

1 TIMOTHY 4:6-10

(Reading: 1 Cor.9:1-27; 1 Pet.1:3-9; 1 Tim.4:1-10)

What Matters for Ministry!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

The apostle now becomes more personal with Timothy.

What he writes here is very germane for his young colleague's position there in Ephesus.

You see, here is what matters for his ministry!

But almost as we say that we recognise that these words are equally valid for all those who serve in the same way as Timothy does.

In fact, the Greek word for 'minister' here is the word for 'serving' – *diakonos*.

Yes, the same word we met in chapter 3's description of the special office in the Church for showing Christ's compassion.

Here, though, it's used in relation to Timothy's specific calling.

Thus the word is determined by its context.

And the situation here is about serving the Lord Jesus Christ in the office of a teaching elder.

It's no surprise that these verses have been often used at the ordination of ministers in the church.

Because the text for the sermon this afternoon is describing the fundamentals for Gospel ministry.

The first of these fundamentals is what verse 6 is about.

To sum this up we may say, **THE MINISTER MUST BE TEACHING.**

At first this might not seem to be the case.

There's no specific reference to preaching, or even teaching here.

Doesn't the expression about "pointing out these things" sound like something we should all be doing?

But it's quite clearly what this verse is about.

To 'point out these things' is highlighting Timothy's calling.

For preaching is what he does.

And this is preaching in a certain way.

Because this is teaching the Christians there in such a manner that they can understand it.

It lays out God's guidance for them in a helpful way.

There is a conditional clause here, though.

It is only 'if' Timothy obeys his calling and uses his gifts the right way by teaching 'these things' that he becomes 'a good minister of Christ Jesus'.

And what are 'these things'?

Well, it's following on from the first five verses of this chapter, so it's about the freedom in Christ as opposed to the false teachers.

Thus it will bring out the thankfulness because of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

But this also refers to the whole letter so far.

A letter which develops the theme of how the Church must conduct herself in God's sight.

Indeed, referring to 'the brothers' here points to the congregation of Christ.

This is a teaching which has to be plainly taught to the church there and the church everywhere!

In this light, it's no coincidence that every time the Lord reforms His Church back to the Word it is accompanied by good solid preaching and teaching.

John Calvin ensured that the families in Geneva were visited every week to make sure the fathers were teaching their households the fundamentals of the faith.

Richard Baxter followed a similar pattern in his congregation at Kidderminster in England.

He spent Mondays and Tuesdays from morning to nightfall taking some fifteen or sixteen families each week in this instruction.

With two assistants he would make his way through the congregation of eight hundred families so that each family was taught during the year.

The Catechisms and Confessions become very important then.

John Calvin, Richard Baxter, and many others in those times of revival wrote up or revised Catechisms especially for this teaching.

It is as Timothy faithfully does this teaching he will find himself blessed also.

Who among us involved in teaching hasn't experienced that?

As you prepare and deliver your lessons you are learning just as much as your students – and often more!

And you don't just increase your knowledge then in biblical teaching.

You also develop your personal qualities.

This is what becoming 'a good minister' is.

As you are true to your calling and gifting you grow in the faith yourself.

It doesn't mean you bring out any inherent quality in yourself but you do bring out more of the Spirit's work through you.

This calling and gifting is further qualified in verse 6.

You see, it doesn't come 'out of the blue'.

It comes because the minister has first of all been himself taught and brought up in the faith.

For Timothy this is a direct reference to his own godly upbringing.

It's an upbringing further detailed in Paul's second letter to Timothy chapter 1.

In verse 5 there the apostle speaks of Timothy's faith which first lived in his grandmother Lois and in his mother, Eunice.

There is a distinctly covenantal line here.

This is about being in distinct families and having distinctively Christian relationships developed over a passage of time.

You don't just become converted and then can be sprung into any church office at all.

The apostle Paul himself had to spend three years right away from people for the Lord to teach him when he became converted!

And that was despite all that Pharisaic training he's had before.

But that's not what's popular amongst Christians today.

Even those churches so rich in a history of passing on the truth in the most systematic way have fallen to completely down-grading this instruction.

Within a few years they have the youngest and most unqualified Christians doing the most important task of teaching the next generation – if they bother with that teaching at all anymore!

And the parents are no help in this.

When they see their children become attracted by the exciting things in other churches, instead of doing their job and teaching their offspring what really matters in life and how that matters, they insist the church must change its programs to become more relevant for today!

Here we come to the second aspect in relation to the ministry of the Word in our text.

This brings us to see what's in the verses 7 and 8.

And what we realise there is that **THE MINISTER MUST BE GODLY.**

The way this point is brought out at first appears negatively.

"Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales," verse 7 begins.

You know, I've always wondered: How a biblical church could fall into such a situation?

"Godless myths and old wives' tales" are those things which are against God.

They are the complete opposite to what should be taught about who God is and what He's done.

It throws out the most amazing grace and replaces it with a pottage of man-made superstitions.

To answer this question about how such a thing could happen you have to go back to when those things start to develop.

We have seen some of that already in 1st Timothy.

The false teachers proclaim a different gospel.

A gospel which, at first, seems close to the true gospel.

They are warm well-spoken folk who use all the right words and phrases.

They certainly seem to be blessed.

Soon enough, though, and they are speaking of what we could be.

Then it seems we never do quite enough.

They introduce more and more methods and devices.

Their people never quite do enough.

There will be glimpses of what they call revival, but then it's back to the same old guilt-trip.

Oh, they'll sing about grace.

There's nothing amazing about it, though.

Because it's something they haven't got to yet.

How such ungodly teachings and practices can infiltrate even the most solidly confessional church was shown devastatingly in the mid 1990's.

You might remember what was sweeping through many churches at that time.

It was what was claimed to be a great revival – no less!

I hope you haven't forgotten?

'The Toronto Blessing' they called it.

But it couldn't have been more of a curse!

Many of us soon knew that much about it.

So why then did Reformed and Presbyterian people so quickly and readily join in it?

And why were the ones leading those people their own pastors?

Men who even imported the whole nonsense into meetings at their own churches for night after night and month after month.

Richard Baxter is most insightful here.

He says the church will not rise above its leadership.

Thus the pastor's personal and family life must always come under the scrutiny of Scripture continually.

The Bible says that the man called to such a high vocation must be completely under the Word.

The sad thing is that those men and their churches have come under godless myths and old wives' tales.

As much as it meant in Paul's time the direct influence of the surrounding pagan religions so much of what's happening in many churches today is clearly borrowed from the eastern religions.

For example, the so-called anointing in the Toronto Blessing is culled straight from the shakti-pat of Hinduism!

Those ministers and their churches go that way because they seek a quick-fix.

The fantastic speculations and phenomenal experiences replace the genuine godliness that comes with consistently faithful preaching.

Like old wives' tales what they advocate has no basis in fact.

They're just like the silly delusions which some old women try to palm off on their neighbours or their grandchildren.

You would know some of them – don't walk under a ladder, don't cross the path of a black cat, don't step on a crack or you'll marry a rat!

True godliness, however, comes through drinking and feeding on the living God in a settled faith.

This is what the word "train" in verse 7 is very clear about.

In English the Greek word used here has come down to us in 'gymnastics'.

A word definitely about being fit and active physically.

But it's not about the outward body here.

This is building us up within.

This is the right exercise and diet spiritually.

Verse 8 goes on to show how much more important this type of training is.

Because while physical exercise helps you for a while on this earth, spiritual discipline helps you for all eternity!

Now, Paul would have known the value of a healthy body.

With all that he had endured so far in his life, you can be sure he would have been thankful for his own fitness.

But this is much more valuable.

Congregation, the minister has to lead from the front.

He must be a man of prayer and the Word.

Here the illustration Paul uses of the athlete guides us.

For, we note that the minister needs to be at it every day.

And he has to be at it every day in the most exerting way.

The athlete is always stretching to go that little bit more.

He's not happy to keep his press-ups at a certain number.

Next we see that the athlete gets rid of everything that would get in his way.

Hebrews 12 verse 1 tells us to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” and so “run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

We see this in the increasingly sophisticated designs for swimming race and running clothes.

Every possible draw-back or obstruction is deleted.

And then you have to keep the finish in focus.

You aim for the winning post.

So you are always looking to Jesus.

In the words of Hebrews 12 verse 2, you’re keeping your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith.

For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and so sits at the right hand of God.

Jesus broke through the ultimate pain barrier to win the prize.

The prize which is the salvation we now have by faith in Him.

That’s a prize we ourselves will completely receive in glory.

But we must live looking to it right now!

And that’s how we come to the third fundamental for Gospel ministry.

For, this is where we see that **THE MINISTER MUST BE HOPING.**

Here we come to verses 9 and 10.

While it has a similar theme to verse 8 before it there is a building upon it.

We see the connection with verse 8 through the athletic reference in verse 9.

The bit in brackets, “and for this we labour and strive”, ties in that theme.

Paul connects all those who are seeking true holiness.

Every one who shows clear evidence of the genuineness of their faith by keeping looking at Jesus is doing this.

I mean, aren’t you?

Don’t you try your best to put everything under Christ’s Lordship?

You might trip and fall sometimes – or should I say oftentimes!

But you get that focus right again.

You humble yourself under the Lord and you keep going with what pleases Him.

This is the best way to understand the third ‘trustworthy saying’ in this letter, which we meet here.

Because it is such a word of wisdom that keeps us focused on the Lord.

And what is this hope we have put in the living God?

Could it be something like the hope this world has?

You know, that hope that somehow it might all turn out alright.

And when they say that don't you know almost straight away that it's actually not going to work out?

Their hope is what flies in the face of the way their lives are going.

It's like saying, "I hope I win Lotto!" when the odds are stacked right up against you.

And even if you did it would only ruin all your relationships and you personally anyway!

This 'hope' in verse 10 couldn't be more different than that hope.

This is the 'hope' that is a certainty!

For this hope is in none other than God Himself.

Unlike faith, though, hope is an attitude that needs to be constantly renewed.

When you go through new and different hardships that test you, you have to keep going.

It is very much like running the race.

There are no prizes for falling along the way, or failing to finish.

There's only an award for the one who makes it.

But all the while, that athlete is running to win the prize.

He might have a stumble, even fall; he could get cramp, and be in other pain; but he's not giving up.

Because he knows those things are all par for the course.

Just like the Bible doesn't promise us a life of ease.

Rather, as Christ's followers we will suffer.

And it could be a suffering that goes deep.

You've been hurt by past abuse.

You're feeling so defeated by sin.

You're sensing you're so much less than others, so much so you walk with your eyes to the ground.

Yet anticipating what God has in store for you puts it all in perspective.

That keeps your chin up.

For hope gives you confidence and that inner assurance.

It keeps telling you everything is going to turn out the Lord's way.

The world famous cellist Pablo Casals once gave this challenging testimony.

He said, "For the past 80 years I have started each day in the same way.

"I go to the piano and I play two preludes and fugues (fyoogs) of Bach.

"I cannot think of doing otherwise.

"It is a benediction on the house.

“But that is not its only meaning for me.

“It is a rediscovery of the world of which I have the joy of being a part.”

If that is how a dedicated musician daily started his waking hours, we Christians – by the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit – can surely dedicate each new day to our Lord.

No matter where we are or what our situation may be, each day we can decide to dedicate the hours before us to God’s praise.

As David wrote in Psalm 118 verse 24, “This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

But let’s also note the context of these verses of David’s.

For it comes directly after he’s spoken of the stone the builders rejected becoming the capstone.

That’s a prophetic word of the coming Messiah.

The Messiah who is the Saviour God in our text.

Jesus Christ is the One who’s rich in mercy towards us.

He has saved us most of all!

And here there is also a special care.

For reference is made to all people enjoying His blessing.

And they do, don’t they?

As Acts 14: 17 says, He has shown kindness by giving all men rain from heaven and crops in their seasons.

He’s the One who gives everyone food and joy.

But that is especially so for believers, as verse 10 concludes.

They are the special recipients of God’s fatherly care.

In the immortal words of Romans 8 verse 28, “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

If you fully accept this trustworthy saying you know God as the living God – your own personal Saviour and Lord.

As Matthew Henry said, “The ground of our hope is Christ in the world, but the evidence of our hope is Christ in the heart.”

This is the hope Peter wrote of in his first letter.

As we read there in verses 8 and 9 of the first chapter, he declares, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you don’t see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

So hope is the constancy of faith.

It gives us feet.

This is the divine motivation for every spirit athlete.

Keep running, dear believer!
 You're getting there, Christian!
 See, there's the finishing line!
Just a little bit more!
 Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O loving Heavenly Father, please keep us through Your Holy Spirit.
 Give us what we need to continue looking to Your dear Son, our Saviour.

And when we stumble and fall pick us up again.
 Revive us and so strengthen us because we will soon finish that race.
 Through Christ our Lord, we pray, Amen.