

Sermon Outline

Reading: 2 Timothy 4:1-8

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: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ 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. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. ⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth 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.

Introduction

2 Timothy is probably the final letter of the Apostle Paul in our New Testament. As Paul writes to his friend, Pastor Timothy, he is aware that martyrdom awaits – in the near future. As such, the whole letter has something of a ‘last will and testament’ feel to it.

‘Preach the word’, he says to Timothy (verse 2). Preach the word in the face of false teaching and of those who reject the gospel and turn to made-made philosophies (verses 3 and 4). How do these last two verses reflect our world today? Such a stance runs the risk of incurring the world’s hatred and hostility. So what do we learn from Paul’s perspective in these verses?

1. Faithfulness – not success

Consider how we live in a culture that admires success – even worships it. But what is Paul calling Timothy to do? To be *faithful* – as he has been faithful. This is the point of the comparison with his own life, which is coming to an end (verse 7). By God’s grace Paul’s ‘race’ had been quite a long one; for some Christians it might be quite short (think of the first Christian martyr, Stephen). You could share the story of a modern-day martyr here.

2. The gospel – not self

Everything in this short letter is oriented toward the gospel. In chapter one Paul reminded Timothy of the wonderful grace of God, given us in Jesus Christ (1:10-11), a gospel for which Paul has suffered (1:12). Now Timothy is to be prepared to do the same (verse 5). How do persecuted Christians today demonstrate this same priority?

3. The life to come – not this life

We have all sorts of hopes in this life, short-term and longer-term. You could give some examples. But for the Christian *the* hope is ultimately for the age to come, not this life. Paul reminds Timothy of that here (verse 8).

Our Response

Do we have the same perspective as the Apostle Paul? Is our desire to be faithful and to live for Christ and the gospel? And do we have that desire for persecuted Christians? Those who have lost loved ones to martyrdom? Those who are in prison or who are oppressed? If our desire is for them (and us!) to ‘run the race’ faithfully, will we pray for them and seek to support them?

Pray – Encourage people to sign up for *Voice* magazine and other Release International information, in order to be informed and resourced to pray.

Give – Encourage people to give to Release International’s ministry to persecuted Christians around the world.

Testimonies

Munshi (India)

From the time Munshi and his wife became Christians members of their extended family as well as some of their neighbours had tried to persuade them to renounce Christ and return to Hinduism.

When he began sharing the gospel in his village Hindu extremists warned him to stop.

Eventually Munshi built a small house on agricultural land he owned, which was outside the main village. From there he began running Christian worship services.

One Friday afternoon, after a prayer meeting, Munshi was abducted by a group of Hindu extremists. He was taken into a nearby jungle area and shot dead.

When she heard the news Munshi's wife Jaini fled from the village with her four young children. She took refuge in the home of a Christian family in another village. Her family and her late husband's family prevented her from returning to the family home.

Matthew Tagwi (Nigeria)

Matthew Tagwi had been an ordained minister just three months when he was shot dead by Islamist militants in Nigeria's Plateau State.

Matthew had been posted to Nsah village with his pregnant wife Rose and their two young daughters. Rose was at an antenatal check up in another town on the day Fulani herdsmen attacked the village. They headed straight to the pastor's house, called him out by name and shot him dead.

Because of lockdown restrictions in place at the time Matthew was buried the following day. His wife was not even allowed to attend the funeral. Rose has since given birth to another daughter, who she named 'Patience', because she says she is determined to wait patiently on the Lord.

Responding to the martyrdom of her husband she later said, *"The evil men think killing a pastor will stop the gospel. Nothing will stop the gospel of Christ. My prayer is that his killers will get to know the Jesus I know. I do forgive them and will pray that the Lord saves their souls."*