

The Minister's Charge: Preach the Word!

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Well, we call this series "Beautifying the Bride" because that's exactly what Paul's intention is as he writes these letters to Timothy. "Timothy," he's saying, "get the church, the local church at Ephesus in order." He gives him a lot of instruction on how to organize and structure the church, he gives instructions for the ladies in the church, how they're to dress, how they're to conduct themselves. He gives instructions to the men of the church and the officers and leaders of the church, and many other things but one of the things that he hits over and over again in a purposeful redundancy is, "Timothy, don't quit. Stay with what I taught you. Do what I taught you to do. When it's easy, when it's hard, when times are good, when times are bad, stay with the stuff," more or less is what he's saying and I don't want us to just run pass this, but if we could take in the atmosphere of Paul as he's in his second Roman imprisonment, he's going to tell us in just a few verses that he knows his execution is imminent and what's, he's writing there and I just see him sitting in that squalor, he's got something to write with and a parchment to write on and he's, you know he's going to tell Timothy the, the few things that he must hold onto, the few things he must do well and do right. That's the way I would feel as an elder pastor if I was speaking to a young understudy and I knew my time was very very short. I'd want to get right to the things that absolutely are essential and unmitigable, can't change. And so that's where Paul is and here's what he says.

2 Timothy 4:1-8. He writes to Timothy,

1 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: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 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, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come [that's his execution, his martyrdom]. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up 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 loved His appearing.

Here we have in Paul's final days, the minister's charge, preach the word.

The primacy of preaching the word is attacked in every generation and too often in our day the modern pulpit has replaced Spirit-empowered Bible preaching with other things, things like dramatic presentations, multimedia presentations, various amusements and entertainments, and often super-charged shallow music. Also in every generation there's always a faction of independent, self-exalting holy ones who deem that their personal Bible study and maybe they're group Bible studies in homes or in other places is really all they need, that's sufficient for them, and the pulpit ministry of the local church is secondary at best. They view that preaching is optional, if not non-essential, but let's don't take their word for it, let's note the Apostle Paul's convictions on the subject.

Now we know from the preceding context in 2 Corinthians or 2 Timothy, rather, chapter 3, verse 16, that he's been talking about the infallibility and the authority of the word of God, that it is absolutely inerrant and that it is completely or absolutely sufficient for all matters of faith and practice. Now we get to chapter 4 and now he, he moves to the most solemn and weighty words as he charges Timothy about preaching and he exalts the ministry of preaching the word.

Now let me pause for a moment. Obviously, this has most direct application to men who feel called into the gospel ministry to pastor a church. The church, this has a lot for you. You must know what preaching the word is, and you must understand what preaching the word is not. You need to know what preaching the word is compared to using the Scripture in a sermon that's not preaching the word. There's a difference and, men, you'll be accountable for your wives and for your children and your families, that you made sure they were part of a local church congregation that was committed to the main thing of preaching the word in the power of the Spirit.

You know, the Bible says that "Jesus came preaching." The Bible tells us that John the forerunner came preaching. And the word "preaching" here is the idea of a town crier, a herald. It certainly involves teaching, but it's more than that. It's, it's, I think it emphasizes the, the proclamation force of an important message. The Bible tells us in Romans 10:9 and 14, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Well, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" They could say how will they hear without a Bible study and Bible studies are important, how will they hear without a discipleship group and discipleship groups are important, or he could have said how will they hear without a personal witness and that's very important, but God uses all those things but it's not the foundational element. Paul says, Among all the other things, the one thing that must be consistent is they hear the preaching of the word of God." This is part of what humbles us, it, it really humbles those of us who are called to preach because other than the Lord we know best our frailties and our faultings and our weaknesses, and

the sins we have to repent of, and we're amazed and humbled that God would use this approach as the primary means of advancing his work in the world building his local churches. But you know, I'm not the question, my Lord's wisdom on these things. I'm to honor my Lord's wisdom on these things.

Matter of fact, back in 1 Timothy 4:15, the apostle tells Timothy, actually commands Timothy to take pains with these things, the context is his studying and his preaching. "Timothy, take pains with your studying and preaching." Then he said, "Even more, Timothy, be absorbed in your study and in your preaching." I would daresay there's a small, Dr. Seal, I bet there's a small percentage of Baptist churches that if you polled them, they would say that's top on our list. We want our pastor to be diligent in studying and preaching the word. Now they would include it on there, they'd give it a wink and a nod if you said, "What about?" "Oh yeah, yeah. Gotta preach." But really in their hearts they're not settled on, "That's the primary ministry. Whatever else you do, pastor, you must do that." When Paul tells Timothy take pains with this and be absorbed in it, we might say be up to your ears in this. Exhaust yourself in this activity. And I can say to you, if you're called to preach and you preach with your heart, it's exhausting work. I, I come from a blue collar background and I, I thought early in the ministry if I wasn't sweating and dirty, I hadn't worked. There was just kind of like cheating, get a check, if you done other things that wasn't hands on and it took quite a few years but I realized there is a type of fatigue with the responsibility of study and preaching that is unique to anything else I'd ever done. It is exhausting but there's, it's the proper thing to exhaust yourself in as a man called of God.

Now three simple points. Now there are things I will not unpack here that could be unpacked, but let me give you this exegesis of the text under three basic headings. Number one, notice the charge as to the gravity of the work. The gravity meaning the deep seriousness, the great weightiness of this charge. So Paul begins in verse 1, of, of 2 Timothy 4, with bringing these witnesses to bear before Timothy. He says, "Now, Timothy. I'm, I'm, I'm the esteemed Apostle Paul," now he wouldn't say that maybe, but he is, and he knew the kind of authority and honor and respect that he had from Timothy. So that's already there. He said, "Timothy, let me back that up with the most esteemed witnesses of this charge that I can bring before you in, in efforts to show you the great, serious and weightiness of the charge I'm giving you, that is to preach the word." So here Paul warns Timothy in view of an, of an avenging God and of Christ as his judge to fully discharge the office of preaching.

He calls him in verse 1, "in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead." God has shown his great and severe care for his church when he delivered his precious Son over for her, and he will not allow a negligent minister to go unpunished. Those who are commissioned to care for the souls of men and are unfaithful in preaching the word are in grave and divine danger. Friend, let me tell you, you do anything else in the world before you take the office of pastor and do not have a serious, full-heart conviction about the primary ministry is to preach the word of God. He's to judge the living and the dead. "Timothy, remember who you are going to give an account to."

That phrase "judge the living and the dead" means that none can escape his judgment. I've heard people very crassly and foolishly say, "Well, I'll tell you what, I, I'll just die and go to hell and be with all my buddies." No, you won't. God goes to hell, he's omniscient, he's omnipresent, he's everywhere. God cannot be not in hell but he's there in his wrath, and he's there in his judgment. When you die, you'll not escape God by not going to heaven, you'll run right into God. That's what Paul was telling Timothy. He's the judge of the living in the dead. Nowhere can you go without having to give an account to him. None will escape his judgment.

The calling to the office of preacher is a dangerous calling. It exposes you to a harsher judgment. Sometimes in my early years here, there was quite a challenge to pastoral leadership and pastoral authority, and I learned early on that pastoral authority isn't the real issue, the real issue is pastoral responsibility. If you're not called to care for the eternal souls of men, you don't want the responsibility of doing that. You don't want the responsibility of authority in the church unless you've been called and gifted to carry out the preaching of the word. The primary issue is not the pastor's authority, though that's taught in Scripture, it's the awesome responsibility and accountability he has that the church members do not have. I will give an account for your soul at the judgment seat of Christ. I'll give an account for your wife's soul at the judgment seat of Christ. I will give an account for your children's souls at the judgment seat of Christ, and account in a way that you will not have to give. It's the responsibility God's laid and that's part of what Paul is bearing out, "Timothy, do you realize as a God-called preacher there's a harsher, more serious judgment? Whatever you do, don't neglect your commitment and your calling to preach the word."

James talks about this in James 3:1, "Let not many of you become teachers," I think that's referring to the main office of pastor and teacher in the church. "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." Now, he adds this in verse 1, "and by His appearing and by His kingdom." Paul is just adding weight to the gravity of the charge. You see, Christ now reigns in heaven and on earth, yet on earth his reign is not yet clearly seen. Today on earth, he reigns in the midst of his enemies. On the day of his appearing, he will reign over his enemies. His reign in the earth is veiled for now, and far too often, we see hirelings, false prophets, and other enemies of our Lord who've invaded the sacred pulpit and are spewing milky man-centered mush instead of preaching, "What saith the Scriptures?" The church is under an all-out attack by her enemies yet what Paul is telling Timothy is his kingdom will appear. It will be established on the earth, as it already is now in heaven, and he will reduce to nothing every opposing power and every enemy and unfaithful preachers will be at the top of his list. There'll be a serious accounting for the men who fill the pulpits. Do you know how many pulpits in America today that probably once were aflame with the preaching of the word will get the most nonsensical, man-centered, mushy milky mess instead of faithful preaching of the word of God. There's a plague of it and they think they're wise. They think they're advanced. They think they understand things that the rest of us don't understand. They need to read what Paul says about the accountability they will have.

So Paul gives these words to show the gravity of the charge and the work, and even the most committed, like Timothy, need to be stirred to continued faithfulness. The charge as to the gravity of preaching the word. Secondly, let's notice the charge as to faithful endurance in the work. The faithfully endure in the word because there's always going to be challenges and obstacles. Brothers and sisters, do you not understand if God wants, or rather if the enemy Satan wants to destroy God's work in the earth, he's gonna destroy the local churches, and if he wants to destroy the local churches, he starts with the pulpits. And if he can destroy the local churches in the pulpits, he can destroy a nation. It always flows in that direction.

So we need to have men who will be continued in faithfulness and enduring through the difficulty. He uses the word "hardship" in this text. Let's take it a phrase at a time. Look at verse 2, he says, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season." We all know what that means. In season is when it's an opportune time, when people are interested, when they're receiving the word of God. Uh, we may have right now more names on our seekers list to folks who believe they're converted are and are inquiring about baptism that we've had in a long, long time. And that's encouraging and that's exciting, and, and, uh, I hear good response out of the preaching of the word, maybe we're in something of an opportune time, but we certainly have had long seasons when it was not an opportune time, when preaching was not "in season." And all pastors will have that and let me just go ahead and throw this in at this point. Pastors out there probably for a good 15 years, if you inherit a typical Baptist church, for 15 years you'll have to deal with a lot of out of season preaching, a lot of resistance, a lot of dullness of hearing. But if you'll, if you'll endure, faithfully endure, God the Holy Spirit will slowly regenerate and change the hearts and minds of those people under your preaching until they'll become addicted to the preaching of the word and you won't have to deal with as much out of season preaching as you did in those early days. Understand the church at Ephesus is a relatively new church and when Paul left them, he called the elders together and he basically said, "I know there's a lot of troublemakers in this church." Now he didn't say it that way but that's what he meant because he said, "People are going to rise up and cause trouble and there's going to be an out of season time, so to speak, but you gotta keep faithful in your calling to preach the word."

You know, I remember so often in my, my past ministry here that I was trying to reform the church and we developed our purpose statement and we developed our strategy statements and we decided to start not doing these other things, these other activities until we had those down well because those were biblical, those were biblical methods we must do well before we do other stuff. It's not wrong to do other stuff, but most churches get on the other stuff and forget the main stuff. Then you gotta do more other stuff and more and different other stuff and more and different other stuff. If you stay with the main stuff, the Bible stuff you can or cannot have the other stuff and it doesn't matter. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. But anyway, those were not easy days and I thought it's not working. I don't know where this thing is going. And literally, I'd pray that biblical prayer, "Lord, I believe, but help thou my unbelief." And God would just gradually bring people. I'd meet somebody in the hallway and they'd say, "Pastor,

you know, in the last three or four months, I believe God saved me. My heart's changed. My, my life has changed." And boy, I'd be encouraged, but overall it was not an opportune season at all.

But here's what I would say to pastors out there and small group leaders, for example: teach the word every week. Love those folks. Encourage those folks. When it's not working, we only have two, well, you never know what that other one is gonna be one day for the glory of God. You keep enduring through the hardship. You don't know what God may be doing in people's hearts. I remember, you know, that one thing about being in a place so as long as I've been, I, I've just watched people sit in front of my ministry, who some would just glare at me and I would think, "Man, what is gonna happen here? What are they doing?" And then, then one Sunday I would notice they weren't glaring, but their countenance has changed, and they begin to lean up on their pulpit and listen, just kind of lean forward to listen more intently. Then, lo and behold, a few weeks or months would pass, and I'd be baptizing them in the baptistry. A good number of you used to be my enemies, and now you love me. And not because I'm so charming and wonderful a personality, but because we love the same Christ, we love the same Christ.

And if I could just be a little bit frank and honest and personal this morning, over my decades of pastoral ministering, I found the best preachers aren't the best personality types. Like if you laugh very much, I'm getting feelings hurt, all right. They're not happy jack, slap you on the back, glad-handing politician types. But you know when you sit under that man's preaching, you get the word of God. You're saying that's what I need. I can have a lot of people hug my neck, but you give me the you eternal words of life, that's what the church needs.

And so we have to, Paul, charges Timothy, "Keep on, be ready in season and out of season, faithfully endure through this. You don't know what God may be doing in people's lives." John 3:8, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." You don't know where that winds gonna blow next but we know God in his sovereign purposes or, has ordained to blow the wind of the Holy Spirit in accompaniment to the faithful preaching of the word of God. Brothers and sisters, you, you say, "We might need to do this little gimmicky thing and this little creative thing and that might help my kids get saved," you listen to me: if God does not save your children under the faithful Spirit impassioned preaching the word, then God will not save your children. If they have that, you're doing the most you can do. Yes, do other things. Yes, implore them. Yes, speak to them. Yes, share with them. Yes, command them even if it's appropriate. But make sure they get the preaching of the word of God.

He says, uh, continuing on in this concept of the charge concerning faithful endurance, verse 3, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." He's talking about a time of dullness. "Timothy, it's very normal that there will be a season when the people are indifferent." I'll never forget re, reading about the esteemed Jonathan Edwards, one of the most brilliant Americans who ever lived and possibly the greatest preacher, theologian America has ever had. Jonathan Edwards preached the famous sermon

"Sinners in the hands of an angry God," and literally tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, were converted under the preaching of that sermon all across the eastern seaboard in our early colonies. But Jonathan Edwards writes when he preached "Sinners in the hands of, of an angry God" in his church that so many of the men of his church after the sermon was over, went out on the porch and talked about the hay crop that year. It just, just didn't have an effect. You don't know when God's gonna use it and you gotta be prepared. There's going to be some dull seasons. Maybe you had a great small group class last year, but this one's been a dud so far. Well, maybe your next one will be better. You faithfully endure in the work and the call that God's given you.

Hebrews 5:11 says, Paul writing to the Hebrew church, "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." That happens, those seasons come and let me say to younger pastors out there, the hearing gets better as the decades roll by if you endure faithfully. The hearing gets better as the years roll by if you'll keep on faithfully enduring. And here's the thought, brothers and sisters, all these people who seemed to come to your church or sit in your congregation, and they just, they obviously love the world, they obviously don't have a heart for God and the things of God, but God is longsuffering toward them, is he not? He hasn't judged them and cast them into eternal loss. They're still here, aren't they? And if God is longsuffering should not his preachers be longsuffering? Should not we come back and do the same thing again next week and the same thing again next week? We must be especially diligent to be faithful when there is an open season, when it is in season, we must put the disk in the ground and fallow, plow up, rather, the fallow ground, faithfully sowing the seed while there's an opportune time. This will help us when the cold gale of indifference blows back in because they're going to be seasons of more dullness.

He says in verse 3 continuing on, "Timothy, you've got to have this commitment to faithfully endure because they will not endure sound doctrine." That's what he says in verse 3, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." It's speaking of desertions. "They'll desert you, Timothy. There'll be groups who decide we're not sitting under your ministry. We're going somewhere else." Literally the idea of "they will not endure" means they will not hold themselves back from it. They, they don't have the discipline to hold themselves where they need to be and and they'll follow their emotions, their little fickle, silly, immature emotions and, and, and typically get a group together and go find somewhere else. That's what Paul is telling Timothy. They'll not hold themselves back from doing such a thing.

He says, "they'll want to have their ears tickled," literally it means "itching ears," and itching ears, an ear that's unsettled, it's an ear that's not at rest. "They're not at rest, Timothy, under your preaching of the word." They, they want something different. The time will come when the Spirit-empowered Bible preaching will not be enough for them. The old gospel just doesn't scratch where they itch. However, we must faithfully endure what God called us to do and must not succumb to the trade of the community's popular preachers who furnish the latest tickle. Well, there's a lot of tickling in the Shoals area today in pulpits. Silly, nonsensical, foolish stuff going on in churches. Pastors flying in on cables and crazy, nonsensical stuff. Are you kidding, kidding me? I've got this whole

inspired book. Until we exhaust this completely, this is what we're staying with because you know what? Those fanciful gadgets and gimmicks, those get boring, then you gotta do other stuff. Those get boring, you gotta do other stuff. Here I am 42 years in and we're still doing this stuff and you're still here, much to my amazement. I'm going to tell you, when you're on your deathbed and you start contemplating the holiness of God and the sinfulness of your soul, you won't think one time about the clever, creative, funny, goofy stuff that happened at church. You'll wanna say, "What did the Lord say to me from His word?" Emotionalism seems to rule the day not just in the culture, but even in the church. "If my emotions aren't, if it didn't bless me." Who says you gotta be blessed? You've got to be fed. I don't know about you, but when I was about, my mother was a cook. She was a country cook, collard greens and snap beans and sweet potatoes, homemade cornbread. You put that in your milk when you got through. I didn't like a lot of that stuff at the first. I guess you would say I was force-fed as a child. But boy, I love it now.

You don't follow your emotions about church attendance. You grab yourself by the nape of the neck until your emotions to submit to truth, we're going to hear the word of God this week. Some of you need to grab your wife by the nape of the neck. Not literally, but be a man and say, "Baby, this is where we're going to church. I love you, but this is where we're going to church and I know you feel this and feel that, but you'll feel this and that different ways all week long, we're going to church where we're gonna hear the word of God." Some of you need to get your children by the nape of the neck, "Sweetheart, this is where we're going church." "Yeah, but I don't like..." "Nobody said you had to like it. Who said you had to like it? I expect you to love sin till God changes your heart. We're going where the word of God..." What I'm saying is it's time for men to be men. Amen. Sweet, kind, compassionate, understanding, loving, loving our wives, but you gotta be a man sometimes. I'm getting off track.

God is at work even when there are those who will not endure sound doctrine, even when they were to form a group and decide we're going somewhere else where they'll furnish the latest fashionable thing for the church, and that breaks the pastor's heart and it's discouraging and it's difficult, but you gotta understand, God is working through that. Dr Seal went to pastor down in South Louisiana, and he inherited a church full of unregenerate mean people. And he's sweet, he's kind person. And they wanted to have a community survey, well, they'd been having community church services annually, I think Dr. Seal, and, uh, I don't know if it was the Presbyterian or the Methodist pastor was meeting with with, with, with Tim and they were going to come preach in his pulpit for the community service and Tim got wind that they didn't believe the doctrines of the faith. He heard that now we're not talking about secondary, we're talking about foundational doctrines of the faith. And he looked at that man and said, "I, I just have to tell you, Sir, you won't preach in my pulpit." Oh my goodness. The people of the church came unglued. They weren't used to having a man of God as their pastor. And so you know what happened? They fired him. You know what he did? He faithfully endured. He started preaching at an old, broke down, closed down hotel lobby, I think it was. I don't know if it had running water, it stunk, and all mildewed, and people started coming and people started coming and people started coming and turned out that church became much, much larger than the one that fired him. You know why? Because he faithfully

endured. He didn't change his method. He kept on. That's what God calls men of God to do because, you see, God was at work. God was at work. It wasn't fun but God was at work in South Louisiana. I got to go down there a few times and preach for him and what a sweet and, and good and healthy church God let him establish down there.

Well, I'm going to skip some of this, but enduring hardship, let me say this about this because this is true of all Christians. Oh my goodness, my time is about gone and my notes aren't nearly gone. But let me say this: one of the powerful things about honoring Christ in this world, and it's really true for preachers, is the attacks from within. I'm talking about this stuff that creeps up in a minister's heart and mind, the discouragement, the anxiety, the fear, the doubt. It can seemingly spring out of nowhere even in a faithful pastor's heart. None other than the esteemed Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, said that, "Beneath the castle of the, of a despair is a dungeon, and that's where I live most of the time." Wow. Have you ever read Spurgeon's sermons? My, what a preacher. What rich doctrine and powerful presentations and yet Spurgeon himself said, "I, I live in the dungeon of the castle of despair."

There's just a haunting depression and warfare that can go on in a pastor's heart in mind but what Paul is telling Timothy, "Even in those seasons, you faithfully endure." You know what you learn to do? You do the next thing. You don't know what, just do the next thing, and that's a word for many of you here. Open the word of God, what's your role in life, husband, wife, child, whatever it is, what does the Bible say? You do the next thing. Get up that next morning and do the next thing. For me, the next thing during those hard seasons was getting ready to preach again Sunday and I literally grabbed myself by the nape of the neck, got in the study, didn't feel like it but tried to faithfully endure through the hardship. You see, God has a purpose for sending you weak, frail men into the battle to lead you. That's because 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 tells us, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels," remember my translation of that? We have this treasure in common peanut butter jars. That's all I am and that's all you are. The treasure is Christ but he puts it in us very common, ordinary vessels. "So that," here's why he does that, "so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves." So you should be able to look at Jeff Noblit and know something about Jeff, Noblit say, "That wasn't Jeff Noblit. God did that through that man." That's what you're supposed to say. That's what you're supposed to conclude.

I live on an elevation, they call it a mountain. Actually, I don't live all the way on top of it, the Wheelers live at the top. They look down on me. But I look down on Doug Lance and he's at the bottom. But when you come off that elevation, a lot of times and, and Doug and the Wheelers, a lot of times there's fog up on the top, but when I get all the way down at the bottom, there's no fog. I thought it was supposed to be opposite and fog was in the valleys, but very often the fog is on the top of the mountain. But if I stop when I hit the fog, I wouldn't have come out of it. You see, that's what you got when the fog of doubt, despair, discouragement, anxiety and fear, you've got to faithfully endure so you can get on through the fog and soon enough the light of God's rays will dissipate the fog and you'll see clearly again. That's the way our discouragement is at times. We've got to do the next thing for God and keep on keeping on.

IV, and I, and I'll be quick here, I promise. No, no. III, I'm sorry. The charge as to the continuity of the work as we get to verses 6 through 8, and there's things I'm not unpacking, I understand that, but I wanted to hammer out these main points. Paul says in verses 6 and 7, "Now Timothy, I am already being poured out as a drink offering," this is verse 6, "and the time of my departure has come." My martyrdom is just any moment now perhaps? That's what he's writing. Verse 7, but "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." What he's saying here is that Paul lays his whole ministry before Timothy as an example. "You see, Timothy, there's a continuity to this. You've got to realize you're not alone. I've lived this reality. Now, Timothy, you take the baton and you be faithful and live it out." And he's already told Timothy, "Now you found some faithful men that you'll train in the local church, and then they'll go and they'll also carry this out."

There will be faithful men who will heed the charge after Timothy's day, just like they were faithful men who heeded the charge before Timothy's day. Timothy is to carry on in the church, planting evangelistic work that Paul had Paul carried on for, from Christ and from the faithful preacher of the, of the old dispensation. Now Timothy must carry on and pass it on to still others. Here's my point. Small group leader, person who wants to honor God, pastor, you're not alone. You did not begin this process and it will not end with you. In each and every generation there's a link in the chain of church history. Let us not be a weak link. Let's stay at the charge in season and out of season. Let's humble ourselves under the gravity of the charge. Let's commit to faithfully endure in our charge, and let's commit to the reality that there's a continuity to this charge. Didn't start with us. It won't end with us. We're to make sure our link is strong and solid. If we do so, then we'll have the assurance that the Apostle Paul says he will have in verse 8, "in the future there is laid up 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 loved His appearing."

Now, Paul never wavered and he never failed. Now he did fall. He did sin, but he got back up. He finished the course God had sent for him. His death will be soon. At one time, Paul's course was before him but now Paul says, "I'm at the end. Now my course is behind me." And he says in verse 8, "there's laid up for me the crown of righteousness." This is God's layaway plan. You ladies still have a layaway plan? Do they still do that? I know my mom always did that around Christmas because she didn't have the money to pay for everything up front, and she'd pay on our Christmas gifts and put them on layaway. Well, Paul says there's laid away for us the crown of righteousness. It's ours. Our name's on it. And by the way, it's not paid in installments. It's been paid in full. It's all paid for and we get the blessing of it.

He said it's the crown of righteousness. You know, I think we think wrongly about heaven. We seem to focus a lot on the fact that heaven is a place of joy and peace and love and no suffering and no pain and no death, absolutely it is and that's wonderful but it is a place of true righteousness. You see, those things are the fruit of, you can't have those without righteousness. You see, what the flesh wants is to be fleshly and sinful and get all

that stuff too. You don't get that. You get the love, joy and peace and no suffering and no death and all the rest of the glories of heaven because you'll become righteous. That's the crown of righteousness, I believe. That's the interpretation of things, I believe. You'll be crowned with the true righteousness of your head, Jesus Christ. You'll know it in full actuality then, and then you will know in the full the love, the peace, the rest, no sickness, no disease, no pain, no sorrow, no death because finally you'll be righteous and all of those things are the fruits of righteousness.

He says, "the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award that to me on that day." The Lord, the righteous Judge. Now think about it. Rome's judges had adjudicated Paul's case and found him guilty and condemned him to death but in actuality what Paul is saying is, "I want you to know something, Timothy, there's an empire greater than the Roman Empire, there's a King higher than a Roman Caesar, there's a court higher than a Roman court, there's a law higher than Rome's law, and there's a Judge higher than a Roman court judge. Rome's judges have found me guilty, but they are unrighteous judges, but my Judge is the only true and righteous Judge and he will award to me on that day the crown of righteousness and all the holy and eternal blessings that come with it."

But he gives a qualification here. He said, "now not only to me," last part of verse 8, "not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." Greek scholars tell us that phrase "who have loved" means you have loved his appearance, appearing and you still love his appearing. There are only two ultimate loves, only two and they're both right here in this section of Scripture. In verse 10 he says, "You know, Demas isn't with me, Demas loved this present world. Demas loved this present world." You're either one of those who loved and still loves his appearance, appearing, or you love this present world. There must be, mark my words, there must be an abiding resonating theme in your heart that says, "Yeah, I enjoy a lot of things in this world. I'm thankful for the common graces, but there's something in me that is unsettled and longs to see my Savior. There's something in me that longs to be with Him and in His kingdom." The old song says, "And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." Are you one who loves this present world? I didn't say you couldn't enjoy some of the things of the present world. Are you one who loves this present world or do you love his appearing? If so, there is for you from the true righteous Judge a crown of righteousness and all the benefits and blessings and glories that go with it.

Paul is locked in the squalor of a Roman dungeon cell and he's writing the final words as the apostle to the Gentiles to his young understudy preacher, Timothy. He says, "Timothy, whatever else you ever do, no matter how hard it is, preach the word." Church, I cannot express deeply enough my gratitude to you that many, many years ago, you drew a line in the sand and you said, "We're going to free our pastor to study and preach." And I think the fruit of that has been not only hopefully changes in our own lives but the expression of our ministry to the ends of the earth. You can't do what we've done if you don't free your pastor to dream and pray and study. "Whatever else you do, Timothy, and you'll have to fight some people to get free to do it at times, study, preach the word."