

1 TIMOTHY 4:11-16

(Reading: 2 Tim.3:10-4:8; 1 Tim.4:1-10)

The Way It Works In Ministry!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

In last Sunday's sermon on 1st Timothy 4 the verses 6 till 10 Paul began addressing Timothy's particular calling as a minister of God's Word.

Now he goes even more personally into that.

The verses 11 till 16 have a directly confronting tone about them.

It's being laid on the line what Timothy is expected to do!

This reminded me of the day I started at Nelson Boys College and we had the rules spelt out firmly by the class teacher.

There you were told what you definitely could not do!

And the consequences were vividly spelt out!

You see, that school teacher recognised there's nothing quite like keeping young men on the straight and narrow than through a healthy respect for authority.

There was nothing better than the fear of the cane to keep our minds focused on why were really there!

That's very much how we have to see what develops in the text this afternoon.

For while Timothy is no likely candidate for class ruffian, laying out what he's meant to do in this clear way, and what happens when he doesn't do it, can only help him!

The English Puritan Robert Harris spoke of how a teacher in the faith had helped him concentrate on what really matters in a similar fashion.

He said that Richard Baxter used to say, "A preacher has three books to study: the Bible, himself, and the people."

And then he gave the quote which sums up the motivation for every gospel minister.

The quote that has remained ever relevant, exactly because it's found in this scripture before us today.

For Baxter said, "I preach, as if I should ne'er preach again; And, as a dying man to dying men."

Congregation, I hope you see such a heart in every man who declares God's Word from this pulpit.

Because if he does not, then, oh what trouble he's in!

And what anguish you will suffer then!

Let's consider this theme now.

In four powerful aspects the apostle lays it out before Timothy.

The first of these comes to us in verse 11.

We may call this THE EXHORTATION TO TIMOTHY.

And exhortation it certainly is because the tense used in this sentence is strongly present imperative.

So it has very much the force of “You have to do this!” and “You have to do this now!” and “You have to keep on doing this!”

That’s pretty forceful!

And doesn’t the word ‘command’ imply this?

We already know of the power of this word from the beginning of this letter.

There in chapter 1 verse 3 Timothy was told he had to command certain men **not** to teach false doctrines any longer!

That’s a clear direction on what Timothy **must** do.

So there’s a sense, with this word, of enforcement.

This is being quite insistent with those you are addressing.

They are to be in no doubt of the seriousness of what you are doing.

And also the authority you have to do it!

That’s true, isn’t it?

Baxter’s words hit it right on the nail, don’t they?

Because these words are the very words of life.

You can’t be saved without them and you won’t please God if you don’t continue in them!

There is the most weighty sense here.

There’s nothing light-hearted or easy-going about these words.

That’s why we must in sorrow for many churches, also churches which have a similar reformed-presbyterian heritage.

Go into one of their church services nowadays and you might well wonder if you’ve gone back to a 1970’s youth club!

There’s the t-shirt and jeans they all wear, and that very much includes the one leading the service.

Not that he’s really leading.

It’s more like he’s MC’ing – you know, introducing and interacting.

There’s the band.

There’s the catchy choruses.

There’s no recognisable solemnity – certainly no distinct liturgy in what’s happening.

And while the message is biblical, though more topical than expositional, the bad jokes aren’t!

the coffee urn!

It’s all so casual you’re wondering when they’re going to bring out

Congregation, something is definitely missing.

There is no sense of the seriousness when God's people assemble together.

It's like a social get together.

But this is not about us getting together first of all.

It's about meeting God together!

And that should be the most awesome and humbling thing!

The word 'command' makes it clear this is from the divine!

And then 'teaching' ties in closely with 'commanding'.

Teaching is different, though, in the sense of explaining the Christian faith and the foundation it has to be on.

You could say teaching is more theological while commanding is ethical.

But as soon as you do one you must do the other.

So you should be able to come away from a worship service having learnt more and being particularly challenged.

You should especially come away from a worship service, however, having met God through His Son, Jesus Christ!

What Timothy is to command and teach is defined by 'these things'.

It's the same expression as verse 6 and refers to not only what is at the beginning of this chapter but to all that's been before in this letter.

Indeed, it implies all of the fundamentals of the faith, especially in the face of those false teachers who were determined to take down the true gospel at an opportunity!

So, it was clear for Timothy what he was to command and teach.

It was something he had to be really focused on.

In fact, he shouldn't let anything whatsoever distract him from this!

And it seemed there was something that really did disturb him.

This is what we come to next in verse 12.

These are the words of the next point Paul raises with Timothy.

For we may call this second aspect, **THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF TIMOTHY.**

Notice what Paul writes first of all in verse 12.

"Don't let anyone look down on you because of your age," he says.

And he doesn't write that for no reason!

So how can the devil be using Timothy's age to try and trip him up in his divine calling?

Well, it's related to how people then regarded those younger.

For you were considered as youth until you were forty years old!

So while it's likely Timothy is in his middle to late 30's that still made him young in a culture where being old was the important thing.

There was also an added difficulty in connection with Timothy.

For while many young men can be quite full of themselves – who they are and what they do – Timothy in contrast had some insecurity issues.

1st Corinthians 16 alludes to this.

In verses 10 and 11 there Paul says to the congregation there, “If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am.

“No one, then should refuse to accept him.

“Send him on his way in peace that he may return to me.”

This has been seen in some young ministers in their first congregations.

There can be those amongst the eldership or within that congregation who use that man’s insecurity to put down his teaching and undercut his ministry.

That could come through comparing him with previous ministers or neighbouring ministers.

But because it isn’t building up it’s tearing down.

Paul specifically addresses this attack as it was used against Timothy.

He encourages Timothy to go on the offensive in this situation.

And it is a response that would for some people there be the least expected one.

Because Paul tells him to “set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”

Congregation, when we are nastily abused we are tempted to respond in kind.

That is the last thing we should do, though.

Rather, it should serve to refocus us on what we should be doing all the time anyhow!

With “speech” this means that Timothy’s everyday conversation reflects what he says in the pulpit.

It would be hypocritical for a minister to preach sexual purity from the pulpit and yet speak suggestively in social settings.

The Ephesians had been reminded about this earlier.

In chapter 4 verse 29 of his letter to them, Paul had written, “Don’t let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

Timothy’s “life” also refers to his everyday actions.

The words of another apostle, Peter, also applies here.

As he says in 1st Peter 2:12, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

And if anyone is checking you out it’s those unbelievers!

Sometimes more than those in your own congregation!

Timothy's word and life would be added to by his 'love' to others.

And especially his love for those who were his sharpest critics would bring out Christ in him.

Paul himself had shown earlier in that great 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians how the greatest of all qualities is love.

By 'faith' here we are most likely being told about faithfulness.

Saving faith isn't an option in a believer's life but not persevering in that faith can be – though a most devastating one!

So Timothy is encouraged to be reliable and dependable.

And then 'purity' ties all these qualities together.

Because what is being pure than keeping yourself undefiled by sin?

So while this quality points to sexual purity especially, it is really about how clean we are on the inside.

Michael Bentley ties this in with Timothy's thought-life.

He makes this telling application: "How uncomfortable we would feel if all our thoughts were displayed on a large screen for everyone to read!

"The Christian leader's motives should always be pure; we would feel embarrassed if the reasons we did some things were known by other people."

So if Timothy was to live the right way it started within him.

By living out these qualities in verse 12 Timothy would be proving his calling.

But these qualities are those things which should characterise every believer, aren't they?

So we may relate them to what is private.

They're personal qualities we all should have.

Next, Paul turns to what must be very much public – to what's involved in Timothy's leadership in the church.

For in the verses 13 and 14 we consider, in the third place, **THE EXPOSITION THROUGH TIMOTHY.**

What Paul outlines here is something that was already clearly defined as essential to Christian worship.

The way verse 13 is laid out here with each particular activity being preceded by the definite article in the Greek text tells us this is nothing new.

In fact, this is how things ought to be in the Church of Christ Jesus.

And what that ought to be?

Well, there has to be the public reading of Scripture.

It seems that large passages of the Bible were read out in these services. Indeed, that has often been the case at times of reformation and true revival.

When the people have been in darkness or ignorance for so long they need to hear lots of God's Word.

And that's especially helpful when they cannot read or write.

But don't think we're so enlightened as to not need lots of God's Word either!

Those churches where the briefest of passages are flashed up on the digital data projector are not doing their congregations a lot of good!

You can get to feel quite the odd one out if you bring your Bible along there!

Who of us can say we don't need to hear more?

While we should be careful not to go overboard and end up having half the service reading the Bible, it's something we must be careful to keep up.

And it's also something we should make sure is held up through who does it.

These days you can have almost anyone on the reading rosters in many churches, but the Scriptures have a clear regulation about that.

It's spelt out here.

For, notice, it's Timothy whose calling is to do.

Along with the other two tasks in verse 13 this is tied up with Timothy's office.

It is even added that he must be 'devoted' to these things.

That's something which be seen wherever the Scriptures were publicly read in the Old and New Testaments.

Only certain men could do it.

And the pattern taken over by the early Church from the Jewish Synagogue service showed the same.

The regard that this must be held in is confirmed in Revelation 1 verse 3.

There John writes, "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."

The same applies to 'preaching'.

It is inextricably tied up with Timothy's calling.

It is this 'preaching' we have already touched into in verse 11.

The word 'command' there has the same aspect of exhortation.

The letter to the Hebrews gives an example of this.

In its conclusion, in chapter 13:22, it refers to itself as a word of exhortation.

And going through that book isn't full of clear warnings?

Earlier on in Paul's ministry we see further examples of the same.

In Acts 13 the synagogue rulers in Pisidian Antioch ask him to speak such a word of encouragement to the people.

With 'teaching' Timothy is being exhorted to instruct the people in the truth of God's Word.

As we saw in verse 11, this means the people are being fed solid food.

That's what they need.

And how much don't we need it today also?

The seriousness of Paul's concern that Timothy does this comes through further in verse 14.

To say, "Do not neglect" your gift, after all he's said so far, shows the concern he has for his young colleague.

He knows Timothy has to be told – and it seems he had to be told often, as we also see this same concern in his second letter to him.

And Paul motivates Timothy by reminding him of his ordination.

For it was the Lord Himself who has placed Timothy in his office.

It was through God's Word setting aside Timothy and God's Church recognising that Word which must be a continual spur for him.

Today we continue the same through men's personal calls by the Lord into ministry being matched up by the Church acknowledging their gifting and their readiness for office.

There are no 'Lone Rangers' in the Church.

And whenever you have a situation of a man ordaining himself, or something similar, there you'll soon find departure from God's Word in other things also!

If, indeed, it hasn't already happened!

The laying on of hands is a rite that goes back to Old Testament times.

It signifies authority being given to that person on behalf of the whole company of God's people.

That was what symbolised in Timothy's ordination.

It was quite likely that Paul was there.

In 2nd Timothy 1 verse 6 he spoke of having laid hands of Timothy.

And while you might think he's speaking there of just what he's done the collective noun used here – the body of elders – shows the elders acting together as one.

Congregation, so far Timothy has received a definitive outlining of his calling.

And there is still more.

The verses 15 and 16 wrap it up altogether with a pleading to work hard at it.

So we may call this fourth aspect, **THE EARNESTNESS FOR TIMOTHY.**

This is the being an example, the devotion, and the fruitful use of God's gifting to Timothy all coming to a head.

To be diligent is to be careful and conscientious is all that you do.

In fact, Timothy's diligence should be such that everyone around him sees it.

To use a common expression, "he's earning his pay."

And that's what he would be doing, for a minister is paid so that he can spend his time in prayer, studying God's Word, and shepherding the flock.

A pastor wasting God's time would soon show up in the congregation.

People will notice that rot a lot quicker than the fruit from faithful ministry.

The preaching of the Word will be one clear indicator.

One minister I knew used a gift he had very well, but it certainly wasn't a spiritual gift.

Because that gift was 'the gift of the gab'!

He told me that when going to another church to lead the service he realised upon his arrival that he had forgotten his notes.

And he was no minister with a photographic memory!

Well, during the offering, which was taken up before the sermon, he was able to scrawl a few notes on a piece of paper.

He talked for over 45 minutes!

But don't call it preaching!

He was a man busy with many things but not busy with the most important thing.

He wasn't spending time in his study praying over and preparing the sermon.

And so neither he nor his congregation are being blessed the way they ought to be.

You see, if Timothy is diligent it will be a personal blessing to him also.

As Paul had written in verse 13 of the previous chapter about elders and deacons, those who serve well "gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus."

In verse 16 the apostle draws together the two sides of every believer's spiritual life – but applying it this time to the minister.

For 'life and doctrine' are absolutely essential.

It's what we announce when someone desires to publicly profess their Christian faith.

Because their life and doctrine must show they're the Lord's.

If there is any cause for concern in this they first need to get that right with the Lord.

'Life' is referring to how we live personally.

Timothy is exhorted to look at his conduct morally and then consider his beliefs theologically.

Someone once said the unexamined life is the life not worth living, and that rings true here.

Unless those in gospel ministry are putting themselves under God's microscope, also through other believers, there will be a wasting away.

There will be a lack of passion for the things of the Lord.

And soon enough there is the wrong kind of teaching about the Lord too.

In this way we come to that word 'doctrine'.

A word so many Christians don't like.

They seem to think it is made up of the words of men and, yet, here it is in God's Word!

It is here, congregation, because it refers to a careful and continual studying of God's Word.

As soon as you start to become influenced by the ideas of men rather than going first to the Word you drift away from the Lord.

Perhaps that's why you are part of this congregation.

You have been in churches which had been faithful in life and doctrine but they began to slip away.

Soon all sorts of showy displays and methods for ministry took over.

Techniques that did not owe their origin to any mandate from God but the business practices of this world!

You come here to be fed.

And, Lord willing, you will be – today and every Lord's Day.

But that cannot ever be an assumed thing – that is something which must always be put under God's spotlight, as Timothy is here told.

This is affirmed by Paul's second letter to Timothy.

There we read in verse 2 of chapter 4 that the minister of God's Word must preach the Word.

Day in and day out he has to correct, rebuke, and encourage.

And he has to do that with great patience and careful instruction.

The last sentence, though, really brings home the importance of Timothy's office.

The charge to him to continue faithfully in life and doctrine because it will save him and his hearers makes this very much a salvation matter.

This is about where people are going for eternity!

But you might be thinking here, 'Surely you're not saved by your works, are you?'

'This cannot mean it's what Timothy does that will save him or his congregation?'

We can very easily misunderstand what Paul means here.

This is where John Calvin has some helpful words.

He says that through the diligent preaching of the gospel, by men, God chooses to give salvation to sinners.

Godly ministers and their faithful preaching is the Lord's way to save His people.

You see, we come back again to the heart of this letter.

For in laying out a primitive Church Order it is aiding the work of nothing less than Christ's Great Commission.

That's the task of the Church!

In this way we also come back to the quote we began with.

For the Church must ensure that her preachers of the Word are those who do hold out the words of life itself.

Those men have to be those who say together with Richard Baxter, "I preach, as if I should never preach again; I preach as a dying man to dying men."

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O LORD God, we have heard Your Word, first written to Your servant Timothy, but now it has come to us today also.

May we take these precious truths deep inside and show the difference You make with how we live on the outside.

And, Lord, may You be with all those called to minister the Word to Your people.

Stir them, as You stirred Timothy, to faithfully serve Your people and so bring You the glory and the honour.

In the Name of the greatest servant of all, our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray,
Amen.