

Marks of the Faithful Preacher, Part 3

2 Timothy 4:3-4

55-22

Now we come to that most wonderful and sacred time of worship when we open God's Word and listen to Him speak to us. Second Timothy is our chapter, is our book, chapter 4 our chapter, 2 Timothy chapter 4, we're looking at verses 1 to 5. We have spent two weeks in these five verses, we shall spend this week and yet one more week. The richness of this truth has captured my heart and I trust it's captured your heart as well.

As you know at Grace Community Church this month is commitment month and it's fitting that we would spend it studying this portion of Scripture, for in these five verses Paul is calling young Timothy to complete commitment to the ministry given him by his Lord. And here in chapter 4 for one final time in this last chapter of Paul's last letter, he compels Timothy to the highest level of self-sacrificing duty in the cause of Jesus Christ. This is the last call to excellence in ministry. In a sense, these five verses sum up everything that Paul has already demanded of Timothy.

As I looked back and reread 1 and 2 Timothy this week and chronicled in my mind everything that Paul expected out of Timothy, I was quite amazed at the breadth of responsibility he was given. Let me just rehearse for you briefly the standard of ministry that Paul set for Timothy in these two epistles. Paul instructed Timothy that he must correct those teaching false doctrine and call them to a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. He instructed Timothy that he must fight for divine truth and for God's purposes keeping his own faith and a good conscience. He instructed Timothy that he must pray for the lost and lead the men of the church to do the same, that he must call the women to fulfill their God-given role of submission and to raise up godly children setting an example of faith, love and sanctity with self-restraint.

He instructed Timothy that he must carefully select spiritual leaders for the church on the basis of their godliness and virtue. That he must point out error and those who taught it. That he must be constantly being nourished up himself on the words of the Scripture and its sound teaching, avoiding all myths and false doctrines. He must discipline himself for the purpose of godliness. He must boldly command as he teaches the truth of God's Word. He must be a model and an example of spiritual virtue that all can follow. He must faithfully read, explain and apply the Scriptures publicly. He must be progressing toward Christ-likeness in his own life. He must be gracious and gentle in confronting the sin of his people. He is to give special consideration and care to those who are widows. He must honor faithful pastors who work hard and never receive an accusation against any of them unless it is substantiated by two or three witnesses. He must choose church leaders with great care, seeing to it that they are both mature and proven. He must take care of his physical condition so he is strong to serve. He must flee the love of money and pursue righteousness, godliness and faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

He must fight for the faith against all enemies and all attacks. He must keep all the Lord's

commandments. He must guard the Word of God as a sacred trust and a treasure. He must keep the gift of God in him fresh and useful. He must not be timid but powerful. He must never be ashamed of Christ or anyone who serves Christ. He must hold tightly to the truth and guard it. He must be strong in character. He must reproduce himself in faithful men. He must suffer difficulty and persecution for the sake of Christ willingly. He must keep his eyes on Christ at all times.

He must lead with authority. He must interpret and apply the Scripture accurately. He is to avoid useless conversation that leads only to ungodliness. He is to be an instrument of honor, set apart from sin and useful to the Lord. He is to flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith and love. He is to refuse to be drawn into philosophical and theological wrangling. He must not be an arguer but kind, teachable, gentle, and patient even when he is wronged. And he must face dangerous times with a deep knowledge of the Word of God.

Quite a list, isn't it? That is the kind of charge that ought to be given to every young man who pursues the ministry. And I'll tell you, that takes a total commitment of life to fulfill. But what a privilege it is to have been given such a high calling. James Mason Brown was right when he said years ago, "The only true happiness comes from squandering ourselves for a great purpose...the only true happiness comes from squandering ourselves for a great purpose." And honestly, folks, the best of life belongs to those who give themselves up totally for a purpose. And the supreme purpose is the glory of God and the gospel of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So the best of life belongs to those who give themselves up for the glory of God and the gospel of Christ.

Approaching that, one needs a perspective. And it struck me that in all of this which Paul has said to Timothy the emphasis is on character...the emphasis is on commitment, not on success. Nothing is said about how many people are to be in his church. Nothing is said about how large his church is or how much money it takes in or how influential it is. Nothing is said about how the world is supposed to revere, esteem or accept him. In fact, there is no mention of success. That's never the issue. The issue here is not success, the issue is excellence. And if I might, I'd like to speak to the distinction between those two things, if I may, for a moment.

None of Paul's instruction to Timothy has anything to do with success. It all has to do with a commitment to personal excellence. It all has to do with Timothy being all that God wants him to be based upon his God-given potential. Frankly, some men seek success rather than excellence. At times all of us are tempted to seek success rather than excellence. In John Johnson's book entitled Christian Excellence, he suggests that success and excellence are competing ideals. In other words, he suggests that man's energies and man's creativity is devoted to the emphasis of one or the other of those two things. He is driven to be successful or he is driven to be excellent. Being successful does not necessarily mean you'll be excellent, and being excellent does not necessarily mean, in the world's eyes, you'll be successful.

Let me see if I can't help you to understand the difference. To define success we could say that success is attaining cultural goals which elevate one's importance in the culture. Did you get that? Success is attaining or achieving cultural goals which elevate one's importance in the culture. Status, and usually success brings four things...power, prestige, wealth and privilege. Power, you have a sphere of influence, of sphere of domination. Prestige, you are esteemed, you are honored, you are looked up to, you are admired, you are envied. Wealth, you make it. Privilege, you get to do what other people don't get to do. You have access, you are on the in. Success...success is attaining cultural goals which elevate one's importance in the culture.

Let me ask you a question. What does success have to do with character? Not much. I would venture to say the powerful prestigious wealth and privileged people in our culture are not necessarily people who have excellence of character. Success still though is the pursuit of most people.

Well what about excellence, what is it? Let me give you a definition. Excellence is the pursuit of quality in one's work and effort whether the culture recognizes it or not. Excellence is the pursuit of quality in one's work and effort whether the culture recognizes it or not. Success seeks satis...success seeks status, excellence seeks satisfaction, having done your best. Success is in relation to others in the culture. Excellence is in relation to your own potential. Success is being esteemed by people, excellence is being the best I can be. Success seeks to please men, excellence seeks to please God. Success offers a hoped-for goal, excellence offers a present standard. Success bases our worth on a comparison with others, excellence gauges our value by measuring us against our own potential. Success grants its rewards to a few, but is the dream of the multitudes. Excellence is available to all human beings but is accepted only by a few. Success focuses its attention on the external, becoming the taste maker for the insatiable appetites of the conspicuous consumer. But excellence beams the spotlight not on the external but on the internal spirit, becoming the quiet but pervasive conscience of the conscientious person who years for integrity. Success engenders fantasy and a compulsive groping for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Excellence brings us down to reality and a deep gratitude for the promise of joy when we do our best.

Success encourages expedience and compromise which prompts us to treat people as means to our end. Excellence cultivates principles and consistency which ensures that we'll treat all persons as intrinsically valuable, the apex of God's heavenly creation. Beloved, success pales in comparison to excellence. Excellence deals with character. Excellence deals with integrity. Excellence deals with being the best you can be. Success has no relation to any of those things necessarily. Success may be cheap. It's often discounted. You can take short cuts to get there. You can lie and cheat and steal and rob, but you will pay the full price for excellence. It's never discounted, never. It's never reduced in price. It will always cost you everything, always...always. But it's the most lasting rewarding ideal.

Listen to the words of David Neff(?), "Success is the key they hand you when they like you. It doesn't matter why. They just give you the key that unlocks the upscale condo, triggers the powerful purr of your new Mercedes. And accesses the executive washroom. Success is what they give you. Excellence is different. It's what's within you. It's what you do that stretches mind and muscle. They'll hand you success when your ratings are up, your sales soar, or when the eager masses plunk down their grubby bucks to buy your stuff, and they'll snatch your success away at daybreak. Success loves its one-night stands at the Ritz, but never expects to say 'I do.' Success is a day-tripper, success is a tease. Success will forget you...and then I love this line...excellence endures when the crowd moves on." Excellence endures when the crowd moves on.

What drives you spiritually? Success? Or excellence? Bernard, the old Medieval saint had a study desk and over the study desk he had these words, "Bernard, what are you here for?" He faced them every day. "Bernard, what are you here for?" Asking himself the deepest question, what is your *raison d'etre*, as the French say, what is your reason to be, are you pursuing success or excellence? In 1932 George Henderson of South Africa wrote, and I like this quote, "The desire to preach helpfully without making the necessary preparation for it is not true ambition, it is merely inflammation

of the wishbone." Listen, our society is full of people who have inflammation of the wishbone. They wish for a lot of stuff but they don't understand what it takes to make the necessary preparation to produce excellence. Many times we seek success rather than excellence. One is pride, the other is humility. One says I am content to be the best that I can be, the other says I'm not content until I'm better than you. That's success.

You look at it from a ministry viewpoint as Henderson also said, "Some young fellows have such a high estimate of their powers that they chafe at the restrictions which hedge them round, they feel that they were made for the universe instead of for the little village in which their ministry is exercised. Scripture, however, reminds us that a man's gift makes room for him, Proverbs 18:16, and nature teaches us that when God intends a creature to fly, he provides it with wings. If therefore we aspire to positions which we are unable, acceptably to occupy, we do but manifest our incompetence." Boy, that's profound.

If you pursue success at a level beyond your ability, you will only magnify your incompetence for everyone to see. How much better that you just be all you can be at the level God designed you to be?

The great Doctor Joseph Parker had an interesting sermon called "Clocks and Watches," he preached years ago. Quoting from that he told this story. "A little watch so delicately made was dissatisfied with its little sphere in a lady's pocket. It envied Big Ben, the great tower clock of London. And one day as it passed with her ladyship over Westminster Bridge, the little watch said, 'I wish I could be up there, I could then serve the multitude.' You shall have your opportunity, little watch. And thus dramatically the little watch was taken over to the tower and by a slender thread was pulled all the way to the top where it hung directly in front of Big Ben.

"When it reached the very top, its owner standing on the ground looked up and said, 'Where are you, little watch? I can't see you.'"

And then pausing in his dramatic style, Joseph Parker said, "Its elevation had become its annihilation."

You want to be exactly what God made you to be, but you want to be the best, that's excellence. Success may be your annihilation.

What Paul is saying to Timothy here is something along this line. He is not calling for Timothy to be successful, he's calling for Timothy to be excellent. There are eight elements required here in this text for excellence on the part of the preacher. Let's go back over the ones we've looked at just by mention.

First of all, he has already noted that an excellent preacher understands the seriousness of his commission, verse 1, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God, even Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by His appearing and His Kingdom." That is the seriousness of his commission. If you're going to be excellent in ministry, you have to realize you're going to be judged. You also have to realize that the one who is going to judge you is the one in whose presence you are now ministering. So your judge is present now in seeing everything you do. That's the seriousness of the commission. You are now functioning in your ministry in full view of the one who will pass

judgment on you. So, there must be an understanding of the seriousness of the commission.

Excellence in ministry demands that you understand the content of the commission, verse 2, "Preach the Word." The content for a faithful minister is clearly defined as the Word of God. Our task is to proclaim divine revelation, this holy book. We are to proclaim it.

Thirdly, the scope of his commission. He is to realize how far-reaching the commission to preach is. As to time, he is to be ready in season and out of season. As one writer said, there are only two times when you're allowed to preach...in season and out of season. That means at all times, in all places.

And then he talks about not only the time of ministry scope but the tone of it. It's to be negative...reprove, rebuke. Positive...exhort with patience and teaching. And so any excellent minister will understand the seriousness of his commission, the content of his commission, the scope of his commission. He is to preach. He is to preach all the time. He is to preach as the old creed said, "No sacrifice but Calvary, no priest but Christ, no confessional but the throne of grace, and no authority but the Word of God." His preaching is to be listened to, therefore it ought to be interesting. It is to be understood, therefore it should be clear. It is to be useful, therefore it should be practical. It is to be obeyed, therefore it should be biblical. The faithful preacher will have excellence in his preaching because he understands the seriousness, the content and the scope of his ministry.

That brings us to the fourth point that we'll look at this morning, the urgency of his commission. And this is a dramatic part of the text. As Paul has been calling Timothy to excellence in preaching and teaching in the first two verses, he now speaks to him about the opposition. There is a certain urgency in ministry because of what it says in verses 3 and 4, let's look at them. "For the time will come..." Stop at that point. That's a prophecy, that introduces a prophecy...the time will come. It's very much like chapter 3 verse 1, "Realize this, that in the last days dangerous times will come." It's very much like 1 Timothy 4:1, the Spirit explicitly says, "In the latter times some will depart or fall away from the faith." This is in a sense then the third prophecy to Timothy. The first one said, "Timothy, the time is going to come when people will depart from the faith." The second one, "Dangerous times are coming in the church." The third one, here it comes, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned aside to myths."

Herein, dear friends, is the urgency of the commission. We have to do it now because the time will come when people don't listen. The times come through all of church history, there have been those times in different nations at different eras when they did not hear the Word of God. The word "time" by the way is kairos, not chronos, not chronological time, but epochal time, the season, the era. It's the same word used in chapter 3 verse 1 where it says, "Dangerous times," it means seasons, eras, epochs, intervals. There will come in the future, Paul says to Timothy, those times and seasons when men will not listen. They will not hear.

You go back to Matthew chapter 10 and verse 16 as our Lord was warning His disciples, He said, "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, therefore be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves, beware of men for they will deliver you up to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will

speaking, it will be given you in that hour what you are to speak, for it is not you who speak but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child and children will rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved, but whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next, for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes." Perhaps we can gather from the general gist of that text the promise that they were going to have trouble...that troublesome times were coming, times when men not only would not listen but would persecute the messengers of God.

In John 15 and 16, it's the same thing. Jesus said if they hated Me, they'll hate you. The time will come when their hatred will turn to avid persecution. He begins the sixteenth chapter of John's gospel, "These things I have spoken to you that you may be kept from stumbling, they will make you outcasts from the synagogues, the hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God." So He warned His disciples, Paul warns his disciple Timothy, times and seasons will come when people will not listen to the truth. Therefore fearless preaching becomes all the more necessary in light of what is ahead of us. It's not going to be able to be done at all times, do it while you can. Preach while they listen. Preach while you have a responsive audience because the time will come when people will not tolerate the truth.

Times like this have come and you can chronicle them in church history, you can study them, times when the people turned their back on the truth of God. Notice what he says in verse 3, "The time will come when they will not endure sound teaching." The word "endure," anechomeans to hear, to support, to hold to. The best way to say it in English is to tolerate, they will not tolerate sound teaching. They don't want any part of sound teaching. They're not interested in sound teaching. That word "sound" there is an interesting word in the Greek, hugiainoses(?) is the form here. It's the word from which we get the English word hygienic. They don't want to hear clean teaching. They don't want to hear healthy teaching. They're not interested in that. They'll turn a deaf ear to that. In fact, in 1 Timothy 1:10 he said there are immoral men, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to healthy teaching. And where you have a society pervaded by people whose lives are contrary to healthy teaching, then you're going to have resistance to healthy teaching. You have a society filled with homosexuals and liars and perjurers and murderers and those who would overturn God's order for the sexes and feminists and all the rest of that stuff, where you have a society pervaded by that, you have resistance to the truth. No question.

Notice the word "they," please, in verse 3. "When they will not endure." The question here interpretively is to whom does they refer? Does it refer to the world outside? Well surely it does in part, but does it refer to the church? It must because those referred to as "they" are the ones to whom Timothy will preach and that no doubt will embrace the church. There would come a time when professing Christians would be included in the "they" like the church right there at Ephesus where Timothy was laboring. And they too would not be interested in hearing healthy teaching, that is the truth from God's Word. There will always be in the church a narrow gate, a narrow way, few there be that find it. There are many kinds of soil and many kinds of false conversions but not much good soil. There are many hard hearts. When God called Isaiah in chapter 6 and Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me." He said, "I have to tell you one thing, their eyes are blind, their ears are deaf, their hearts are fat, they won't listen." There's only a small remnant, He said, a tenth that will hear. People will not tolerate truth, they will not tolerate healthy teaching.

I look back on our country. I think there was a time in the United States of America, this great

country, when people honored God's Word, when they listened to sound teaching, when they listened to the truth of God, when they revered the minister of God. That's not true anymore. And it's not just the world that doesn't want to hear the truth, even the church doesn't want to hear the truth. Within the large framework of what is known as the church, Christendom is a small group of people who believe the truth and are willing to face the truth, hear the truth, the healthy teaching. And today the church is advocating rights for homosexuals, feminists doctrine overturning God's design for women and I was just reading this past week the excerpts from the Feminist Bible wherever it refers to God as Father, it's changed, it's changed into some kind of non-descript sexless term so that women aren't offended. It doesn't seem to bother anybody that you can't just change the Bible unless you strike a blow at God.

But they don't mind doing that. They don't want to hear the truth. They don't want to hear the truth. This society doesn't want to hear the truth of what God teaches about the role of a woman. This society doesn't want to hear the truth about what God teaches about homosexuality. And there are many in the church who don't want to hear it either. This society does not want to hear the truth about abortion and there are many in the church that don't want to hear it. Frankly, I'm convinced that most churches in this nation would not tolerate for two weeks strong biblical teaching that confronted their doctrinal error, refuted that error, confronted their sin, convicted them of sin and called them to obey the truth. I think they'd throw you out in two weeks...in most cases. They don't want to hear healthy teaching. Why? Because the society is so corrupt and perverse the church has become the world, it now owns that philosophy and, beloved, I am telling you, unless something dramatic changes in this country the pressure is going to come greater and greater and greater against anyone who speaks the truth...because not only does the society not want to hear it, even the church doesn't want to hear it and the church, much of the liberal church, the church that doesn't affirm biblical truth, is going to side with the world against what they see as the fringe of the church. I know in the last just few years, the attacks keep coming more rapidly against me and of course that's true of anyone who stands for healthy teaching in our society. And I get more than most because of the wide-profile of ministry through radio and tapes. But it wouldn't surprise me at all for me to be in hot water with all kinds of groups who don't want to hear sound teaching..which could lead to all kinds of interesting conflict. Believe me, people can be volatile about that.

Now what is they want to hear? Look at verse 3, "Well they will accumulate for themselves," that's a very interesting little thing, you can underline that..."for themselves." You see, they're in this for themselves. "They will accumulate or mass or pile up teachers in accordance to their own epithumia, lusts. Give us people who say what we want to hear." See, that's the issue.

Jeremiah directed himself at that in chapter 5. Let's digress a moment from 2 Timothy and note with me Jeremiah 5 and verse 31, actually verse 30. His language is graphic. "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land." He chooses some strong adjectives. "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land." What is it, Jeremiah, what is it? "The prophets prophesy falsely and the priests rule on their own authority...and here it is...and my people...what?...love it that way...they love it." They want somebody to say what they want to hear. They want the prophet to lie, to tell them what they want to hear. They want the priest to function on his own authority, not divine authority.

Ezekiel confronted it, graphic terms. Look at chapter 33 of Ezekiel. And chapter 33 verse 30 is such a poignant passage. "But as for you, son of man," God speaks to Ezekiel, "your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother saying, Come now, and hear what the message is which comes forth from the Lord." They

talk about you, Ezekiel. They stand by the wall and talk about you. They talk about you in the doorways of their houses. And they say to each other...let's go listen to what the Lord's saying through Ezekiel. Verse 31, "And they come to you as a people come and they sit before you as my people and hear your words...here it is...but they do not do them for they do the lustful desire expressed by their mouth and their heart goes after their gain and you, Ezekiel, verse 32, you're like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on instrument for they hear your words but they do not practice them. So when it comes to pass, as surely it will, then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst." They'll wake up too late. They'd listen to you out of fascination. You're like a sensual song from someone who has a beautiful voice, you're very entertaining, he must have had some oratorical capability. They want to accumulate teachers, however, who tell them what their lusts already dictate.

Now you can go back to 2 Timothy. They will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own lusts. Boy, that's true today. Churches are filled with people saying exactly what the congregation wants to hear, right? What do they want to hear? They're like those in Acts 17, "Tell us some new thing." They want what feeds their ego. They want what makes them feel good about themselves. "Give us something sensational, give us something entertaining, give us something ego-fulfilling, makes us feel better about ourselves, build up our personal satisfaction." And preachers who blast their lusts and who offend their sin, they reject. So they accumulate a mass of teachers who feed their lusts, which by the way are an insatiable desire and catering to that insatiability is folly of the worst order because it's absolutely unable to be satisfied. But that's the kind of teachers and preachers they want. And the preacher, get this, the preacher they least like to hear brings the message they most need to hear, right? Truth seldom gets a hearing...seldom gets a hearing.

That Bible scholar Vincent who did a monumental work on New Testament Word Studies said this, "If people desire a calf to worship, a ministerial calf maker is readily found." They're always there...always there.

Now their appetite has a terrible end...verse 4. It says, "And will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned aside to myths." First there's a deliberate refusal and then they become a victim of that refusal. The first verb is an active, the second is a passive. They themselves actively turn away their ears from the truth and then they are turned as victims toward myths. You can't live in a vacuum, that's the point. If you turn away from the truth, you become the victim of Satan who will turn you into errors. It's so common today, those who resent the truth. Beloved, do you understand how many people resent the truth and how many people even in the church resent the truth? If you preach the truth boldly and you preach the truth out of God's Word, they resent that, they don't want to hear that, they don't want anything to do with that. So they turn their ears from the truth and then by an outside force they become the victims of those who turn them to myths...those hypocritical lie speakers who are the agents of Satan himself. That verb "to be turned aside" is to twist or dislocate a limb, their minds are dislocated, out of joint, non-functioning. They have a dislocated mind and their believing delusions and muthos, myths, fables, not the truth.

That's what we have today. The trash, the myths, the fables, the theological error that's being pervasively preached and taught and advocated, people are flooding into that. Why? Because they don't want to hear the truth and so they become victims of that because you can't exist in a vacuum. As soon as you turn away from the truth, you become the pawn of Satan, he moves you.

What's behind it all? Go back to verse 3 and let's pick up the key phrase, here's the motive for the

whole deal. Why will not they endure sound doctrine? Why do they accumulate teachers? Why do they turn away from the truth? Because down deep inside they simply want to have their ears...what?...tickled. They don't want to be confronted. They don't want to be convicted. They just want to be entertained. You see, it refers to speaking things which produce pleasant sensations, that's the idea. They just want to feel good. They want their ears scratched, no deeper penetration, just give me some nice stories...little positive thinking, a little psychology, a little ego feeding, a little self-congratulation. Might even talk about some of the tragedies of human kind so I feel sort of like there's a cause. Make me feel good about myself. Just tickle my ears, give me some nice sensations.

You want to know something about the gospel? The gospel does not tickle your ears, it boxes them. Not only boxes them, it burns them. It pounds your ears, it reproves, it rebukes, it convicts. This is what preachers face. Herein lies the urgency of our ministry. In my short life time there has been an escalating indifference to the truth, is that not true in yours? Even in the church. And we must preach while we can what we can before they stop hearing all together. Soon, I think, soon I think, tolerance for the truth is very very low.

I was reading last...two weeks ago...about a young girl who was the valedictorian of her high school graduating class. She was to give the speech at graduation. In her speech, she was a Christian, she used the word "Lord" once in a statement something like this, "As I look forward to life, I'm grateful that the most important person in my life is my Lord." Nothing more than that. The school demanded that she remove the word "Lord" from the speech. She refused to do that so they didn't let her give it. This is the United States of America. On our coins we have, "In God we trust," but you can't say "Lord" in a high school graduation, even if that's your belief. Frightening! Intolerance for the truth, even anything that comes close to the truth. A faithful preacher knows then that there's an urgency about what he does. I don't know how much time we'll have to keep declaring the truth before they rise up against us, but we keep doing it while we can.

So the one who serves with excellence is one who is compelled by the seriousness of his commission, the content, the scope, the urgency. Let me give you one more this morning, this is so good, just briefly. The attitude of his commission...the attitude. What is the pervasive attitude that we are to have? Look at verse 5, just the first..."But you, but you in contrast to those flaky people who won't listen to truth and turn away, you be sober in all things." What do you mean by that? Well what does he mean be sober, not drunk? Well, that certainly is part of it, but that's not what he means. Sober means self-contained, steady. Let me give you my favorite synonym, stable, unmoved, unwavering, steadfast. Says...Hort(?), the Greek scholar, "It describes a mental state in which every faculty is at full command, in which an individual is able to look at all facts and all consideration right in the face with deliberation."

This is a solid person, a stable person, who is like an athlete who has brought all his passions and all his appetites and all his nerves under complete control to perform at a maximum. To put it in the negative, a preacher is not to be flaky, not to be trendy, not to be a victim of whims, not to be inconsistent, to be stable. In the midst of a changing world, in the midst of a changing church, in the midst of a rocking and reeling society, in the midst of all of this animosity and antagonism toward the truth, you better be a steadfast, stable, firm rock or you'll compromise when the pressure's on. You be stable in all things. Don't you become a victim. Stability is the issue here. We've all had enough of flaky preachers, trendy preachers, whimsical preachers who flip-flop depending on the tide of the mob. What we need are those who live totally steadfast in an unstable world, who know their

priorities. We need men of God whose heads are clear of deceit, whose heads are clear of false teaching, whose heads are clear of whimsy, who are unaffected by the people's desire to have their ears tickled. O how I pray that God would raise up powerful preachers. O how wearing it is to hear insipid innocuous pabulum dribbled out of pulpits instead of the profound Word of God. I think this also implies an unruffled alertness, a watchfulness. There's something very balanced. There's something very consistent. There's something very solid. There's something very clear-minded about the noble preacher, he never picks up the ear tickling stuff that entertains the lusts of the wanton masses. He's just unmoved by it.

Timothy, would have to face that. He would have to face the fact that the heat would really come because they wouldn't want to hear what he was saying and he needed to be firm and say it anyway because he had to discharge his commission before God. Excellence, not success, excellence...not how do I stack up with others in my culture, but how do I stack up with God? Not am I better than someone else, but am I the best that I can be? That's the issue, always. Paul is calling Timothy to excellence and calling me to excellence and calling you to excellence. And so we need to look at our lives, don't we? All you can be is all you can be. And if you try to be more, you'll be a pocket watch hanging in front of Big Ben and nobody will know you're there and your elevation will your annihilation. And if you pursue success you'll compromise, but if you pursue excellence, you can't compromise...excellence doesn't have any room for compromise. You can go the cheap route to success but it will cost you everything to go the route of excellence. You can get your success here and now, or you can have excellence reward you forever and ever and ever. The choice is yours and it's yours every day, every hour of every day. It comes down to that. Let's pray together.

I think of the words in this same passage, Father, where Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." That little statement, "I finished the course," is so thrilling, to be able to come to the end of your life and know you finished your course, you did it with excellence. Help us, Father, to take the lead of Paul and be all that we can be, not in our flesh but in Your Spirit, not in our strength, but in Your strength, doing all we can do and yet knowing as Paul said in Colossians that it's the Spirit which works in us mightily. May we be noble servants for You, knowing the urgency of a time when they will not listen, maintaining the attitude of steadfastness in the midst of all the change. Raise up a generation of people like this for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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