

Preaching the Word in Times of Doubt

Jonathan K. Dodson | 2 Tim 4:1-8 | March 2, 2021

We've talked a lot about race and the gospel over the past year, and in our desire to honor the diversity of God's people, I've invited pastor Tory Mayo of The Well to preach next Sunday so make a point to join us. We're seeking to be bound together in divided times. What binds us together? *Preaching the Word*. But what about when the Word is deconstructed? *Doubting the Word*. Is it worth it? *Reaching for the Reward*.

Preaching the Word

What should preachers preach? What should church members expect? V.2 pastors who *preach the word*. What is the Word? It's a central theme in the letter. *Follow the pattern of sound words, cut the Word straight, like a workman, the word of God is not bound*, all summarized in 3:16 as Scripture: *God's words*. God-breathed *speech*. We should expect ministers to preach *Scripture* not their opinions. Is that your expectation when you log onto a service? Is it your longing when we gather on Sundays? *That the Word of God is preached?* That's the minister's charge and it should be the church's expectation. Preaching the word is our job description. Sometimes people will say, he's a great guy but he can't really preach. When your pipes burst would you settle for a plumber who's a really nice

guy but not good with plumbing? Not at all and preaching is much more significant, so serious the charge is given **in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus**. It's courtroom language. The order comes from the divine court, the very presence of God the Father and Christ the Son. And the charge is enhanced by three descriptions of Christ. First, Christ **who is to judge the living and the dead**. What kind of judgment? Jesus says, "**The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son...**" (Jn 5:22). *All* judgment, over *all* people, living and dead is given to Jesus. Why is this here?

Accountability. To emblazon on preacher's minds and church's hearts, the absolute necessity of attending to the divinely authoritative word. The appeal to Christ as judge is to hold us to account, to remind us the Word is how we'll be judged. So, don't reduce Scripture to a moral handbook, an intellectual puzzle, or set of spiritual warm fuzzy. That's not what it claims to be. It is intellectually rigorous, morally robust, and moves you...because it's the speech of God. So, teachers *and listeners* labor to submit your thoughts *to the Word* not bend the Word to suit your thoughts. The second enhancement to preach the word is the promise of Christ's **appearing**. It's the word from which we get epiphany. The sudden arrival of Christ will be radiant, like the bright morning sun, accompanied by trumpets and shouts. It's *meant* to evoke awe: The resplendent, reigning, returning Christ. His appearing should

compel preaching, not just because of Jesus' is judge, but because of his manifest beauty and glory. Judge: authority. Appearing: awe. We should *heed* his word because he *will* appear. Every single person will face the Son of God. What will you have to say about how you handled his words? Will you be embarrassed by your neglect, humbled by your obsession with lesser words? Reading, posting, ranting about masks, unbothered to attend to *his Word*? People sign up in droves for marriage/parenting class, but a mere dozen for the Bible class. Jesus is real; he's coming back, and bringing the **kingdom** with him, the third enhancement to the charge. *The kingdom is the reign and rule of Christ over everyone and everything.* The reordering of every atom for those who trust his Word. *Preach the Word. Heed the Word.*

Doubting the Word

But there's a challenge. Timothy's preaching is falling on deaf ears. People are less interested in *the Word* and more interested in *other words*. Some turning away from the truth. Nearly 60% of people raised in the Church deconstruct their faith after high school: your kids, your friends, yourself. Now not all deconstruction is bad. It can be helpful to take beliefs apart and examine them for integrity. After all, what good is a belief that can't stand up to scrutiny? But it's also important to admit that any act of doubt comes from a place of faith.

No one stands on neutral ground. If you doubt historic Christianity, it's because of faith in something else: post-Enlightenment reason, deconstructionist philosophers, a podcast. Here's where Paul's sage advice comes in. V. 3 [For a time is coming when people will not endure healthy teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.](#) Couple things: teachers, passions. **Teachers.** Notice people aren't "enduring healthy teaching." The word *enduring* is tongue and cheek. They aren't willing to *put in the hard work* to examine sound, biblical teaching. They don't want to use their heads; they want their ears tickled. It's welcoming influences *you want to hear* but ignoring things *you don't want to hear*. They're *intellectually dishonest*. If you're going to doubt, doubt well. Pick good teachers from both sides. Christians who deconstruct often think because they grew up around conservative Christianity they already know the Bible, so they choose to balance it out with non-biblical or progressive teachers. But the problem is, they don't *really* know the Bible. They haven't studied hard, read broadly, or asked difficult questions of good scholars. So doubt well: get good teachers from both sides. Second, doubt in community not in a corner. Doubt *and* faith are nurtured in relationship. Honor that. Don't withdraw. Lean in. Consult local teachers. Elders and pastors who know you. Doubt is

rarely a pure intellectual enterprise. You need leaders who can help you sort thru layers of pain, misunderstanding, sin, and genuine doubt. We'd love to. Third, doubt reverently. Remember, this is not a worldview, an intellectual game. It is the authoritative word of God. And you'll have to account for how you've handled it. Doubt with him not apart from. Make it a matter of reverent prayer not just research. Next **passions**. The selection of teachers is driven by passions. This word is "desire" + a prefix that means "over": *over-desire*. What desire drives your selection of inputs? *Anxiety*? In an age of information overload it can be easy to feel like you have to have all the answers. So to offload anxiety, dissolve online pressure, we gather up podcasts, websites, articles, feeds to help us hone expertise. Along the way we end up creating a *pastiche authority* comprised of sources *we've* curated. But if we're not careful that pastiche, curated authority, will rival, eclipse the Word, elders who've studied much longer. Instead of casting your anxiety onto curated knowledge hoping it will care for you, cast anxiety on the Lord knowing he cares for you. *Is it to be right?* If that's your chief desire, then you will inevitably be compelled to expose those who are wrong. A person in our church posted something nonpartisan about the election, and she was subsequently dressed down by a thread of posts from a non-American! When passion to be right is in overdrive you'll mistreat others. Or perhaps you desire is *to be*

accepted. Twitter or Instagram push an issue to the forefront, and to feel accepted you like/post. After the race riots, people blacked out their Insta feed as an act of protest, and some who didn't were chastised. Did you black out because of a deep commitment to racial justice or to be liked? What desire is in overdrive in you? Desire to be non-anxious, right, approved? The only place passion can be fulfilled is in a hyper-capable source. The crown of righteousness is given to those who love his appearing.

Seeking the Reward

How do we endure all this? Paul says, *As for you, always be sober minded, endure evil, always do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry* (5). To be *sober minded* is to have a level head about things. Not off balance. The people I know like this are not given to extremes *because they're anchored by an intake of the Word, centered in the love of Christ. Endure evil*. When people wander off into myths, are driven by passions and pastiche authorities, they often slander, gossip, and tear down those who challenge them. Endure this. *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad when others say things against you falsely for great is your reward. Do the work of an evangelist*. Be about the gospel. When we're dialed into Christ as Judge, his appearing, and the Kingdom, we'll be about the gospel. But when we're lulled by lesser authorities, we evangelize for them,

proselytize our politics but not the Word. *Fulfill your ministry. Don't give up. Keep your head, endure evil, be about the gospel, and don't give up. Why? 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.* The reason we should *keep our head, endure evil, be about the gospel and keep going* is because we'll receive a crown. A crown symbolizes the rightful belonging of a king. Paul is saying those who love Christ, will belong next Christ. Not just that. Those who love his appearing will enjoy an endless peace, righteousness, and approval that come with the kingdom. So love his appearing. *Doubt well; heed the Word, love Christ, and reach for the reward that always satisfies.*