

The Faithful Christian Pastor And His Faithful Hearers.

Text: 2 Tim 4:1-8

Suggested Hymns:
463, 373, 164, 352, 378

1) In This Life They Fight The Good Fight Of Faith

2) For The Life To Come They Are Promised
A Wonderful Reward Of Grace

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Timothy 4:1-8, *¹ I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ² Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*

³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. ⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Paul calls himself *a bondservant of Jesus Christ.*¹ He was *called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ.*²

In these words St. Paul gives us his conception, the right conception, of the Gospel ministry, but also of Christian life in general. Note the absolute sincerity, the forthright earnestness of purpose. There is not the faintest hint of dallying, of trimming, or of neglect in any shape or form.

He could truthfully say, as we read in Philippians 3:13–14, ¹³ *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

What an example for pastor and people! What an incentive to right preaching and right living! Paul himself wants us to view the matter in this light, Philippians 3:17, ¹⁷ *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

The pastor who wants to be faithful today must follow the wholesome example of our faithful fathers. Christian people who have a faithful shepherd should gladly follow him, both in his teaching and in his Christian life.

Such an attitude is essential to our spiritual well-being here below and to a full assurance of the better life to come. But the forces of evil are bent on hindering us on every hand.

Therefore it is necessary that we should take to heart and put into practise the warning admonition of the text before us.

This week marks 30 years since my ordination, which took place on the 18th of August 1996 at Nambour Qld. The readings and most of the hymns are the ones used at my ordination. Let us consider today — *The Faithful Christian Pastor and His Faithful Hearers*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. In This Life They Fight The Good Fight Of Faith.

Paul had been a strict Pharisee, but God's grace snatched him as a burning stick from the fire.³ In Acts 9:15 he is called *a chosen vessel* of the Lord, chosen to bear the Lord's name before the Gentiles, before kings, and before the children of Israel.⁴

With a burning, consecrated zeal he began to preach Christ Crucified,⁵ who had been merciful to him. Wherever he went on his three missionary journeys, he held up to men the wonderful grace of God in Christ Jesus. He was a most faithful preacher. We read in Acts 20:20, *I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house.*

And now he is nearing the close of his ministry. He is in prison at Rome, through the plots of the enemies of the Gospel. He looks back without any vain regrets as he speaks of the time of his departure from this life.

Our text says ⁶ *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.* He has been faithful in the ministry where God had called him and faithful in his Christian walk and life.

Note the song of triumph, ⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* It was an agony at times, a bitter struggle. But as a good soldier of Jesus Christ he did not shun the fray; he fought faithfully according to precepts which he himself lists as we read in 2 Timothy 2:3-5, ³ *You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.* ⁴ *No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.* ⁵ *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

“I have finished the race.” In Acts 20:24 he speaks of his earnest desire to finish his course. Here he exalts in the realisation. Like a runner in a race, Paul has persistently and consistently pressed onward to the goal and has attained.

“I have kept the faith.” From these words we can readily understand the meaning of the two preceding metaphors. Paul has guarded jealously the faith implanted in his heart at his conversion, the faith in Jesus Christ that saves. In this way he is an example of a faithful and therefore a successful pastor.

Timothy is a younger preacher of the Gospel and must carry on after his faithful mentor has been taken from him. Paul wants him to be likewise faithful to his trust; but knowing that Timothy is of a more timid disposition, he does not hesitate to warn and exhort him.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The “therefore” refers back to what Paul had written in 2 Timothy 3:16, ¹⁶ *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

It also refers back to the repeated warnings he had uttered against false teachers. For example 1 Timothy 1:4-7, ⁴ *nor give heed to fables and endless*

genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

⁵ Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, ⁶ from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

And in 2 Timothy 2:16–18, *¹⁶ But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. ¹⁷ And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, ¹⁸ who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.*

To make his admonition emphatic, Paul adds: before *the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom*. That is, when He appears to usher in the Kingdom of Glory.

If Timothy wants to stand before His God and Saviour unashamed and unafraid, he must heed the following admonition, *² Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*

That is Timothy's office, as it was Paul's, to preach the Gospel as the God-given means for the salvation of men. *"Be ready in season and out of season"* which means, step up to your work, be ready always, be zealous in preaching and applying the Word of God.

Use tact, yes, but do not debate whether the time is right or not. St. Chrysostom wrote, *"Do not hold to a fixed time; let it always be a suitable time for you.* Compare Paul's example written in Acts 20:3, *³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*

Timothy is to show faithfulness also in the nature of his preaching and practise. *"Convince,"* take to task, in a general sense refers to moral behaviour as well as to false teaching. *"Rebuke,"* a bit stronger, meaning to censure, to reprimand, sometimes even to consider a penalty. *"Exhort"* includes encouragement and comfort.

A faithful pastor must show righteous indignation at times, but he should never fail at the same time to encourage his hearers in the right way. ***“With all patience and teaching.”***

We pastors must reprove and exhort often, patiently, teaching the people again and again the more excellent way.

Compare also those other exhortations addressed to Timothy, such as 1 Timothy 4:16, ¹⁶ ***Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.***

And 2 Timothy 1:13–14, ¹³ ***Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*** ¹⁴ ***That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.***

And 2 Timothy 2:15, ¹⁵ ***Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.***

Our text says, ⁵ ***But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.***

And for his Christian warfare, we read in 1 Timothy 6:12, ¹² ***Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*** In the manner indicated, then, a Christian pastor fights the good fight of faith.

But the hearers of God’s Word must fight in the same manner. The Christian pastor in effect says to his people: *I show you the way by my teaching and my Christian warfare; do you follow me?*

These exhortations are addressed to all Christians as we read in Revelation 2:10, ¹⁰ ***Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. ... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***

And Revelation 3:11, ¹¹ ***Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.***

In our text, Paul calls attention to a particular danger which threatens Christian hearers regarding the preaching of the Gospel. Paul warns Timothy that the time will come when the hearers will have itching ears for new and strange doctrines, that they will heap up, secure in abundance, teachers who will

pander to their depraved tastes. The consequence is that they will turn away from the truth and no longer fight the good fight of faith.

Read Paul's solemn words concerning the last times as we read in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, ¹ *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ²For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*

And then think of the modern preaching and of the many heresies of our day. How shall a faithful hearer fight the good fight? By setting his face like flint against all error in doctrine, by insisting with his pastor on purity of doctrine, by clinging to the old and only Gospel of salvation. True righteousness of life, true faithfulness unto death, can flow only from strict adherence to the Word of God.

2. For The Life To Come They Are Promised A Wonderful Reward Of Grace.

Our Christianity, the true religion, and our faithful adherence to it have to do not merely with the present life, but chiefly with the life to come.

St. Paul, the faithful pastor, looks forward with confidence to the wonderful reward of grace in heaven, and he would have Timothy do likewise. He says, "*Finally*," literally, "As for what remains," and then describes the last and enduring phase of our Christian experience, *there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.*" Righteousness itself, perfect righteousness, is the crown.

In his Christian life Paul strove for perfection, but could not fully attain it.⁶ This was a source of constant grief to him, as we read in Romans 7:15, ¹⁵ *For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.*

However, he knew that in the life to come the image of God would be fully restored in him, which, according to Ephesians 4:24, consists in righteousness and true holiness. This would be to him a glorious, incorruptible crown.⁷

Our text continues, *which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day*. The Lord has promised it to His faithful ministers, and He will fulfil His promise, for He is righteous. We read in Matthew 10:22 that *he who endures to the end will be saved*. What a comfort for Paul, for Timothy, for all faithful pastors, to be clothed in yonder life with perfect righteousness!

As the shepherd, so his sheep. The faithful hearers who believe the preaching of the Cross have the same confidence. They, too, are often hindered in their sanctification through the weakness of their sinful flesh, but they are assured that they shall stand before the Lord, the righteous Judge, together with their faithful pastors, in the robe of perfect righteousness.

For Paul expressly writes, *and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing*. While they fight the good fight of faith, they are filled with love to the Lord who has redeemed them and look forward with yearning hearts to the final consummation and prays as we read in Revelation 22:20, *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

And it is all a wonderful reward of God's grace. We labour in His kingdom, we strive to be faithful; but even the best that we can do does not entitle us to a reward of merit.

Heaven was opened to us by Christ, He is our Redemption, His Holy Spirit brought us to faith in Him and preserves us to the end. Nothing short of the power of God can save us.

1 Peter 1:5 assures us that we *are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*.

God alone gets the credit for our Salvation as we read in Ephesians 2:8–9, *⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast*.

That we are saved by the grace of God is clear from Titus 2:11, *¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*.

We Christians are monuments of the grace of God. As such we serve Him faithfully in His Kingdom of Grace here below, and as such we shall glorify Him in the Kingdom of Glory hereafter. Conversion, justification, glorification.⁸ God has established this order, and He alone can carry it out.

The glory to come — let it incite you to greater faithfulness during the time of your earthly pilgrimage. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 1:1

² Romans 1:1, Colossians 1:1. Cp. also 1 Cor. 2:2; Phil. 1:21; 1 Cor. 9:22-27; Acts 20:26-27

³ Acts 9

⁴ Cp. Gal. 1:1

⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:23

⁶ Philippians 3:12

⁷ Cp. Gal. 5:5; 1 Cor. 9:25

⁸ Romans 8:30