

Helping each other be healthy finishers. 2 Timothy 4:1-8

For all

Our passage, 2 Timothy 4:1-8, is often preached at ordinations and licencings, where we authorise someone – after their gifts have been recognised and they have been trained and tested – to preach the gospel in a congregation. I have taught it in those contexts – and having heard Paul's charge to Timothy you might think that is where it is best suited.

But it shouldn't be confined to that context or applied only to those embarking on full time ministry.

This is a passage for us all.

It is not just that amongst us there may be some the Lord is calling to ministry, whom He wants to engage through this word with what is involved in fulfilling that calling.

This is for all of us because we go through the Christian life together. To be saved is also to be brought into God's family, to be joined to a Christian community. We are pilgrims together travelling towards our goal – the heavenly Jerusalem,

or to use Paul's images, every believer is engaged in the same fight, is running the same race.

Our perseverance in our journey, our steadfastness in our fight, our coming to the end of our race well is either helped or hindered by the Christian community we belong to.

It helps if we are part of a faithful, encouraging, loving as Jesus has loved us community, a community that spurs one another on to run well

And we will be hindered in our race, and maybe even fall by the wayside, if we are part of a community where truth is obscured, sin tolerated, lovelessness or cold formalism takes root

But to be a faithful community – you need faithful pastors.

Those to whom you entrust the authority to teach among you have a big role in sustaining the health of a congregation as followers of Jesus by keeping the gospel of Jesus, the Word of God, central to your common life.

And Christian communities are often like the proverbial fish, rotting from the head. Where the minister starts substituting in his own or the congregation's life other words in place of the word of Christ, unhealthy decay soon sets in.

Having a faithful pastor is important for running the race well, but faithful pastors are also helped and encouraged by faithful congregations. Their work is facilitated, encouraged, by those who respond to and encourage faithful teaching

Good congregations need good pastors

Good pastors need good congregations

We all have a role to play and an interest in being the congregation that can help us persevere in our faith, endure in the fight, run our race to the end.

And that is why 2 Tim 4:1-8 is for us all

It gives us a description of the work of the good pastor – the pastor you want to get and have – either here or in whatever congregation you may be in in the future

And it also gives shows us the congregation you should want to be if you want to sustain faithful ministry – by describing what you must not be like

Does all this as it reminds us that the goal of our race, the crown of righteousness, is for all who run to the end.

So let's look at the kind of Pastor you want to get, or, if you are ever called to the work of pastoring a congregation, the kind of Pastor you must be.

2 Timothy 4: I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom: ² Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching.

The Pastor to get – what to look for in a pastor vv. 1-5

Serious

Paul's charge to Timothy is very solemn, calling God and the Lord Jesus to witness what Paul is entrusting to Timothy, the work of preaching the gospel. The seriousness of this charge is brought home by reminding Timothy that the Lord Jesus who is a witness to this commissioning is the judge of the living and the dead – the one who will hold Timothy and all of us to account and punish or, as Paul confidently expects [4:8], reward justly;

and the Lord Jesus is not some formal, fictional witness invoked in a parroted phrase. He is living and mighty, the one who will appear, who will be revealed from heaven at the close of the age and establish God's eternal kingdom.

Preaching the word is serious, and you want as a Pastor someone who is serious, who knows that they will give account for every word they speak, for every action, for the way they themselves obey the Lord Jesus, give account to the one who sees and knows all, who is never fooled

Someone who is serious because they know what they do matters to our God and Saviour, matters for eternity

This is unfashionable. Have you noticed how increasingly commentary and guidance on life in Australia is given by comedians.

Comedians will review the week for you

People who will give insight with a laugh, not get you down by taking things too seriously

We prefer light, any bad news sugar coated

But you want as a pastor someone who is fully convinced of the significance of what they are doing – preaching the gospel of God for which they will be accountable to the living Lord

Someone who is not cynical – as if it doesn't really matter because nothing really matters

Not casual – as if it doesn't deserve everything you have

Not play acting, a hypocrite – but someone of integrity who knows their life is open to God, and He is never fooled.

You want that person for conscious of judgment and the coming eternal kingdom they will bring home to you the seriousness of how you are responding to God's word

The seriousness of sin, the sin that will exclude you from God's reign [1 Cor. 6:9-11, Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 5:5]

The seriousness of holding fast to Jesus and not drifting from him, for no-one else will save you [Heb]

Look for seriousness, someone who still trembles at God's Word

And look for someone whose ministry is centred on that word.

Who will ² *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching.*

Word centred

What does a word centred ministry look like?

Firstly, they Preach the word. This is more than being animated in a pulpit.

Paul had declared himself to be in 1:11 appointed by God to be a 'herald'. The Greek word is Kerux. Here he uses the related verb. Timothy is to 'herald', proclaim the word, and that word is the word of the gospel, the word that is all about Jesus and His defeat of death, the word that brings life and immortality to light [2 Tim. 1:10-11], the power of God to save [Romans 1:16-17]

You are to look for someone who knows that their central task is making known God's gospel word, God's word for the whole world. It is a message from God, whose content is given by God.

Entrusted by God with that word they know they are stewards – and what is required is not novelty, but faithfulness and clarity in delivering the message God has sent out.

And it is God's word – God breathed as Paul has just said [3:15-16] – so they should be bold in making it known, clear on its authority, confident of its effectiveness

In that word God commands that we repent and believe in Jesus [Acts 17:30-31] – so they shouldn't speak the gospel as if they are giving lifestyle advice which people can take or leave, or are here to give you tips about how to live a better life, or it doesn't matter whether you respond or not

And they are to be Always ready with the word – in season and out of season. If it is convenient or inconvenient, opportune or inopportune

Whenever he can, whether he thinks the circumstances are favourable or not – he is to be ready to make the gospel known

And as he preaches he is to Apply the Word to the circumstances of their hearers – correct, rebuke and encourage

If someone's thinking or understanding or behaviour falls short – they are to help them improve. Point out the problem and show them the better understanding, the better way to live

If someone is wilfully embracing error, or wanting to keep on sinning – they should rebuke. Tell them it must stop if they are to go on with Christ – as Paul does 1 Cor. 6, Eph. 5

If someone is weary, worn down – they must encourage

Like a good doctor they don't use the one medicine for every condition.

They match their treatment to the individual's condition, their application of Scripture to the circumstances of their hearers

And all their dealings are characterised by patience and teaching [2:24, 3:10].

Patience – while they expect change and growth in response to the word, they recognise that takes time. They accept in others the frailty they know in themselves – that people can be forgetful, or pre-occupied, or defensive.

That People can slip back into long held habits of thinking and acting – even when committed to thinking and acting otherwise

People can know moments of weakness – in loneliness, or weariness, or anger

It's not one slip and you're out,

It's not immediate conformity or endure angry rejection

There must be the patience of grace, that when it meets failure exhorts to confess, be forgiven, go on

The patience of being able to point them to a patient, forgiving yet powerful Saviour

The patience that looks for and gives time for the new life of the Spirit to grow to maturity

And all their preaching, correction, rebuke, and encouragement is characterised by teaching

Disciples are made by being taught all our Lord has commanded—

it is through teaching people grow in godliness.

Teaching is what Paul modelled – in dealing with the Corinthian's competitive boasting

He didn't resort to the exercise of naked authority – I'm an apostle, do what I say

He addressed the issues by the patient explanation of the Cross

Persuading them to change thinking and behaviour by helping them understand better what it means to be saved by a crucified Saviour, saved by grace

People grow in faith through being taught the gospel, for through the gospel they grow in knowledge of our Lord Jesus, and realise how loving and mighty He is, how worthy of our trust, and they grow in knowledge of His will

Christ's people need to hear Christ's word for conviction of Christ's will. It cannot come by co-ercion or manipulation

So look for someone who pastors with an open bible – whether it is opened in the memory, or an open book, who takes every opportunity to teach

Who should you want to get for a pastor?

Someone whose ministry is word centred – who proclaims the gospel as God's message to the world, knows they are stewards of that message, who is always ready in any circumstance to speak of Jesus, who can apply that word to individual circumstance, and who in everything shows patience and teaches – so that change and growth come through understanding and conviction of the truth.

2 Timothy 4:³ For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. ⁴ They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths.

And who will do all that diligently – so that they seize the time they have, for times when people are receptive to sound teaching can quickly be lost

the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine

But whatever the reception they receive, they must have the character and conviction that will allow them to fulfill their ministry

2 Timothy 4:⁵ But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Committed to fulfilling his ministry

This is the kind of person you should be looking for, and trying to be yourself.

Self controlled in everything. The sense, as one commentator put it, is that Timothy is to be 'free from every form of mental and spiritual 'drunkenness'. Look for a pastor who is free from excess, free from being ruled by his passions, who is not rash or confused

Someone who will not lose their head when facing opposition, not panicked by fear, not provoked to anger

And someone who will not be intoxicated by success, who will vainly think success is because of them, and not the power of God's word, and focus people on themselves and not Christ

You want someone always connected to, grounded in, reality – that Christ is Lord and we are servants, that HE is the one who saves and we are sinners saved by His grace, that it is God who gives the growth and all the glory is His

Someone who will Endure suffering – this is where Paul started, encouraging Timothy to endure suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God 1:8

And Paul has shown in the letter that suffering can come in all forms

Violence from those outside the church as Paul encountered in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra

Being caught up in the hard times of the last days caused by sinful humanity

From the opposition to the gospel of those inside the church who seek to frustrate and abandon the truth

Such suffering can be physical and emotional

Imprisonment and beatings, and also grief and abandonment and slander

The good pastor endures with the strength God supplies – and does not give up preaching and teaching the word

And he will keep on with the work of an evangelist [Like Paul in prison Phil 1]

He will Seek Jesus' sheep with Jesus' word, Jesus' gospel

You want a pastor who will keep the main things the main things

Sin and judgment and salvation through faith in Christ alone

Who will never tire of calling people to repentance and to put their faith in the Lord Jesus

A pastor who will fulfill their ministry – they will remain focused on the service entrusted to them,

They won't see the work as a hobby, or a job - clock on and then clock off – but a calling

They won't withdraw from it, and give their time and thinking to other things

Someone who lives to hear the commendation of their master

When you come to call a pastor, that is the pastor you want to get

When you move church, that is the kind of pastor you want to sit under

This is the kind of Pastor you should be praying your pastors will be

It is for your good

But good pastors, to persevere, need good congregations

How can you be a good congregation, what are you to look for in yourself?

The congregation to be – what to look for in yourself vv. 3-4

2 Timothy 4:³ For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. ⁴ They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Here we learn what we should be by seeing what we should not be

A welcome for the word

Rather than be people who cannot tolerate sound doctrine, we have to be people who welcome and delight in sound doctrine – the health giving, wholesome, teaching of the Scriptures read in the light of the gospel [1Tim 1:10, 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; Tit. 1:9, 2:1]

Every believer who can should be reading the word for ourselves and seeking to grow in understanding, becoming people who are convinced of its goodness by conforming our lives to its truth. And we should come to church, when we can, expecting it to be taught.

Not to hear opinions or practical tips for a better life but God's word taught clearly

Not for exciting experiences or occasional revelations, but to have the God breathed word do its work in our lives

And delighting in the word also means being Willing to accept its application to our lives in correction, rebuke and encouragement – that where this is administered with an open bible we are glad for it.

Welcoming the application of God's word to our lives will encourage its practice by your pastors, and that is good for us, though in the moment it can be hard to hear

Good for it is life saving to have sin – our sexual immorality or our greed or our thoughtless pride - rebuked, our errors corrected, our spirit sustained by a word of encouragement

And we do that – welcome the word, accept rebuke correction and encouragement, because we Remember whose church it is. It is not our church, but Jesus' church which He builds and rules through His word.

And we remember what is at stake in abiding in His truth – eternal life, being reckoned righteous on the day of our Lord's appearing.

The congregation to be is the congregation that welcomes the word –

And the congregation that resists the temptation to make ourselves, our desires and preferences, central

A resistance to the temptation to make yourself central

2 Timothy 4:³ For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. ⁴ They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths.

We live in a consumer society where the constant message is that your desires and preferences are to be satisfied, that you have a right to have your tastes catered to, and where that is not happening– you should go elsewhere.

And many live in an online world where the search algorithm takes you only to those sites that echo your opinions and reinforce your views

It is so easy to bring this expectation that we should only hear what we want to hear to church,

So easy to expect that when we meet our opinions should be reinforced, not challenged

Our interests catered to

We can start to look for teachers who will tell us what we want to hear

Accumulate them

Easy today – search the net – and you can get that list of favourite teachers

Who satisfy your curiosity, tell you what you want to hear, give you the sense that you are in the know.

Want to be healthy and wealthy – who doesn't? You will find preachers who will tell you you are entitled to that, and how you can get that health and wealth you desire – and that those who aren't – its because of their lack of faith

Want your greed tolerated

Your sexual immorality endorsed – you will find preachers to help you be comfortable with that

Or maybe its politics – you will find preachers who will speak to your concern for personal responsibility and reinforce your suspicion of government, or feed your concern for social justice as the outworking of the Christian life

Do you want your privilege endorsed, or your rights championed? There are preachers for that

Are you Curious about the future, about the content of the end times, the exact meaning of prophecies – you will find preachers who will satisfy your desire and make you think you are amongst the specially enlightened – and soon all you are listening to are detailed explanations of obscure verses finding fulfilment in another time, not in the Lord Jesus.

And you can accumulate them – on the net, on the conference circuit, in the library

But sometimes it is not content people demand – but style. We all have preferences and different learning styles – but some make them absolute – whether it is length, or illustrations and stories – and refuse to listen to those who don't conform to their stylistic preferences, often unaware of how culturally conditioned they are.

In all of these situations – whether content or style – the test of whether we will listen is

Us – what we want, what we prefer

And where this happens – inevitably – there will be drift

People will turn away from the truth and turn aside to myths

When you just want to hear an echo of yourself from the pulpit, when you set yourself up as the judge of what should be said and how it should be said

You will mistake the part for the whole and neglect other things God has said – about suffering and sickness, or about the dangers of wanting to be rich, or ...

And Your God will become a fiction of your own making, constrained within the limits of your desires and preferences, who can't speak to you in any other way than the way you demand

There is no health there.

You can't thrive on myths, just like you can't live on air.

To be a good congregation, a congregation that can help each other run the race to the end, we have to keep welcoming the Word – in all it says, however it comes, from whoever speaks it

And resist the temptation to make ourselves the test of what can be said and how it can be said

We should test what's said by the Word, but not make our own desires the test of what the Word can say.

How are you going with that?

Are you content with opening the word and working through it, to hear what it has to say

One of the reasons our regular diet is systematic expository preaching through the bible

Not topical preaching

is to keep what God is saying central – not what I want to say, or what you might want to hear, but what He has said and wants His people to hear

Know the pastor you should get

Know the congregation we should be

And together look to and long for the end of our race

The goal to attain vv. 6-8

2 Timothy 4:⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing.

In verse 6 we see, we feel. what lies behind the seriousness and the urgency of Paul's charge to Timothy

Paul is going – he knows he will soon depart this earth, rescued by the Lord through death, through his anticipated execution, to His heavenly kingdom [4:18]

He speaks of his death as a drink offering [Phil 2:17]. A drink offering was the pouring out of some wine that accompanied sacrifice in the temple – accompanied, for example, the daily offerings [Ex. 29:40, Lev. 23:13]

It wasn't atoning, but it was worship acceptable to God, holy.

The world will see Paul's execution as a criminal as shameful.

But his death in faithful service of Jesus, a martyr's death, says Paul, is a sacrifice that accompanies the atoning sacrifice of Christ, purposeful, holy and pleasing to God

And as he contemplates his death Paul can say

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

He has come to the end.

That's a reminder. There is an end to our race.

It's not retirement – that is moving to another context of service.

It's death, and sooner or later – the fight finishes, the noble struggle to love and follow Jesus in this life, the contest with the world, the flesh and the devil concludes

The race ends

It's important for all of us to remember that

Sometimes the struggle seems unending – and we fear for our strength

The course stretching out beyond the horizon, beyond our sight – and we fear for our endurance

But there is an end,

And won't it be good then, to say by God's grace *⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

For there is a prize for those who finish the race

⁸ There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing.

Paul looks forward to the crown of righteousness which the Lord will give him on that day – the final day, the day of judgment – confidently, for the Lord is the righteous judge, who never fails in His commitments

And This crown is ‘righteousness’ itself – the crown which is righteousness, being reckoned righteous on the last day, someone who is justified in God’s sight by faith in the crucified and risen Jesus

What a prize that is

To be righteous on that day is to have heaven’s door opened

To enjoy Eternal peace with the almighty and holy God

It is to be assured of rising with Christ in bodies that are incorruptible, glorious and mighty

It is to be able to drink from the river of life in the new Jerusalem, and to see God’s face

And it is certain – for the Lord, Paul’s Lord, the one whose faith he has kept, is the judge

And this crown is not just for Paul

but to all those who have loved his appearing.

IN this letter ‘appearing’ has been used both of Christ coming to earth to save [2 Tim. 1:10] and of His coming appearing in glory – in v.1, which is the usual sense in Paul’s other uses [2 Thess. 2:8, 1 Tim. 6:14, Tit. 2:13].

2 Timothy 1: ¹⁰ This has now been made evident through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

2 Timothy 4: I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom

And loved speaks of a settled and enduring disposition of our affection and desire.

All who loved His appearing are those who delight in Christ and have set their whole hope on Him, who rejoice in the completion of His work on earth and long for His revealing in His rightful glory

Who now say with the Spirit and the bride

Revelation 22: ¹⁷ Both the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” Let anyone who hears, say, “Come!” ²⁰ He who testifies about these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

They love the Lord Jesus

They have been captivated by His love, His goodness, His truth, His compassion,

They want His reign of justice and righteousness

That the crown of righteousness is for All who have loved His appearing – tells you this prize is by grace

You could think Paul was speaking of something deserved by his outstanding faithfulness and service, something you and I could never share in

But Paul knows himself as the worst of sinners,

1 Tim. 1: ¹⁵ This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life.

Someone whose achievement is all of grace

1 Corinthians 15: ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

This is the prize graciously given to all who persevere to the end loving the Lord Jesus because they have believed His gospel

Think for a moment of what it is to live loving the appearing of our Lord Jesus

It means your Hopes are not focused on this life, but on Him

That you are not living for, longing for, what you can achieve or get in this life, your life directed by your plans and dreams,

But living to please Him

living a life, like Pauls, that only makes sense if Jesus is coming back

By that measurement, are you someone who loves His appearing

Running to finish well together

Every believer is in the same race as Paul, engaged in the same noble struggle

We run, run to the end, to receive that crown

On the day of our Lord's appearing

A dreadful day, but a day every believer longs for as a bride longs for her wedding day

We will be helped along the way, sustained in our race

By good pastors – so know what to look for

Someone who will faithfully teach God's word, who will rebuke, correct and encourage

Who will be examples of faithful suffering and focused service of our Lord

And some of you should consider if God has given you the character and gifts that would fit you to be a good pastor, to preach the word – congregations need good pastors, so think about it

And Good pastors need good congregations

Will the person who comes after me be blessed by finding you are a good congregation

Faithful to the word of Christ – so that you keep welcoming the word, year after year

Praying for and encouraging faithful ministry

Accepting that rebuke, correction and encouragement from God's word that will keep you healthy and running well

People who welcome someone who gives themselves to

² Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching.

As God's provision to sustain us as those who love the Lord Jesus and long for His appearing, people determined to run our race to the end