



Tickling the Ears
2 Timothy 4:1-4
GCSP – 12/19/2009

Why are you here tonight? What are you hoping to accomplish by sitting here and listening to this sermon? Are you here because it is expected of you to be here? Are you here because you feel you are doing God a favor by being here? Do you feel obligated to be here?

Are you hoping to hear a message that will inspire and encourage you? Do you hope to be convicted by the message tonight? Or are you hoping I am going to take a breather and preach something a little lighter after all of those messages on offence and forgiveness?

Although I am sure there have been people throughout the history of the church who have moved around from church to church every time they didn't agree with the preaching, I am also sure that this practice is much more common in our time and in this country. It has only been in the last 70-80 years that most people in this country had multiple choices of churches to attend, and/or the means and time to travel more than a few miles on a Sunday morning.

In the early 1900's, most small towns and villages in the United States had one church if they could support it. Between Fairplay, Hartsel, and Jefferson you probably have a full-time population of 2,000 or so and we have at least ten churches that I could count off the top of my head, and many people who live up here drive as far as Buena Vista, Breckenridge, Conifer, Aspen Park, and even Denver to attend church. Finding a preacher to suit your fancy is easy if you don't mind the expense and the travel.

The world is bombarded by words and messages. The information age in which we live has books and sermons and teachings available at our fingertips on just about any topic or field of study you desire. And if you do a little research, polish your approach, wear the right clothes, and give the people what they want to hear, you can develop a following; and that following can take you to the top of corporate America, help you build a mega-church, or get you elected to government office.

All it takes is telling people what they want to hear.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **2 Timothy**.

2 Timothy 4:1-4

Let's pray.

The lure to tell people what they want to hear is not new and it is not confined to any specific segment or aspect of society. We all have a natural inclination to want to be liked by other people, so, the tendency to try to tell them what they want to hear will always be tugging at your mind and emotions. Add to this the disdain most of us have with confrontation and the pull to speak what someone wants to hear is strengthened.

Because of this natural tendency, Paul charges Timothy with some strong words and sentiments.

Paul is at the end of his life. This letter to Timothy is the last letter Paul writes that is included in the canon of Scripture. And in this last letter he is down to the last few sentences of teaching and instruction prior to listing some personal concerns and requests.

If you knew that your life on this earth was close to the end, what would be your final words? What wisdom and information, out of all that you have accumulated through your years on this earth, would you consider of the utmost importance to be passed on? It's a sobering thought.

In the section of personal concerns and requests, Paul asks Timothy to come to Rome as soon as he is able. We do not know if Timothy was able to make that journey prior to Paul beheading so we do not know if Paul had the chance to personally speak any final words to Timothy, but we do have record of what Paul thought was the of most importance in this letter; and that was "**Preach the Word!**"

And to make sure this charge was not lost amongst all the other teaching contained in this letter, Paul begins with why Timothy should preach the word:

"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus..." Paul uses very forceful and reverent terminology when he solemnly charges Timothy. Paul in essence says, "Timothy, with God the Father and the Lord Christ Jesus standing beside me, we tell you..." If Timothy was in any way sleep-walking through his reading of this letter, this phrase would have awakened him out of his slumber.

And if that was not enough to shake Timothy and garner his attention, Paul adds, **"...who is to judge the living and the dead..."** The sense and purpose of this phrase is to remind Timothy of the awesome responsibility that is before him and the fact that he will be judged according to how well he carries out the task.

Hold your place in **2 Timothy** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **James**.

James 3:1-2

James points out that those who teach the Word of God will be judged more strictly by the Lord. And the fact that James immediately talks about stumbling in speech, this stricter judgment is directly correlated to how accurately the teacher handles God's Word as he teaches and preaches. Jesus was the only human to never stumble in his words so this literally means that all who teach and preach God's Word will stumble at times and incur this stricter judgment.

Now how many of you would like to come up here and take over for me right now?

The great Scottish preacher, John Knox, once cried out to God, "Give me Scotland or I die!" – meaning his desire was to see all of Scotland come to salvation through Christ. Knox then spent three days secluded in his room weeping at the awesome responsibility he now had in proclaiming the Word of God.

Back in **2 Timothy**, Paul adds yet another qualifier to this awesome charge before Timothy: "...**and by His appearing and His kingdom...**" in other words, this charge not only is made in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, this charge is not only in light of a stricter judgment in which the righteous Judge of the universe will be monitoring your every word, but His return to this earth and His very kingdom are somehow wrapped up this charge you are receiving.

Now I know I am in a different position than you are in this regard, but can't you at least begin to feel the weight and the pressure on the shoulders of Timothy at this point? How awesome is the responsibility to teach and preach the Word of God?

Paul now goes into detail on what is entailed in this solemn charge: "**Preach the Word...**" He doesn't tell Timothy to preach philosophy, or to preach psychology, or to preach about social issues, or to preach self-help, or to preach popular culture, or to preach positive thinking, or to preach how to have your best life now. Timothy's solemn charge infers that he cannot corrupt it or add to it or take away from it.

Timothy's solemn charge means he will be preaching the very revelation of God Himself. Timothy's solemn charge is to preach what God has left behind for all of His children to know. Timothy's solemn charge is to reveal the very character of God to his hearers, and to preach about God's love and mercy, and God's judgment and wrath, and God's patience and the limits of God's patience.

Timothy's solemn charge is to preach about sin and hell and damnation, and to preach about forgiveness and heaven and salvation. Timothy's solemn charge is to preach Christ Jesus and the Cross and the Resurrection. Timothy's solemn charge is to preach justification and sanctification and glorification. Timothy's solemn charge is to preach God's sovereignty and God's omnipresence and God's omniscience and God's omnipotence.

Timothy's solemn charge is to preach the person of the Holy Spirit, the conviction of the Holy Spirit, the leading and guiding and filling of the Holy Spirit; the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the use of that power and those gifts.

Timothy's solemn charge is to preach the Word and nothing else!

But Paul is not finished; he then says concerning the preaching of the Word to "...**be ready in season and out of season...**" To be able to genuinely fulfill this great and awesome responsibility your life must be so saturated by God's Word and by God's Spirit that at a moment's notice you could ascend the pulpit, open the Scriptures, and preach the Word!

Now that's a scary thought; but we must be ready. We are to operate on the Holy Spirit's schedule and timetable, not dictate to the Holy Spirit to operate on our schedule and timetable.

And beloved, in case you are shrugging this message off somewhat because you are not a preacher or a teacher let me set the record straight. You may not have the charge to

stand before a church or a crowd of people but we all have the charge to teach God's Word in one way or another. When you learn a principle of God's Word you are responsible to pass along that knowledge to others. When you have the opportunity to witness to an unbeliever you are teaching God's Word. When you add your comments to a Bible study discussion or share your thoughts about God's Word during our testimony time you are teaching the Word.

That was not meant to discourage you from participating in bible study discussions or to speak up during testimony time, but it was meant to strongly encourage you to share the truth of God's Word and not your own philosophies and what you think is God's truth; know it.

Paul then adds: "...**reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction.**"

The solemn charge to **reprove** means you are to preach God's Word of conviction. You are to handle God's Word accurately and skillfully to stir people to examine their sinfulness and thus feel pangs of guilt over it; leading them to confession and repentance before Almighty God.

The solemn charge to **rebuke** means you are to preach God's Word of severe correction. The sense of the word **rebuke** is one of a sharp, severe word with the possible inclusion of an impending penalty if the behavior is not rectified immediately.

Matthew Henry comments: "*Convince wicked people of the evil and the danger of their wicked courses. Endeavor, by dealing plainly with them, to bring them to repentance. Rebuke them with gravity and authority in Christ's name, that they make take your displeasure against them as an indication of God's displeasure.*"

The solemn charge to **exhort with great patience and instruction** means to beseech, encourage, comfort, and help. Reproving and rebuking are of utmost importance but you cannot stop there; you now must in essence take them by the hand and lovingly show them the way of righteousness from God's Word.

Oftentimes the teacher and preacher is satisfied with condemning the wicked ways of the sinner without giving them the good news of how to be reconciled with the God of love and forgiveness. We must patiently endure with them regardless of the circumstances. We must exhort and exhort and exhort some more. We must encourage and encourage and encourage some more. We must instruct and instruct and instruct some more; it says **great patience and instruction** not a little patience and instruction.

Hold your place in **2 Timothy** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **1 Thessalonians**.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-18

I used to read this passage and when I got to **verse 18** I thought and even taught that it is God's will for you to give thanks in everything, but I stopped there. And while this does teach that it is God's will for you to give thanks in everything, it also teaches that it is God's will for you to pray without ceasing, and it is God's will for you to rejoice

always, and it is God's will for you to seek after what is good for all people, and it is God's will for you to never repay someone who has done evil to you with evil in return. It is also God's will for you to admonish the unruly, to encourage the fainthearted, to help the weak, and to be patient with everyone.

And for that matter, if we were to back up a few verses we would also find that it is God's will for you to live in peace with one another; and it is God's will for you to appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction; and it is God's will for you to esteem these teachers and leaders very highly in love.

And then if we were to read **verse 19** we would also see the connection that we quench the Holy Spirit when we are not engaged in any of these activities.

And all of this could obviously be a whole other sermon, but the point for our sermon tonight is that exhorting with great patience and instruction is the responsibility of all Christians not just those who are called to pastor and preach.

As we now go back to **2 Timothy**, all of what I have preached thus far is actually introduction for what I want us to leave with here tonight.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

Paul tells Timothy that a time is coming **when they will not endure sound doctrine**; a time is coming when the people who fill the churches will not stand for hearing the pure Word of God preached; a time is coming when reproof and rebuke and exhortation will be wholeheartedly rejected; a time is coming when Bible based preaching will be completely ignored.

Once again, hold your place in **2 Timothy** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Prophecy of **Amos**. Where in the world is Amos you ask? You can probably find Ezekiel; then comes Daniel, Hosea, Joel, and Amos.

Amos 8:11-12

Beloved, I do not have an inside track as to when God's prophetic Word gets fulfilled, but with what I see and hear in our land today it sure seems like this prophecy is at least beginning to be fulfilled before our eyes. In most places in our country you can indeed find a church very easily, but finding a church that is committed to teaching and preaching exclusively from God's Word is becoming more and more difficult.

Most of you know the story of our friends Bernie and Joan when they moved to Florida. It became so frustrating for Bernie while searching for a church that preaches the Bible that he started sitting in the parking lot of the churches he visited and watched to see if people were carrying Bibles as they walked in; if he didn't see Bibles in the hands of the people he started his car and moved on.

A famine is coming if it is not already begun; and just like the four hundred silent years between the time of the prophet Malachi and the ministry John the Baptist, people will long to hear the Word of God, and they will be searching for, hungering for, and thirsting for the Word of God but it will not be found.

Paul continues as we go back one more time to **2 Timothy**: “...**but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.**”

Across our land people are flocking to “churches” that teach and preach pop-psychology, riches and happiness to all who believe, positive mental attitude, and all manner of other forms of personal fulfillment. They want to walk out the doors of that building feeling good about themselves, and they want to receive affirmation that pursuing their desires, wants and needs is the way to happiness and fulfillment.

They want **to have their ears tickled**, meaning they want to be comfortable and justified in their current lifestyle. They want their sins overlooked and swept under the rug, and they reject any teaching and any teacher that goes against their self-proclaimed beliefs. They consider it unloving for anyone to hold them accountable to moral standards and doctrines. They consequently **turn away their ears** from the teachers and preachers who have what they most desperately need to hear.

Instead **they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.**

Now while the primary purpose of this passage applies to those who are denying the doctrines of God’s Word and desiring to live their lives as they please, do not miss an application that we all can make with this portion of **verse 3**: Be careful how you are choosing to accumulate teachers around you in accordance with your own desires.

Let me give you a few examples. When I owned my own Christian bookstore and when I worked for the Family Christian Store chain, the book department was always broken into sections. There was a section called Christian Living, a section for Prophecy and End Times, a section for Charismatic Interests, and various other categories. People who purchased books in the Charismatic section rarely even looked at books in any of the other sections. People who purchased books by authors like John MacArthur avoided the Charismatic section like the plague.

In this regard, can we not also be guilty of accumulating for ourselves teachers in accordance with our own desires? Beloved, I used to be in the John MacArthur camp in this way; and I still love and appreciate the ministry and teaching of Dr. MacArthur. But I also have begun exploring the teachings of other men of God who I never used to give the time of day. As a matter of fact I recently bought a book by an author I used to laugh at and joke about.

I have discovered that there are tremendous teachers and preachers out there that I may not agree with on every point but who have a treasure trove of other teaching I can and have benefitted from.

But this cuts both ways. If you have accumulated teachers who are primarily Charismatic in their theology, I guarantee you that you are missing out on some

tremendous teaching by avoiding books and sermons by those who don't agree with you on a few points.

Regardless of which side you have been accumulating over the years, aren't you turning your ears away from some truth?

Getting back to the primary application of this passage, those who are turning away their ears from the truth of God's Word are also guilty of turning to myths. Like the people of Bible times who carved idols of wood and stone and then trusted in them to be their god, rejecting the truth of God's Word is just as much a myth as praying to a piece of wood or stone.

Back up a few verses and let's read **2 Timothy 3:16-17**.

The reason Paul could give this solemn charge to Timothy is because all of God's Word is inspired and profitable for us. Do you desire to be equipped for every good work and equipped to tackle anything that comes your way? Immerse yourself in the pure and undefiled Word of God, and then accumulate a wide variety of godly teachers and preachers around you; not just those who tickle your ears.

Let's pray.