected forceful confrontation. Here it refers to the chief priests, scribes, and elders suddenly cornering Jesus while He taught in the synagogue, saying, *“Tell us by what authority you say and do these things?”*

Isn’t it true that opportunities to speak for Christ often suddenly appear when we least expect them? It wasn’t long ago that one of my neighbors began sharing their recent setbacks and disappointments. I

wasn't trying to push the conversation toward the Gospel, yet out of nowhere the opportunity was before me! It was just four days ago as we were rushing to get into the car that our next door neighbor walked over to begin talking with Emma. She had something troubling she needed to share that ended with her saying that she had no peace in her life!

How regular it is that open doors come when we're not in a position to freely open them. Have you experienced this before? ***I don't think this is by chance, but I think it is orchestrated by the Evil One.***

What do we know about Satan's plan of attack? We know from 1 Peter 5:8 that he's like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Our job is to resist him, firm in our faith. We also know that after he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he departed from Jesus ***until an opportune time***. ***This is key: It teaches us that Satan operates according to opportune times.*** He knows when a need for Gospel hope and promise weighs heavy on people's hearts. Therefore, he sets up obstacles in the hearts and paths of nearby Christ-followers that prevent them from sharing with those in need. ***We must be aware of Satan's subtle tactics: He sets up his opportunity for obstacles right when we have opportunity for Christ.***

This therefore means that our greatest opportunities for Gospel fruitfulness could be on the days when we feel most attacked, when we feel most self-centered, when we feel most disappointed.

So, even on our worst days, the days that feel more "out of season," are days when Christ could most use us. Why? I've shared the negative work of Satan, but let's remember the positive work of Christ. ***Even as Satan is working, Jesus is also always working! And Jesus' good work can always usurp the work of the evil one!*** 1 John 3:8 declares, ***"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."***

You never go into a hard conversation by yourself. You never operate according to your own skill at the work. ***Jesus goes with you, and His***

intention is always to work with you to destroy Satan's work against you. Satan's work is stopped where God's work is accepted.

You can also know that wherever you bring the Word of God, you are welcoming the work of God. God always works through His Word. Isaiah 55:11 teaches us that ***God's Word always accomplishes that which He purposes and it always succeeds in the thing for which it was sent.***

No matter the season of our soul or the circumstances of our day, we can step into a good work with the Word of God and know for certain that Christ will work, too!

It's important that we share the Gospel continually, but we must also share the Gospel completely, because others are inclined to compromise. Notice v.2; it says, ***“reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”*** Another translation says, ***“with complete doctrine,”*** or with “completion instruction.” No one can come to faith in Christ apart from clear Gospel instruction. It's the work of God's Word in the heart and mind of a person that ultimately leads them to receive salvation. They must know their sinful condition, understand what Christ has offered, and comprehend how they are to respond. And this refers only to right-standing with Christ. We haven't even mentioned all the Bible tells us about Gospel-fueled right-living with Christ!

Paul says in Acts 20:27, after three years of ministry in Ephesus, ***“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”*** This doesn't mean we must literally teach every page and word of the Scriptures in order to be commended by God. ***But it does mean that we must faithfully teach the full message of the Bible!*** We can't leave necessary pieces out and we surely can't twist its meaning!

This passage speaks quite prophetically of our day. It says that a ***“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 the truth and wander off into myths.”***

We live in a time when people are intolerant of the unadulterated Word. Think with me of all the areas the Bible's truth is being attacked today: The origin of the universe, the identity and uniqueness of both male and female, the marriage relationship, the family unit, the authority of the Bible, the sufficiency of the Bible, the inerrancy of the Bible, the identity of Jesus, and the exclusivity of Christ. This is just to name a few.

Remember Paul's strong words to the Galatians for those who twist the Gospel? ***"If anyone is preaching to you a Gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."*** There is no room for alternative views.

Yet today many want their ears tickled by easy believism and selfism and positive thinking. ***They come to have their egos fed and their sins approved, not to have their hearts cleansed and their souls saved.*** They only want to feel good, not to be made good. Tragically, such myths serve to religiously insulate people from the true Gospel and drive them still further from the Lord. Their eyes are blinded by the god of this world so that they are kept from seeing the light of the Gospel in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is no new problem. Even in the OT the Jews wanted their ears tickled by false teaching. Jeremiah 5:30 says, ***"An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule according to their own direction; and my people love to have it so!"***

Why do people turn away from the truth? It's not that the Scriptures are easily twistable. ***The issue starts with a passion produced by their sinful nature.*** This passion then forces them to find an alternative interpretation that suits them. If there's anything COVID taught us, it's that you can find ample scientific backing for whatever you want to believe!

This temptation exists in all of us because we also have a sinful nature. We live in an age when emotional passion trumps empirical truth. ***If we're not careful, we can be persuaded to regard what we feel should be right above what the Bible declares to be right!*** We may not compromise

essential doctrines, but we may leave subtle room for secondary issues to be influenced by false teaching. This is why Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, *“Keep a close watch on yourself and on your teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”*

The call here is to vigilant and sober living, just as v.5 says: *“As for you, always be sober-minded.”* A sober person is level-headed, well-balanced, and in control of his or her faculties. By extension it includes the ideas of being stable, unwavering, steadfast. ***The person who is faithful to God refuses to be trendy or compromising, to be an ear-tickler and man-pleaser rather than a God-pleaser.*** The Gospel isn't compromised for our own benefit and we surely don't twist it to please others.

Finally, we must share the Gospel joyfully, because a reward awaits us in Heaven. Notice that Paul doesn't ignore the sacrifice that comes with being a faithful Christian worker. He shares some of his own testimony of sacrifice over the course of his life, starting with saying that he's already being poured out as a drink offering. This likely referred to the type of execution he expected to receive. Because Roman citizens couldn't be crucified, he knew he likely would be beheaded, literally pouring out his own blood for the Lord.

Yet he is not disappointed by this. He affirms that he's fought a good fight, he's finished the race, and he's kept the faith. Isn't that what you want to say at the conclusion of your life. Nobody wants to look back on their life and be full of regret. ***We see here that Paul looked back with satisfaction and he looked forward with great anticipatory joy.*** He knew that what awaited him in Heaven was a crown of righteousness! He specifies that this crown is *“laid up,”* meaning it's being safely stored and carefully guarded. It cannot be taken away!

There are only two other places where a specific heavenly reward of a crown is mentioned. One is in James 1:12 - *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive*

the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” The other is in 1 Corinthians 9:24, where Paul talks about the way we should be running this race of life: *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”*

This verse shows the contrast between the two lives you can live. ***You can be sold out for earthly gain or sold out for heavenly gain. You can be committed to getting an earthly crown or a heavenly crown.*** The earthly one only lasts during this age, but the heavenly one lasts forever! We cannot know for certain if this crown is literal or figurative. The Bible often speaks of literal rewards for good deeds done with sincere motives. So there’s no clear reason for us to conclude this is figurative.

The truth is that those who stand for Christ in this lifetime know that it’s going to feel like a sacrifice. 2 Timothy 3:12 says that *all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*. As Paul himself describes it here, it’s going to feel like a fight, *but it’s a good fight*. It’s a worthwhile fight. It is a fight that pays dividends not in this lifetime but in the time to come. This is because waiting for you in Heaven in a glorious crown of righteousness that Christ Himself will place upon your head! This is a reason to endure. This is a reason to keep fighting the good fight!

CONCLUSION

And in case we attempt to make this about ourselves and neglect the one who went before us, let’s conclude by remembering the One who made this all possible. ***Why is it that we can receive a crown of righteousness? Because Jesus first needed to receive the crown of thorns.*** Before we ever came delivering Good News to others, Jesus came down from Heaven with the Good News of life forever with Him. Yet our sin blinded us. We didn’t accept His message of life, so we rewarded Him with death.

Yet as Jesus was nailed to that cross, suffering the anguish of physical torture and spiritual separation from His Father, ***He did not dwell on His***

circumstances. Rather, He looked forward with joy to the reward!
Hebrews 12:2 says *that for the joy set before Him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Jesus joyfully endured so that we might one day joyfully reunite with Him in Heaven!*

We talked at the beginning about fear. We all have various fears that hold us back. A fear most of us wrestle with is sharing the Gospel with others. We are convinced persecution in some form will be associated with it. Whether it makes us look bad or causes others to actually do bad things to us, we settle rather for the easier path of not even attempting it.

But we just learned that Christ has pathed a new path for the Christian! This new path is a way of sacrifice that results in overwhelming glory! It asks us to die to ourselves today so that we might truly live forever. ***In fact, this hope of eternal well-being is what enables us to joyfully face our fears before us today.***

We can have that loving, yet difficult conversation with our neighbor; we can again bring the Gospel to our coworker, even after he's shrugged it off three times before; we can gently ask our family members about their true hope in life and death, knowing that they likely will blast us for trying to share it. We can do all these good things in our good fight because we look ahead, like Jesus, to a good reward. ***This perspective causes our fear to retreat and our joy to lead us forward. How do you conquer fear? You conquer it with joy.*** May your joy in Christ lead you always toward a good fight for Christ. And may God produce the fruit He intends.

CLOSING PRAYER