

**Ministry in an Age of Itching Ears**

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Code: 80-116

It's my privilege this year to give to our graduating class a charge as they launch into a life of ministry. And I want to follow a pattern that our own Dr. Thomas has set and stay very close to the precision of a manuscript in order that I might say all that I would desire you men to hear.

If you're familiar with the life of Charles Hadden Spurgeon you've probably heard of the "downgrade controversy." Spurgeon spent the final four years of his life at war against the trends of early modernism which he rightly saw as a threat to biblical Christianity. The name by which history remembers the controversy comes from a title of a series of articles that Spurgeon published in his monthly magazine called "The Sword and the Trowel." Spurgeon wanted to admonish his flock about the dangers of moving away from the historic positions of biblical Christianity. Biblical truth, he said, is like the pinnacle of a steep slippery mountain, one step away and you find yourself on the downgrade.

Once a church or an individual Christian gets on the downgrade, momentum takes over. And the slide begins. Recovery is unusual and it occurs, said Spurgeon, only when Christians get on the upline through spiritual revival.

In the controversy that transpired as a result of these articles, Spurgeon resigned from the Baptist Union, though he had the largest church in the world in the Baptist Union. Later after his resignation he was subject to an official censure by the Union. Within a few years the Baptist Union was hopelessly lost to the new theology and Spurgeon was dead.

In 1900 Spurgeon's wife Susannah wrote these words, "So far as the Baptist Union was concerned, little was accomplished by Mr. Spurgeon's witness bearing and withdrawal. But in other respects I have had abundant proofs that the protest was not in vain. Many who were far gone on the downgrade were stopped in their perilous descent and by God's grace were brought back to the upline. Others who were unconsciously slipping were made to stand firmly on the rock while at least for a time in all the churches evangelical doctrines were preached with a clearness and emphasis which had long been lacking." She believed that the Lord would ultimately make clear how right her husband had been in his protest against the downgrade.

To this day, church historians will debate whether or not Spurgeon should have withdrawn and resigned or whether he should have stayed in and fought to keep the Baptist Union orthodox. He

considered that option but concluded it would have been futile. Personally I guess I'm inclined to agree with Spurgeon's choice. But whether we agree with the course of action or not, we will have to acknowledge that history has vindicated Spurgeon's warnings about the downgrade. He was right.

In the early part of the twentieth century, immediately following his life, the spreading of false doctrine and worldliness, theological liberalism and modernism ravaged denominational Christianity. Most of the mainline denominations were violently if not fatally altered by these influences and have never recovered.

Here we are a hundred years later and history is repeating itself. The church again has become worldly. And not just worldly but studiously so...winds of doctrinal compromise are beginning to stir. False doctrine and worldliness, the two things that Spurgeon spoke about, the very two influences he attacked always go hand in hand. And listen to this, worldliness usually leads the way.

The term "modernism" was not used, first of all, to designate a theology, it was used, first of all, to designate a methodology. And the methodology that wanted to be modern, to reach modern man soon became a theology. Christians forget that modernism was not at all at first a theological agenda. It was a sociological one. And early modernists were not trying to hit at the core of biblical faith, they were simply trying to make Christianity more palatable to a cynical world, a methodology. But it became a theology because worldliness inevitably ends up as false doctrine.

The same spirit is abroad in the church today. I'm convinced that most of those behind it would not deliberately undermine biblical Christianity, but neither did those in Spurgeon's day believe they were doing it but they were. And today, these who are concerned about a new methodology have introduced into the church a philosophy of pragmatism and with it a spirit of worldliness that left unchecked will eventually reap the very same bitter harvest that it reaped a hundred years ago, namely the loss of biblical Christianity.

Now this new market-driven philosophy is straight forward. It goes like this...the church is in competition against the world. We're fighting for the minds and the thoughts and the ideals of men. We're basically fighting for the same consumers, the same customers as the world is. And the world is very good at capturing people's attention and capturing their affection and capturing their hearts. The church, on the other hand, is very poor at selling its product. We don't know the sophisticated means that the world uses and so we're losing out in the marketing battle.

Evangelism, they tell us, should therefore be viewed as a marketing challenge and the church should market the gospel in the same way that all modern businesses sell their products. Now that's going to call for some fundamental changes. The goal in all marketing is quote from George Barna(?), Marketing the Church, "To make both the producer and the consumer satisfied."

So anything that tends to leave the consumer unsatisfied must be rejected and jettisoned. Preaching particularly preaching about sin and righteousness and judgment is too confronting and not at all satisfying to the consumer. The church then has to learn if it's going to get truth across to couch it in ways that amuse and entertain. One best selling author advocating the new pragmatism rights, "I believe that developing a marketing orientation is precisely what the church needs to do if we are to make a difference in the spiritual health of this nation for the remainder of this century." He adds, "My contention based on careful study of data and the activities of American churches is that the major problem plaguing the church is its failure to embrace a marketing orientation in what has become a marketing-driven environment," end quote.

The main problem...the major weakness of the church is its lack of marketing strategy? That all sounds very modern and may sound to some shrewd. But it is not biblical. He said he came to that conclusion with a careful study of data and the activities of American churches, and there is a glaring omission in that list of the Scripture. And what has happened with this new marketing orientation, I believe, is that it has given the church a strong hard push on to the slippery slope of the downgrade. Marketing principles are becoming the arbiter of truth. Elements of the message that don't fit the promotional plan are simply omitted. Marketing savvy demands that the offense of the cross must be down played, salesmanship requires that negative subjects like divine wrath must be avoided. Consumer satisfaction means that the standard of righteousness cannot be raised too high. And there you have the seeds of a watered down gospel sown in the very philosophy that drives many ministries and many churches today. And make no mistake about it, this methodology, this new philosophy of ministry is altering the message the church conveys to the world. Although many who propound these ideas think of themselves as loyal to the biblical doctrine.

I believe we are living in a time, gentlemen, when Christianity is on the downgrade. And what is now a methodological passion will become a theological aberration.

The question...how does market-driven ministry compare with the biblical model?...is the question that we want to answer tonight. And I believe we have a thorough answer to that from the two epistles that Paul wrote to Timothy. And I want to give you an overview of those two and then look directly at a specific text.

Paul had personally mentored the young pastor. But Timothy was encountering severe trials when he was assigned to Ephesus to cleanse and straighten the church. Paul wanting to give Timothy all the information he needed and wanting to strengthen his hand and wanting to maximize his opportunity and his ministry wrote him two letters...1 and 2 Timothy. And in them you have what is the most complete ministry philosophy given anywhere in the New Testament for the church.

Paul instructed Timothy that he must...and here's a list in the first letter...correct those teaching false doctrine and call them to a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith.

He must fight for divine truth and for God's purposes keeping his own faith and a good conscience.

He must pray for the lost and lead the men of the church to do the same.

He must call in the...call the women in the church to fulfill their God-given role of submission and raise up godly children, setting an example of faith, love and sanctity with self-restraint.

He must carefully select spiritual leaders for the church on the basis of their giftedness, godliness and virtue.

He must recognize the source of error and those who teach it and point these things out to the brethren.

He must constantly be being nourished on the words of the Scripture and its sound teaching, avoiding all myths and all false doctrines.

He must discipline himself for the purpose of godliness.

He must boldly command and teach the truth of God's Word.

He must be a model of spiritual virtue that all can follow.

He must faithfully read, explain and apply the Scriptures publicly.

He must be progressing always toward Christ's likeness in his own personal life.

He must be gracious and gentle in confronting the sin of his people.

He must give special consideration and care for those who are widows.

He must honor faithful pastors who work hard.

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 teach and preach principles of true godliness, helping his people discern between true godliness and mere hypocrisy.

He must flee the love of money.

He must pursue righteousness, godliness, 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 instruct the rich to do good, be rich in good works, be generous.

And he must guard the Word of God as a sacred trust and a treasure.

All that in the first letter.

In the second epistle Paul reminded Timothy that his duty was to keep the gift of God in him fresh and useful.

To not be timid but powerful.

To never be ashamed of Christ or anyone who serves Him.

To hold tightly to the truth and guard it.

To be strong in character, reproduce himself in faithful men, suffer difficulty and persecution willingly while making the maximum effort for Christ.

Keep his eyes on Christ on all time.

Lead with authority.

Interpret and apply the Scripture accurately.

Avoid useless conversation that leads only to ungodliness.

He must be an instrument of honor set apart from sin and useful to the Lord.

He must flee youthful lusts, pursue righteousness, faith and love.

Refuse to be drawn into philosophical and theological wrangling.

He must not be an arguer but kind, teachable, gentle and patient even when he's wronged.

He must face dangerous times with a deep knowledge of the Word of God.

He must understand that the key to his own maturity and that of his people was the Scripture.

He must preach the Word in season and out of season, reproof, rebuking, and exhorting with great patience and instruction.

He must know the priorities for all of life, endure hardship and do the work of an evangelist.

In all of those statements you have summed up the nature of ministry. Nothing hints at a market-driven philosophy. In fact, some of those commands are absolutely impossible to harmonize with the theories that are so popular today. To sum it all up in five categories...one, Paul commanded Timothy to be faithful in his preaching...two, to be bold in exposing and refuting error...three, to be an example of godliness...four, to be diligent and work hard...and five, to be willing to suffer hardship and persecution.

If you were to take the time, and you don't need to do it, but if you were to read a dozen or so of the latest books on ministry and church growth, you would search long and hard to find anything in them from these two letters. In the reading of a dozen or so of the latest books there was no reference to the instruction of Paul given to Timothy in any one of them anywhere. In fact, none of them drew any element of their ministry philosophy from the New Testament pastoral epistles. They drew their principles from modern business, marketing technique, management theory, psychology and other similar sources. Some then tried to illustrate their principles using biblical anecdotes but none of them drew the philosophy of ministry from the Scripture.

Unfortunately the market-driven ministry philosophy appeals to the very worst mood in our age. It caters to people whose first love is self and who do not care for God unless they can have Him with disrupting their selfish life styles. Promise such people a religion that will allow them to be comfortable in their materialism and comfortable in their self-love and they will respond in droves.

Paul foresaw such a time. And near the end of his second epistle to Timothy after outlining all these principles we've listed above, Paul abridged his advice to Timothy in this well-known verse, 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the Word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction." And then he added this warning, "For 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 turn aside to myths," verses 3 and 4.

Listen, there was clearly no room in Paul's philosophy of ministry for "give the people what they want" theory that is prevalent today. He did not urge Timothy to conduct a survey to find out what people wanted and then preach what they see as their felt needs. By the way, a local church did that in this area of Southern California recently and they asked people to list on a card what subject was most important to them and the most commonly listed subject was "tell us how to potty train our children." Potty training?

Paul never suggested to Timothy that he study demographic data. He never suggested that he do research on the felt needs of his people. He commanded him to preach the Word faithfully, reprovingly, patiently and let it confront the spirit of the age head on. And you'll have to notice in that text that nothing Paul said to Timothy had anything to do with how people might respond. He didn't lecture Timothy how large his church should be, how much money he should take in and how influential he should become. He didn't suggest that the world was supposed to revere, esteem and accept Timothy and he was supposed to become very popular. In fact, Paul said nothing whatever about external success. Paul's emphasis was on commitment, not success. He never said anything about whether unbelievers should attend or would attend or tolerate what he said except to warn him about persecution.

You see, contemporary ministry philosophy is loaded with worldly standards of success. The church is most often judged successful or large and rich, mega churches with multi-million dollar facilities, spas, handball courts, daycare centers, etc. But not one church in a thousand falls into that category. That means one of two things, most churches are pitiful failures or the gauge of success on God's terms is quite different than it is on man's. External criteria such as affluence, numbers, money, positive response have never been the biblical measure of success in ministry, faithfulness, godliness, spiritual commitment are the virtues that God esteems and such are the qualities that He blesses. They must be the building blocks of any ministry philosophy. That is true in small churches, that is true in large churches. Size does not signify God's blessing and popularity is absolutely no barometer of success. In fact, an appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land, writes Jeremiah, the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests rule on their own authority and my people love it. The fact that people love it doesn't make it right. Popular does not mean pleasing to God necessarily.

So, instead of urging Timothy to devise a ministry that would garner accolades from the world, he warned him about suffering and about hardship. Hardly the stuff that modern church growth experts aspire to. The appropriate goal is never success, it's excellence. As I've said through the years, you take care of the depth of your ministry and let God take care of the breadth of it.

Let's look at little more closely at this text and I just want to draw from it nine reminders for you...nine reminders that you yourself can see in the text of 2 Timothy chapter 4. Let me read the first five verses again. "I solemnly 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 preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction for 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 turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Now there is a ministry philosophy. Point number one, remember your calling. Remember your calling. That comes in these words, "I solemnly 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."

What is he saying? He is saying, "Timothy, you live and work in the light of impending judgment. You live and work as one who is visible to God. I am charging you knowing that God and Christ Jesus are present hearing the charge and holding you responsible. And Christ is the one who will judge the living and the dead by His appearing and His Kingdom. You remember now that you have been called by God to represent the Lord Jesus Christ and it is in their presence that you minister and accountable to them." Paul invokes the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead. He wants Timothy to understand that the one who will judge him is the one in whose presence he ministers. God is our judge and He judges by a criteria revealed in Scripture, not what people think.

Elsewhere Paul says, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God and each one of us shall give an account of himself to God," he says in Romans 14. That's the point he wants to make to Timothy. Remember your calling is in the context of the presence of God and your accountability is to please Him, not men.

The second injunction here, second reminder is preach the Word.

What kind of ministry pleases God? What kind of ministry does He want done by one called and serving in His presence? He says preach the Word, that is the centerpiece of every single biblical ministry philosophy. The preacher's task is to proclaim Scripture and as Nehemiah 8:8 says, "To give the sense of it." All other content in ministry is extraneous. Preaching the Word is not always easy. The message we are required to proclaim is often difficult and offensive. Christ Himself is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. The message of the cross is a stumbling block to some, foolishness to others. The natural man does not understand the things of God, they are foolishness to him. Paul even said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," perhaps he said in contrast to so many who may have professed some association with Christ but demonstrated shame at the very message that supposedly had transformed their lives.



It's not easy to preach the Word. It's not popular to preach the Word but it is our calling. Perhaps Timothy himself struggled with the temptation to be ashamed because it says in 2 Timothy 1 that he was not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me, says Paul His prisoner. Perhaps Timothy was a somewhat timid man. Paul reminds him that God has given us a Spirit of power and love and a sound mind, not a Spirit of timidity. He was young and some people demeaned him for his youth. He was struggling as all young men with youthful lusts and stubbornness and belligerence and self-doubt and felt inadequate to confront the Ephesian errorists successfully. He knew that publicly proclaiming the Word of God could land him in prison. The very least he was sure to incur hostility and debates from Jews who were antagonistic to the gospel. There were some humanly compelling reasons not to preach and Paul commanded him, however, to preach. Whatever present feelings, whatever present inhibitions...he was to preach.

And what was the Word he was to preach? "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable." Preach it all. This is the Word to be preached, the whole counsel of God. Paul said in Acts 20, "I have not failed to declare unto you the whole counsel of God." In chapter 1 Paul told Timothy, "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me." He's speaking there of the revealed words of Scripture, all of them. He said, "Guard the treasure entrusted to you." And then in chapter 2 he said, "Study the Word and handle it accurately." And now he says, "Don't only guard it and study it, preach it."

Colossians 1 Paul says that he was to fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God, verse 25. He writes to the Corinthians, "When I came to you, brethren, I didn't come with superiority of speech or wisdom proclaiming to you the testimony of God for I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." In other words, his goal as a preacher was not to entertain people with his rhetorical style, it was not to amuse them with cleverness, humor, novel insights and sophisticated methodology, he simply preached Christ and the Word of God. As John Stott once said, "There are many popular preachers today, but not many powerful ones." And he's right. There are men in the pulpit who gather crowds because they are gifted orators, they are interesting story tellers, they are entertaining communicators, they are dynamic personalities, they are shrewd crowd manipulators, they are rousing speech makers, popular politicians are erudite scholars. They may be popular but that doesn't mean they're powerful. No one preaches with power who doesn't preach the Word.

You can elicit emotion but you can't transform lives. And no faithful preacher will water down and neglect the whole counsel of God. And so the preaching of the Word then must be the very heart of our ministry philosophy, any other philosophy replaces the voice of God with human words.

Thirdly, he reminds Timothy that he is to be faithful in and out of season. This is an important word. Timothy is called to a never ending task. He is to preach the Word regardless of the climate. It is immaterial what is going on. It doesn't matter whether they are favorable or unfavorable to it. It

doesn't matter what the opinion of the hearers are or the culture. He is to be faithful when such preaching is tolerated and when it is not tolerated.

Now let's face it, right now preaching the Word is out of season. Ten years ago it was in season. I remember those days. Now it's out of season. The market-driven philosophy currently in vogue says that plainly declaring biblical truth is out of fashion. One well-known teacher of exposition has now come to the conviction apparently that the day of expository preaching is over. Biblical exposition and theology are antiquated and irrelevant. Quoting one source, "Church goers don't want to be preached to anymore. The Baby-Boom generation won't just sit in the pew while someone up front preaches. They are products of a media-driven generation, they need a church experience that will satisfy them on their own terms." But Paul says the excellent minister will be faithful to preach the Word even when it isn't in fashion. The expression he uses is "be ready," ephistemi, literally means to stand beside. It has the idea of eagerness, preparedness, readiness and explosive eagerness to preach the Word, not reluctance, readiness; not hesitation, fearlessness; not motivational talks, the Word of God.

Number four, he reminds him that in the context of preaching he must reprove, rebuke and exhort. Now that tells us about the tone of preaching. He uses two words that carry negative connotations and one that is positive. The first two, reprove and rebuke, are negative...all valid ministry has a negative tone. The preacher who fails to reprove and fails to rebuke is not fulfilling his commission.

Recently there was a radio interview with a well-known preacher who emphasizes positive preaching. The man had stated in print that he assiduously avoids any mention of sin in his preaching because he feels people are burdened with too much guilt anyway. The interviewer asked how he could justify such a policy. And the pastor replied that he had made the decision early in his ministry to focus on meeting people's need, not attacking their sin. Strange...since the greatest need people have is to be delivered from their sin. Preaching that fails to confront and correct sin through the Word of God does not meet people's need. It makes them feel good. And they may respond enthusiastically to the feeling of the moment but that's not the same as having their real need met. Reproving, rebuking and then the positive tone of exhorting which means to encourage are all to come out of the preaching of the Word of God.

Fifthly, he reminds Timothy, don't compromise in difficult times. The time will come, he says, when they will not endure sound doctrine, wanting to have their ears tickled they'll accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to those kinds of desires. They'll want ear ticklers. In the last days difficult times will come, we heard read to us earlier from chapter 3. The Spirit explicitly says in the latter times some will fall away from the faith. This then is the third prophetic warning to Timothy. Not only will difficult times come, not only will people fall away from the faith, but there is coming a time when people will not want to hear the Word of God. They don't want to hear sound doctrine, they just want things to tickle their ears.

Do we acquiesce to that? No. We conclude that fearless preaching is all the more necessary in such times. When people will not tolerate the truth that's when courageous out-spoken preachers are most desperately needed to speak it.

Now I'll ask you a simple question. Why are people unwilling to endure sound teaching? Because they love...what?...sin. Sound preaching confronts and rebukes sin and people with love for sinful life style will not tolerate it, they just want their ears tickled. Paul says we can't do that...we can't do that.

They want to be entertained. We can't do that. I think there are thousands of evangelical churches worldwide that can't even tolerate sound doctrine. They wouldn't listen to it for two weeks in a row because it would confront their sin, it would confront their error, convict them, call them to truth and obedience. They don't want healthy teaching. Why? Because they've been corrupted by the world. They don't want to give up their sinful life styles. They want someone who makes them feel good about the way they live.

And what do they want to hear? Ear tickling stuff and they will literally heap to themselves teachers who give them that stuff. In periods of unsettled faith, says one writer, and skepticism and mere curious speculation in matters of religion, teachers of all kinds swarm like the flies in Egypt and the demand creates the supply. The hearers invite and shake their own preachers. If the people desire a calf to worship, a ministerial calf maker is readily found.

This appetite for ear-tickling preaching has a terrible end. Verse 4 says these people will ultimately turn away their ears from the truth and be turned aside to myths. You see, ultimately their methodology causes them to be victimized by inerrant theology. They become victims of their own refusal to hear the truth. You show me a church where people say, "In order to reach people we're going to sublimate the truth," and I'll show you a church that in a very few years is going to be devoid of truth. They will have deprioritized it and they will be ignorant of it. They'll not only not know it, they'll not want to know it...not believing it important. They will turn away and they'll be left with myths.

That's happening in the church today, I believe. Evangelicalism has lost its tolerance for biblical preaching and now the church is flirting with serious doctrinal error. The church is throwing its arms open wide and embracing every kind of aberrant viewpoint. Christians madly pursue extrabiblical revelation in the form of prophecies and dreams. Preachers deny the reality of hell. The modern gospel promises heaven apart from holiness. Churches ignore the biblical teaching on women's roles, homosexuality and other issues that are somehow politically charged. The human medium has overtaken the divine message and this is evidence of a serious doctrinal compromise.

Look again at that verse, verse 3, they want their ears tickled. They don't want to be confronted. They don't want to be convicted. They want to be entertained. They want pleasant feelings, anecdotes, humor, psychology, motivational lectures, reassurance, positive thinking, self-congratulation, ego-massaging sermonettes and small talk, not biblical reproof, rebuke and exhortation. But the truth of God doesn't tickle your ears, it boxes them. It burns them.

Number six, Timothy is reminded to be sober in all things, as this section winds down. To be sober means to understand your priorities. It means self-controlled, it's the idea of self-mastery, a very common term throughout the pastoral epistles. It means to be steady and attentive. It's not the idea of sober as opposed to drunk. It's not the idea of sober meaning joyless, gloomy and morose. It means self-controlled, self-mastered, steady, attentive. It describes a state of mental alertness and control. Here is a solid person, a stable person, a preacher who is not flaky, not trendy, not a pursuer of every whim. In the face of a changing world, in the midst of a vacillating church, in the context of a rocking and a reeling society, here is a man who is rooted and steadfast and stable and rock solid and he never compromises. We've had enough, my friends, of erratic trendy whimsical preachers who flip-flop depending on the tide of the mob. What is needed are those who remain totally steadfast in an unstable world, true to the faith and true to the ministry philosophy outlined in the Scripture. The noble preacher is balanced. He is consistent. He is solid. He doesn't move even though the cries of those under him beg to have their ears tickled.

And then number seven, Paul says to Timothy, "Endure hardship...endure hardship." That would tell you if it tells you anything that a minister who is faithful can expect difficulty, not popularity. Obviously excellent ministers cannot be those who yearn for the applause of the world. No ministry of any value is painless.

And I often encounter young men, and I'm always kind of amazed at this, who say, "Well I'm looking for a church without problems." Don't go there, you'll be their problem. I've heard young men say, "I want a ministry with not too many challenges. I need some time to kind of get my life in order and be with my wife and raise our baby, so I want...you know...kind of an easy place." You're not going to find that. The notion that ministry can be effective and painless is a lie. If you preach the Word of God you're going to have adversity. All who live godly in this present age in Christ Jesus are going to be persecuted, says 2 Timothy 3:12. Faithfulness and hardship go hand in hand. Paul says to Timothy, "Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

Did Timothy follow Paul's counsel? Yes. Evidently he did. In a little obscure verse in Hebrews 13:23 it says, "Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released." Isn't that interesting? Released from what? Prison. We can assume when the suffering came Timothy took it and endured it. He didn't compromise, he remained faithful. He was imprisoned. He never found a cheap way out.

And then number eight, he reminds Timothy and all those who step in to the place of ministry, "Do the work of an evangelist." At first it might seem that that's an abrupt change of direction, but it isn't. He isn't...he isn't acknowledging that Timothy had the evangelist ministry particularly, he is simply saying, "Timothy, you've got to reach out beyond your own comfort zone." Very easy for men who preach the Word all the time to be so absorbed in the exegesis and the theology that they never get beyond that process to the unredeemed. You must do that.

He wanted Timothy to face the world courageously and preach Christ crucified. He wanted him to proclaim sin, righteousness, judgment, God's law. He wanted him to declare the depravity, not the dignity of man. He wanted him to herald the Second Coming and warn of eternal judgment. He wanted him to magnify the cross, the resurrection, the atonement, grace and faith. He wanted him to go beyond just teaching theology and doctrines of sanctification to preach evangelism...part of his duty.

And then lastly, sums it all up in verse 5 by saying, "Fulfill your ministry." I love that. It's just the summation statement. Do it all. And do it all all your life to the very end. He might have said, "Don't serve God half-heartedly, do it with all your might and don't serve God with half your life, do it with all your life, all your might, all your life." He was coming to the end of his life. Didn't have much left...Paul. Timothy was at the beginning. Paul says, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, the time for my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. I have done it with all my might to the very end. Timothy, I want you to get to that point some day where you can lay down your head in the rest of death and I want you to be able to say I did it with all my might, all my life."

Some very practical instruction. At the height of the Downgrade Controversy, two weeks after he was censured by the Baptist Union, Charles Spurgeon preached a message. The title of the message was "Holding Fast the Faith." I wish I could read you all of it, let me read you some selected portions of this message he preached after this censure in which the Baptist Union disowned him because of his cries against the downgrade.

He closed the message at least with these words, "Everybody admires Luther. Yes, yes, but you do not want anyone else to do the same today. When you go to the zoological gardens you all admire the bear. But how would you like a bear at home? Or a bear wandering loose about the street? You tell me it would be unbearable. And no doubt you're right. So we admire a man who was firm in the faith, say 400 years ago. The past ages are a sort of bear pit or iron cage for him. But such a man today is a nuisance and must be put down. Call him a narrow-minded bigot or give him a worse name if you can think of one. Yet imagine that in those ages past, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and their compeers had said, 'The world is out of order but if we try to set it right we shall only make a great row and get ourselves into disgrace. Let's go to our chambers, put on our nightcaps and sleep over the bad times and perhaps when we wake up things will have grown better.'

"Such conduct on their part would have entailed upon us a heritage of error. Age after age would have gone down into the infernal deeps and the pestiferous bogs of error would have swallowed all. These men loved the faith and the name of Jesus too well to see them trampled on. Note what we owe them and let us pay to our sons the debt we owe our fathers.

"Look, you sirs," he said, "there are ages yet to come. If the Lord does not speedily appear there will come another generation and another. And all these generations will be tainted and injured if we are not faithful to God and to His truth today. We have come to a turning point in the road. If we turn to the right, may hap our children and our grandchildren's children will go that way. But if we turn to the left, generations yet unborn will curse our names for having been unfaithful to God and His Word. I charge you, not only by your ancestry but by your posterity that you seek to win the commendation of your master that though you dwell where Satan's seat is you yet holdfast His name and do not deny His faith.

"God, grant us faithfulness for the sake of the souls around us. How is the world to be saved if the church is false to her Lord? How are we to lift the masses if our fulcrum is removed? If our gospel is uncertain? What remains but increasing misery and despair. Stand fast, my beloved, in the name of God. I your brother in Christ entreat you to abide in the truth, quit yourselves like men, be strong, the Lord sustain you for Jesus' sake."

And Spurgeon said and I say, "Amen."

Father, this we believe is a word from You. We pray that we might take it to heart. Spurgeon did his part. He passed the baton to another generation. Paul did his part. Timothy did his part. Help these men to do their part that they may bring glory to You and advance Your holy name for the glory of Christ we ask. Amen.

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