

Introduction:

Paul was in prison and he knew he was near the end of his life. Later in this same chapter he points out:

Following Passage: 2 Tim 4:6-8 ⁶ *For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

- Timothy was probably Paul's closest associate. He was the apostle's disciple, his protégé, his apprentice – the one more than any other that Paul saw as taking his place. Like Joshua after Moses or Elisha after Elijah, Timothy was the man God had appointed to follow in Paul's footsteps. The section we're looking at today is the final charge Paul gives to this young minister. If Paul were here today, he would no doubt want to say the same thing to Mark Radke.
- But before we dive into this paragraph, let's also read what comes before it to set it up in its proper context. Chapter 3 of 2 Timothy ends like this:

Previous Passage: 2 Tim 3:14:17 ¹⁴ *But as for you, [Timothy] continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

- Notice Paul's emphasis on the Scriptures – how important they have been in Timothy's life and how important they will be to him in his future ministry.

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So on to our passage:

2 Timothy 4:1 ¹ *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:*

- What a sobering introduction! What more could Paul have said to convey the importance of the charge he is about to give? But again consider that this is his final injunction, his orders for Timothy who he may never see again on this earth. More than anything, Paul wants Timothy to succeed, be blessed in this life and be rewarded in the next. This is a very serious moment in the life of the Apostle Paul, so he sets up these next words with maximum gravity.

2 Timothy 4:2 ² *Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.*

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- When Paul tells Timothy to “preach the word” he is pointing back to vv.15-16 and referring to the Scriptures. Timothy’s job, Mark Radke’s job, is to proclaim the Scriptures to you, God’s people.
- But what does that involve? What does the preaching of the word look like in the life of a faithful minister? Paul elaborates:
- **Be prepared in season and out of season** In other words, when it’s easy and when it isn’t – when it’s convenient and inconvenient to do so – when the hearers are open to what the Scriptures say and when they are not. Timothy has to simply **preach the word**. One early church father put it like this:

“Just as the fountains, though none may draw from them, still flow on; and the rivers, though none drink of them, still run; so must we do all on our part in speaking, though none give heed to us” (Chrysostom’s Homily, 30, vol. 5).

- A pastor is not allowed to change the message of the Bible to fit the preferences of his target audience. He needs to faithfully proclaim and explain the text so that people can respond to God’s holy word.
- And when the Bible is faithfully taught, it will naturally provide opportunity to do all of these things: It will **correct, rebuke and encourage**.
 - When we are in error, the Bible corrects us;
 - When we are in sin, the Bible rebukes us;
 - On those all too rare occasions when we are actually doing well, the Bible encourages us so that we will have the courage to keep right on going.
- And all this has to be done **with great patience and careful instruction**. Here’s why:

2 Timothy 4:3 ³ *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.*

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- Paul prophesied of a coming day when audiences would insist on teaching that is easy to listen to – teaching that only tells them what they want to hear. He described this as “having itching ears.” The idea is that the people want to be scratched where they itch, as they dictate what the messages should be.
- There are pastors that entertain the people, or affirm their views no matter what those views are. Their messages are like cotton candy, sweet to the taste but completely without substance. This is not what Jesus meant when He told Peter, “Feed my sheep.” Paul warned against the day when a nutrition-free “lite preaching” would take the place of a balanced diet of sound doctrine. God help that church where the pastor’s message is dictated by the “felt needs” and “itching ears” of the hearers.

- Think back on what we said earlier: The word of God corrects us when we are in error. How often do people really want to be corrected? The word of God rebukes us when we are in sin. How often do people really want to be rebuked? And if no one is ever corrected or rebuked it is hard to see how anyone will ever get on the right track so that they might someday be encouraged.
- When this happens no one in the church will ever be truly transformed, and God knows that transformation is what we so desperately need. We need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. How else are we going to test and approve God's good, pleasing and perfect will?

(See Chuck Smith Word for Today Bible)

JE: The UCC has a marvelous biblical and theological heritage that dates all the way back to the New England Congregationalists of colonial times. Jonathan Edwards is no doubt the most impressive of those pastors. He is widely considered the greatest theologian that America has ever produced. In this marvelous information age, his collected works are now accessible online, put there by Yale University. Let's **read 2 Tim 4:3 again** and hear what JE had to say about it:

"Men are exceeding prone to bring their principles to agree with their lusts" (J. Edwards)

Edwards was right. "When your principles become a bit too constraining, just change your principles," that's what many people think. They don't want to hear that they are supposed to repent of sin. They want a pastor who will avoid uncomfortable topics like sin altogether. In fact, they want a pastor who will tell them that the Bible actually justifies their own sinful desires. And if they can't hear that in their own church, they can now buy any number of books or listen to any number of podcasts, and ***gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.***

- And that is exactly why...

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- Paul goes further:

2 Timothy 4:4 ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

- Here in this verse we have the sixth time Paul has used the word "truth" in this epistle (cf. 2:15, 18, 25; 3:7-8). He also referred to truth five times in 1 Tim [2:4, 7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5] and twice more in Titus [1:1, 14]. Obviously in these *Pastoral Epistles*, or letters to young pastors, he was very concerned with the dangers of false teachings diverting people from God's truth. But if we look closely at this verse we see something else:
- **And they will turn away their ears from the truth**—That is, the people themselves will turn away from the truth. Paul is not saying that the teachers would turn them away by the influence of their instructions. It's the other way around. The teachers are influenced by the people's desires to hear lies.
- This is what the people of Israel did in OT times:

Isaiah 30:10 ¹⁰ *They say to the seers, “See no more visions!” and to the prophets, “Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions.*

- And what happened? False prophets appeared for them out of the woodwork to satisfy their desire to hear lies. There is an old Latin proverb that says:

“The people wish to be deceived, so let them be deceived.”

- Mark Radke and every other pastor on this planet can be tempted to alter deviate from the straightforward message of the Scriptures to say things that will make people happy.
- I would suggest that you as a congregation should make the preaching of God’s word the primary expectation you have for your new pastor.

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- Paul ends with four more quick little commands for his guy Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:5 ⁵ *But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

- Paul knew from experience that ministry can sometimes be a little bit nerve-racking. A pastor needs to **keep his head in all situations**.
- Sometimes it can be difficult, but nobody wants to hear a pastor get all whiny. **Endure hardship.**

2 Timothy 2:3 ³ *Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*

- To **do the work of an evangelist** is to make sure that at one level the ministry of the word is constantly aimed at the unconverted, so that people will always be taught what it means to have a saving faith – to find new life in Jesus Christ.
- There is a great danger of false conversions in a country like ours in a region like the Midwest with our strong Christian heritage. People may easily think they are saved when they are not. Some people who have never experienced God’s regenerating power will call themselves Christians anyway. This is **the work of an evangelist** – to communicate the gospel.
- **Discharge all the duties of your ministry** Anything else you have to do, do it. In ministry the job descriptions are often very loose, so Paul ends with a sort of catch-all. “Whatever you need to do, just make sure it gets done.” In one routine day a typical pastor may have to mop a goopy mess off the floor, sit down with an engaged couple to counsel them regarding their upcoming marriage, go to a funeral home to comfort a grieving family, lead a Bible study for college-agers and then make a few complex financial decisions for the church. **Discharge all the duties of your ministry.**
- But again:

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Conclusions:

These are Paul's final instructions to Timothy. And once more, if he were here today to say it, these would be his instructions to Mark Radke. My hope and prayer is that Mark will be that pastor for Garfield UCC – a pastor who is eager to preach God's word.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father I thank you for this body of believers, this church called Garfield UCC. We thank you for placing Mark here as their pastor and for the agreement they have come to in having him take this position. Please empower him now to preach Your word. Help him to be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. Help him to keep his head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and discharge all the duties of his ministry. For these your people I pray that they would have ears to hear what your Holy Spirit is saying to them – that their minds and hearts would be receptive to what Your word has to say – that they might have much treasure stored up in heaven and might bear much fruit for your kingdom here on earth – and bring as much glory as possible to the glorious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.