

The sermon

Intro

What is that you want to hear?

A good health report. You're getting a raise. A promotion. You've been hired. This boy or girl likes me. Your favorite team made a great trade. Your favorite movie franchise is coming out with a new trilogy. Affirmation from a loved one. I love you. I've decided to follow Jesus. I've been persuaded to agree with your theological position.

There's many things we want to hear. Question. Do you want to hear God's word?

What if, during a fruits of the Spirit class or a Sunday morning sermon, it becomes clear that you're lacking in a particular virtue? Do you still want to hear? Do you want people who will tell you the truth? Do you invite correction?

Paul counsels us that what we want to hear directs where we'll look.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Teachers, preach God's word (4:1-2)

I 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: – 4:1

Paul's laying out the seriousness, the enormity, of preaching. When I preach, I'm preaching in presence of God the Father and God the Son. Their witnesses to what's coming out of my mouth. That's supposed to make me take my preaching very seriously. Not casually.

In the future, at his 2nd coming, Jesus will appear visibly for all to see with unmistakable signs. At that time he'll enter into judgment with everyone who's ever been born. Those who are alive when he returns. Those who've died before his return.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹ for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." ¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. – Romans 14:10-12

One day each one of us believers will stand before God's judgment seat for evaluation. Christians whose sins are forgiven and whose inheritance in the kingdom of God is sure and certain. At that time, I will give an account for the sermons I've preached.

The point? The fact that I will be personally evaluated by Jesus on that day is supposed to motivate me to do my very best when I teach/preach.

What am I supposed to preach?

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. – 4:2

“preach” = to publicly, announce/proclaim a message.

If there's a distinction between teaching and preaching, teaching is explaining God's truth. Helping people to understand their Bible. Preaching is calling people to act upon God's truth. But you can't teach the Bible without calling for action.

Bobbi and Mike can't explain God's word without calling for some sort of response. We don't just tell you facts about God. We also tell you to love God, trust God, tell others about God, obey God.

What must I preach?

"the word" = the 66 books that compose the Bible. I don't teach myself, my opinions, my preferences. I don't teach gun safety, knitting, World War II history, the weather, the news, the stock market, music theory, etc. I teach God's word.

To the extent my thoughts are pulled out of the words in the passage, I'm preaching God's word. If I'm ignoring the words that are there. If I'm inserting my own thoughts, I'm teaching my thoughts, opinions, assumptions, etc. Not God's word. To be preaching God's word rather than something else, we need to take pains to handle the words that are in the passage we're looking at. If not, we might be preaching something other than God's word. That's why my sermon points are pulled out of the words in the passage. To prevent me from imposing ideas that are nowhere to be found.

"be ready in season and out of season"

"in season and out of season" means whether it's a favorable time for God's word or an unfavorable time. Two years ago preaching God's word would have created a bit more of a backlash, public outcry. After Charlie Kirk's murder, it appears to be a more favorable time for talking about Jesus. But whether Jesus is celebrated or despised, you preach the word.

"reprove" = verbal exposure of sin in an attempt to bring about self-awareness of sin. Persuade. Convince.

"rebuke" = stronger than reprove. Telling a person to stop. Warning them that if this behavior doesn't stop, there will be consequences.

"exhort" = encouraging an obedient response to the Bible. Urging you to act on God's word.

"with complete patience" = long-suffering/constraint/patience towards others. Used of God restraining his wrath. Bearing with those I preach to. A fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) we'll get to rather shortly in Sunday school.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. – Colossians 3:12-13

Because sin resides in believers' hearts, believers need to bear with one another in the church. Because hearers might be slow to embrace the truth and obey it, preachers need to bear with those they teach. Because preachers should be making progress (*"so that all may see your progress"* – 1 Tim 4:15), hearers need to bear with preachers who are in the process of getting better.

The idea is I need to bear with questions, disagreements, push backs, suspicions, etc. The assumption is some will resist what's taught. Or some will be slow to pick up what's taught. A good preacher gives time for God's word to take effect.

"and teaching" = teaching is part of preaching. You can't preach the word without teaching the word.

Application to hearers

This is what you ought to want out of a preacher: God's word. Is he giving me God's word?

The challenge is, to want God's word is to want correction! When a preacher explains and urges God's word, he can't help but correct your thinking and challenge your desires. When sitting through the fruits of the Spirit, I can't help but be challenged. Is this me? Am I irritable? Am I rude? Am I thankful?

In fact, I can't help but be corrected when preparing sermons myself. That's how God's word works. God's purpose in salvation is newness of life. Newness of life comes through the correction found in God's word.

To long for God's word is to be a person who invites correction.

We do this together. We bear with one another. We're corrected together. We grow together. We do the work together. We beg for God's help and blessing. Together.

Practical question: do I want the correction that God's word provides?

Point 2: Congregation, endure God's word (4:3-4)

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. – 4:3-4

Paul foresees dark days for the church.

“people will not endure sound teaching” = people won't want Jesus' gospel, the apostles' doctrine, *“the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). So they'll look elsewhere.

“having itching ears” = they have ears that want to be itched. The itching is satisfied by teaching. But the Christian faith doesn't relieve the itch.

“they will accumulate for themselves teachers” = not willing to endure the Christian faith, they will turn to other ideas. In doing so, they pile up a number of teachers. Just not gospel-preaching teachers.

to suit their own passions” is why they can't endure the Christian faith. It doesn't fit their sinful passions. So they look elsewhere. They're successful. There's plenty out there who will affirm their sin.

Here morality drives theology. Desire to commit sin is the root of their rejection of the Christian faith. Sometimes people don't believe because they love their sin. Sometimes people want to believe a lie because it's compatible with their sin. People look for teachers who will tell them what they want to hear!

“and will turn away from listening to the truth” = the Christian faith discourages their sin. So they stop listening to gospel-preaching teachers.

“wander off into myths” = in seeking out teachers that affirm their sin, they wind up believing lies. **“myths”** = made up stories, tales, legends. Not from God. Manmade fictions.

The picture is these folks have sinful passions. They have an itching for teaching that affirms their sinful passions. God's word isn't satisfying their itching. So they look elsewhere for teachers that will affirm their sin. They find an abundance. In the process, they wind up believing a bunch of manmade fictions.

Likely you know people like this. Christianity doesn't give them the answers they want. So they look elsewhere. They'll believe anything. As long as it accepts their sin.

New Age

That's the appeal of New Age spirituality. Free from the rules and beliefs of Christianity's truth claims, you're free to customize your own pick and choose spirituality around your own preferences. You get a positive message about yourself that encourages self-esteem, self-reliance, self-improvement. You don't have to subject yourself to embarrassing doctrines and morals that don't fit with modern sensibilities.

Why are people willing to believe in a spiritual system with zero proof that they essentially make up themselves? Because it fits their desires.

Often people simply reject the gospel because it's not what they want. They want sin. They want to feel good about themselves. They want a "faith" that fits in with the culture.

Application

What does this mean for us?

There's a temptation to revise the faith to fit our own desires. There's a temptation to want to be free from the shackles of moral constraints and doctrines that make us out of step with the people we live around. There's a temptation to seek out teachers who will tell us what we want to hear.

We need to reject these urges and call them what they are: idolatry. Creating a god to suit our sin, our desires, our comfort.

I preach what I find in the Bible, not what I think you want to hear. Personally, I want to believe the things that I find in the Bible. I want my beliefs to be grounded in God's word, not my preferences. Not my desires. I want to embrace God for who he truly is, not what people want him to be. My desire is to love the God who truly is. Not a figment of my imagination. Not a mixture of truth and human assumptions. Whatever God says and does is just and right and good and helpful and worthy of praise.

When our goal is to understand God rightly we won't be disappointed by what we find. If our goal is to make God conform to our desires and expectations, or to make God conform to the wishes of the non-Christians we're trying to reach, we're fighting a losing battle. Too many "hard" passages to explain away. Too many passages that don't fit our expectations. Everything fits together beautifully when we let the whole Bible speak. [PAUSE]

You should want to hear truth. You should say, "Speak, O Lord."

Practical question: do I want preachers/teachers who give me God's word? Or something else?

Point 3: Be clear-headed and faithful (4:5)

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. – 4:5

"you" = Timothy.

"*always be sober-minded*" = literally sober, not drunk. Self-control over our thoughts and our desires. A restrained life. Alert at all times to what's going on inside our heart.

What does this mean for you? In all things, be alert to where your heart is at. Parents, where is your heart at with your children? Children, where is your heart at with your parents? Church people, where is your heart at with the people sitting beside you? Christian, where is your heart at with those non-Christians in your life?

We're supposed to be alert to what's going on within our thought life. Measuring our thoughts against Scripture. So we don't do anything sinful and rash. Think biblically before your act. Slow down!

"*endure suffering*" = keep doing the work despite legal threats, the slander of false teachers, division in the church, the heartbreak of people swerving from the truth. Continue.

What does this mean for you? Sometimes life is hard. Challenges in multiple directions. But you keep going. You don't let opposition stop you. You don't let threats/worries make you quit. You endure in the strength God provides. "*be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus*" (2:1).

"*do the work of an evangelist*" = Timothy might not be gifted as an evangelist, but he does what the evangelist does.

In his preaching to the congregation, he evangelizes non-Christians present. In his correction of false teachers, he evangelizes them. He evangelizes people swerving from the truth. He evangelizes non-Christians outside the church.

What does this mean for you? You may not be gifted as an evangelist, but you do what an evangelist does. You speak the gospel. You urge people to believe and repent. You pray for opportunities. You're alert to opportunities. You speak when opportunities arise. You're thinking about the non-Christians God has chosen to intersect your life. You're praying for them. You're looking for opportunity to speak.

Maybe you'd agree with me, but you're thinking, "God, this is really hard for me." So tell God and say, "Give me wisdom, courage, love. Stir my heart. Strengthen me. Show me your power. Use my words to convert sinners."

"fulfill your ministry" = to fully accomplish the task at hand. To finish the job.

What does this mean for you? In God's providence you have responsibilities before you. You fulfill the task. Tasks like church member, place of service in the church (fellowship, music, etc.), friend, evangelist, employee, student, spouse, parent, child, etc. You seek to accomplish your responsibilities in a way that pleases God.

What's a mature Christian? Someone who fulfills their responsibilities well.

Question: what responsibilities am I fulfilling today?

Conclusion

We've learned that what we should want to hear is God's word. We've learned that God's word involves correction. So we might be tempted to avoid God's word and look elsewhere.

Maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian.

Where are you looking? Are you willing to believe anything, so long as it fits your desires? Are you looking for excuses to reject Jesus, because he doesn't fit your desires?

Better is to come to grips with your sin: doing life your own way, not God's way. And seeing your need to be rescued from your passions. Not becoming further enslaved to your passions.

What does Jesus have to do with your passions?

On the cross Jesus died as a substitute to that whoever believes will experience forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus relieves the guilt problem. The guilt over all the wrong you've done. Jesus' death is worthy to take away the guilt that comes with sinful passions.

Jesus rescues us from the passions themselves. By giving us a new heart with new desires.

How do you respond? Confess your sins. Recognize your only hope is Jesus' death taking away your sins. Ask for God's forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' death. And trust that God forgives all who come to him through Jesus.

Christian, want the word. Want correction. Don't look elsewhere.