

Sermon on **2 Timothy 4:1-8** for June 24-26, 4th Sunday after Pentecost

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I don't often go outside the boundaries of Brown County. Life in New Ulm keeps us busy and happy. An annual trip up North and some family weddings and funerals take me beyond our boundaries. There is the opportunity to meet new people, but also catch up on conversation with those loved ones you haven't seen in a while.

One acquaintance I had the chance to talk to told me about his Ethics Class and the subject of assisted suicide, and how after seeing a few friends suffer and linger fighting serious diseases that he thought that this might be ok. Clearly God's Word is against this notion. It's hard to see someone suffer or linger when they know death is inevitable, so it begs the question: How do we deal with last days and the struggle? What's the worth of living out your last days?

I had a conversation with my aunt about her granddaughter who after four years of battling cancer used her last day to bake cookies for her siblings for their track meet, and then her last night she sent texts that would be sent out later after she died, texts that they read which encouraged them to stay close to Jesus, and his Word, and church, and that they'd see her again in heaven. What is the worth of a person's last days and words? The Apostle Paul was imprisoned again in Rome. He would soon be put to death for the faith. He shows the worth:

A Christian Knows the Crown is Coming.

1) So Preach the Word with Patience in this Perverse World.

2) Pour out your life for Him now.

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing."

It has been interesting to see how people react to "the chain of command." If I tell one of my younger children to tell their big sibling to get off the screen and come to the kitchen, sometimes they delay or ignore their younger sibling. But when I send the child to say, "Dad says, get off the screen and come to the kitchen," it often gets a more agreeable response. Paul is an apostle of the Lord Jesus, sent by Jesus to share the Gospel, a spiritual father to Timothy, so his Word would be enough, but when he adds, *"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:"* Our dear Father in heaven is called as witness, as well as my Savior Jesus Christ who shed his blood for us. Jesus' kingdom (his rule in my heart) and his return (which is soon) are called into view. This is important!

"Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction." Have this message of God's Word in your heart and on the tip of your tongue ready to go. *"In season"* – not just at the planting or at the harvest for the farmer, not just for Sunday morning, or when you are sitting with your Bible for the Christian. Have it ready *"out of season"* too - when you are walking along, when you are at the lunch table at work, when you might not expect to have opportunity to talk about the faith at the car shop, the grocery aisle, the words you use with your friends, the talks you have with your kids or parents. Every time is a good time to live your faith, and declare with your words and your actions the good news of God. Paul testified to the faith before pagan kings, to Roman jailers after receiving a beating, to Jews and Gentiles alike -some who wanted him dead. He didn't force the Gospel on anyone, but shared it freely. Always be ready to hold out God's Word, the Bible, as precious and gladly hear and learn it yourself.

This will take *"great patience"* and *"careful instruction."* Or as the word used means, *"long-suffering."* How so? Expect wishy-washiness. Expect downright ridiculous ideas that people have, even ones that are well-accepted but are wrong and opposed to God's Word. Expect opposition.

"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." Do our ears itch? Do we want something more than what God gives us in his Word, or something different as though God's Word isn't enough, or won't fulfill me? We itch for something that tickles our ears and hearts. Paul says to *Preach the Word*, and here to *hold to sound doctrine* because many turn aside to myths.

Someone is always preaching to you whether it be the television, a friend's conversation, a voice on the radio, or a reel or short video on your phone, or simply the daily battle between your true baptized child of God self vs. your old sinful nature. When we imbibe more of the world and less and less of God's Word, we start to think and act and feel like the world. Everything has to be on my terms and my timing, not God's. My sinful nature wants me to think and feel that sin is ok, that God's commands really don't apply anymore whether that be in regards to greed and stealing, sexual desires, or even where I find my true identity, or how I treat my neighbor. My sinful nature wants nothing more than for me to go after the big stinking pile of false teachers whether I hear them from the pulpit or pop up on my phone. They all want the same thing – to lead me away little by little to think I really save myself with made up works-righteousness and my sin isn't really all that bad, or to lead me down the path of sin and then think I'm too far gone so that I can't be saved or forgiven. Or maybe that none of this matters. How dizzying and deceitful our sinful natures are, and how often they've led us astray. We are sinners. We need the truth, not myths.

So Paul says, *"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."* People may not like you because they don't like the message from God's Word. Many want their own version of God, like a thing of silly putty you can form into whatever shape you want it to be. Do the work of an evangelist. Be the kindest and gentlest person when it comes to this – not the arrogant know-it-all – or the one who has to always get their way. Neither be the one who has nothing to say. Stand firm on God's Word.

Why do we *"Preach the Word."* Why do we *"do the work of an evangelist?"* Why do we **Preach the Word with patience in this perverse world?** We do this because this is what Jesus did, and he did it for us. He *came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.* He came to *"proclaim freedom for the captives."* He came to *"seek and to save the lost."* And what did the leaders of the Jews do – they hated him for it. He said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the father except through me."* He is the only way to eternal life. He is God in the flesh. He is the only Savior. His voice is the only one we want to listen to, and those who preach and teach him faithfully. He endured hardship. He discharged all the duties of his ministry – even a cross – for us! Because he gave his life to be punished for the times we've had our ears itched and fell into sin and entertained false beliefs. He *"freed us from our sins through his blood."* You are forgiven in Jesus Christ.

We want others to know and hear those beautiful words as we have, "You are forgiven," because Jesus died on the cross for you. These are words that change our life now, and our eternal future. Jesus lived for you, died for you, and rose and ascended to prepare a place for you and rule all things for your good. That is your future. **A Christian Knows the Crown is Coming. So we preach the word with patience in this perverse world. And we pour out our lives for Him now.**

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing."

Paul told the believers in Rome to offer their bodies as living sacrifices in view of all God's mercy to them. Paul did the same. Jesus did each day. You and I make this effort as well to live for Jesus. Paul saw that all that was left in his thanksgiving to Jesus was his martyrdom by the sword of Rome. His life was being poured out like the last act of a sacrifice in the Old Testament after the meat was burned on the altar and an offering of wine was poured out at the base of the altar. But Paul knew what came next – the crown of righteousness. The righteousness Jesus had earned for him – robed in it since his baptism, but now he would get to experience it fully – no more sin, no more sinful nature, no more trials, no more struggle – just perfection with Jesus in heaven, and not only that, but Jesus, the righteous judge, would bestow this victor's crown on his head at the finish line of his life.

Pour out your life for him each day knowing what is coming. Preach the Word – live it, hold to it. Stand on the Truth – the Bible and don't give it up though many just want their ears itched. On this day, 493 years ago, Lutheran princes confessed the faith we hold to as Christians, as Lutherans, and they kneeled down offered their heads to be cut off should the Emperor want to take God's Word away from them. They wouldn't have their ears itched and be enslaved again to false teaching and works righteousness. Nor would they give up the faith. That day they lived and were able to confess the faith, the Gospel, true doctrine. We are beneficiaries of this true teaching. Hold to it. Why? Because the crown awaits. And Jesus will give it to us. **Preach the Word. Pour out your lives. The Crown is Coming.** Amen.

Acts 20:24 – However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.