

Given the fact I announced my retirement from CPC last September, this must be the longest goodbye in recorded history. I want to thank all of you for putting up with this for an entire year! But here we are; finally, the day for me to say goodbye has come. After almost 35 years at CPC, I've been experiencing so many lasts: last staff meeting, last elder meeting, last paycheck, and today, my last sermon.

Many of you have asked us if we'll be staying in the area and still be a part of CPC. The answer to that is yes and no. Yes, we're planning on staying put. We still feel called to the San Francisco Peninsula. I'll be leading the Bay Area School of Ministry, better known as BASOM. BASOM exists to strengthen the work of God in the Bay Area by raising up leaders through our Pastoral Residency Program and strengthening existing pastors through our Pastoral Cohorts. You can learn more about that on the website basom.com.

So we're staying, but we've also decided we won't make this our home church for at least a year. We're doing that because I've witnessed the damage long-time lead pastors can do to a church if they don't let go. I've been your pastor for 35 years. It's been one of the greatest gifts God has given me. You'll always be in my heart. But, as of tomorrow, I'm not your pastor anymore. That responsibility lies with Kevin and the rest of our pastoral staff. Trust me; you're in very good hands!

The last few weeks, I've been wrestling with what to say today. After preaching over 1,000 sermons at CPC, what do you do for a finale? I've decided to go with another man's finale, and that would be the apostle Paul's. I'm not comparing myself to Paul. That would be both foolish and false. Paul, an apostle, wrote these words to Timothy. Timothy was a young man called to lead in a challenging place called Ephesus. Paul was his mentor, the man he'd leaned on for guidance and strength. But now Paul sits in a Roman prison waiting for Nero's order of execution. 2 Timothy, a letter written to Timothy from prison, contains Paul's last recorded words. I certainly hope these are not my last recorded words! But I'd like us to imagine these words were written not to an individual like Timothy, rather to a church like ours. The best way to describe it is a final charge. The contents of this charge express very well what I want to say to you as a church today. Let's read 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

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.

There are four important things I want us to hear in this passage: The seriousness of the charge, the contents of the charge, the urgency of the charge, and the necessities of the charge.

The seriousness of the charge

Let's start with the seriousness of the charge. We live in a day and age where people are chided for being too serious or heavy. Of course, a sense of humor is a great gift. But there are times to stop kidding around. You don't yuck it up at half-time of a close contest or at the critical juncture of a battle. This was one of those times for Timothy. So Paul makes this charge, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus." In other words, they're my witness. They're watching when I write this to you; you're accountable to them, not to me. And then he offers three solemn realities about the future work of Christ which electrify this charge.

First, he talks about his judgment. He will judge the *"living and the dead."* The old KJV says, *"the quick and the dead."* The idea here is, "Sober up! There is a judgment to come!" We don't like to talk about judgment. But judgment is real.

Next, Paul mentions his appearance, not his first appearance but his second. Did you know Jesus will make another appearance? I recall as a kid going to the movie theatre to see a movie called Big Red, about an Irish Setter. At intermission, they brought out an actual Irish Setter and told us it was Big Red! I was stunned! Big Red made an appearance in my hometown theatre! I doubt it was the real Big Red, but just someone's pet Irish Setter. Well, think of what it's going to be like when Jesus makes his appearance!

Finally, Paul speaks of his kingdom. When he appears, King Jesus will establish his kingdom. He'll reign overall. Everything will be perfectly aligned with his will.

As a church, we're to think about these things because not only do they sober us up, but they motivate us. We're not just playing games here! This isn't a religious country club that exists for the benefit of the members. There are eternal realities at stake. Later in the chapter, Paul talks about how he himself had internalized this. In verse 8, he says, *"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's not so much about fear; it's about the excitement and anticipation of seeing the One we love and serve

and actually have him commend and reward us. Paul looked forward to these things. He wants us to be ready for this and for that to motivate us to faithfulness.

The content of the charge

For Timothy to be ready, he'd have to pay heed to Paul's charge. This is the second thing. The content of the charge is found in the first three words of verse 2, "Preach the word." Paul talked about God-inspired "sacred writings" or "the Scripture" at the end of chapter 3. The Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God. In verse 3, he speaks of "sound doctrine," in verse 4, "the truth." That's what he means by "the word."

As a church, we're to be people of the Word. We're not to preach our own word, but God's Word. The issue isn't what we want to say but what God has already said. We're not trying to come up with anything new, but we communicate what's already been spoken. Furthermore, the focus is the Word, not ourselves. It's not about our own story or personal experience. Those things might shed light on the Word, but the focus is the Word. This happens not just here on Sundays as you come a listen to a sermon, but it happens in all of our ministries. It's happening right now in our CPCKids ministry and with our students. It happens in our Community Groups, WBS, Men's Fraternity, and MOPS. In all these places, we preach the Word, which Paul calls "the sword of the Spirit."

In this letter, Paul has already told Timothy to believe the Word, to study the Word, and to live the Word, but that's not enough. We also need to preach the Word. I think Timothy was one of those guys who'd have been very content to just stay in his study and forget about the preaching part. Preaching is hard work. When I came to CPC, by all accounts, I wasn't very good at it. But I did work at it. And the elders were kind enough to support me as I entered a doctoral program in preaching. I'm not sure if they did that for me or for all of you, but I'm grateful for it. But it's still hard work that gives me both headaches and heartaches. Headaches because it's just hard mental work. Heartaches because I know how seldom I live up to my own preaching. I think that was true for Timothy, and so Paul says, "Preach the word."

What is preaching? Listen to a definition from J. I. Packer: "Christian preaching is the event of God bringing to a congregation a Bible-based, Christ-related, life-impacting message of instruction and direction from (God) himself through the words of a spokesman." Each part of that definition is worth thinking about. And though, in a sense, this happens in all of our ministries, it's when we meet together as a body on the Lord's Day that the preaching of the Word must be front and center. It's through this preaching that a church grows and matures.

I don't think I have to tell you there's a dearth of biblical preaching in America today. The very validity of preaching is being attacked. The idea of someone standing in front of a group of people and proclaiming absolute truth is out of style. I mean the audacity of that! Don't we need discussion to share ideas and stories? Don't we need to find ways to connect with visual learners? I mean, you can't just preach to them. They'll forget most of what they heard by breakfast the next morning.

Several years ago, The British Weekly published this letter:

Dear Sir:

It seems ministers feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I've been attending church quite regularly for 30 years, and I've probably heard 3,000 of them. To my consternation, I discovered I couldn't remember a single sermon. I wonder if a minister's time might be more profitably spent on something else?

For weeks a storm of responses ensued, finally ended by this letter:

Dear Sir:

I've been married for 30 years. During that time, I've eaten 32,850 meals - mostly my wife's cooking. Suddenly I've discovered I can't remember the menu of a single meal. And yet, I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago.

Maybe that is why Peter said, "*Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow in your salvation*" (1 Peter 2:2). So when you come to this church, you should come hungry for a well-prepared meal from the Word of God that spiritually sustains you. Not a watered-down little chat with a verse at the end; not someone just sharing from their own life; and not a dull and boring speech you listen to with the same interest you watch a flight attendant giving instructions on how to put on your oxygen mask. But you come to hear the Word of God proclaimed with care, relevance, and convicting power. This is why we're so committed to expository preaching because it forces us to deal with the Word in its entirety, not just the parts we like or think are important. I've never had to worry about what to preach next because it's just the next passage and what's always amazed me is how so often that's exactly what we need to hear!

But for us to do that well as a church, we'll have to keep a few things in mind. Look at what Paul says. He says, "be prepared in season and out of season." Isn't it interesting as individuals and as a church, we go through seasons? There are seasons of growth, seasons of pruning, seasons of drought. But through it all, be prepared. Preach the Word when it's convenient and inconvenient, popular or unpopular. Don't change the message just because it's out of season! Preach it when you feel like it; preach it when you don't.

Lynn has been a wise judge of this stuff for me. She tells me it's when I feel the most disappointed by what I've preached that God uses me the most. On the other hand, there have many times when I thought I hit a home run, and I didn't even get to first base. Someone once told me, "Your sermon is never as bad as you might think it is, nor is it ever as good as you might think it is." That's helped me not be too inflated or deflated.

Paul says to also keep in mind that part of preaching the Word is to "correct, rebuke and encourage." When you come to church, or when you go to your small group Bible study, do you expect to be corrected? Do you expect to be rebuked? Do you expect to be encouraged to do

something? All those things are important. Far too often, when we're corrected or rebuked, we get angry, and we just go find another church where they make us feel better. But the Word will speak directly to where you're at. We shouldn't shy away from correcting, rebuking, and encouraging people to do what's right.

It's like soccer. What good would a referee be if all he did was run back and forth and watch the game? He has to make hard calls. Every once in a while, he pulls out the yellow card and warns someone. If it gets really bad, they get a red card. That's what you should expect from a church. There may be a few hard calls. When you hear the Word, you may get a yellow card; sometimes, you even get a red card.

Unfortunately, there are some of us who pull out the yellow card too much. So Paul reminds us to do this "with great patience and careful instruction." Don't be too quick with the card. Be patient and encouraging, especially with slow learners. Don't just rebuke them but instruct them; be patient enough and practical enough that they can work on getting it right.

The question arises, "Why?" Why is preaching the Word the great need of the moment in Timothy's day, and why does it remain so in ours? The answer is in verses 3-4.

The urgency of the charge

There's an urgency to this charge. Why? Because:

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. vv. 3-4

That's the reason. The time is coming when people won't want sound teaching; they'll literally turn aside from the truth. But that's not all. They'll find teachers who'll say what their itching ears want to hear, turning from the truth to myths.

Isn't that what we see today? I don't want to be an alarmist, but this describes our culture, and even worse, it describes many of our churches. You can find churches today that reject the idea that Jesus is the one and only way to find true salvation, that those who reject Christ will be eternally separated from God. They'll say that's narrow and harsh, and the Christian faith is just one of many paths leading to God.

You can find churches today that reject a biblical sexual ethic that says God created sexual intimacy to be enjoyed and shared exclusively within the covenant of marriage and that the covenant of marriage was designed by God to be exclusively between a man and a woman. You can find churches today that deny the inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture and instead teach us the Bible is a human book. They say the Bible may "contain" the Word of God, but it's not his actual word verbatim. They say the Old Testament God is harsh and mean. The apostles Paul and Peter were wrong about a few things.

You can find churches today that will tell you the core message of Christianity—the gospel—is not that Jesus died for our sins, was buried

and resurrected, and thereby offers reconciliation with God by faith in Christ alone. They'll tell you the gospel is really primarily about social justice, and the idea of God willing His Son to die on a cross is nothing short of cosmic child abuse.

Finally, you can find churches today that teaches God doesn't know or control the future; that he's not sovereign over everything that happens. The future is open and determined by the free will of human beings and not the sovereign will of God.

By the way, this is nothing new. Not only did Paul predict it here in this passage, but years earlier, Jeremiah lamented, "*The prophets prophesy lies...and my people love it this way*" (Jer. 5:31). You might wonder why I'm so pointed and specific. The best answer to that question is something I read recently, attributed to Martin Luther,

If I profess, with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I'm not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity. Where the battle rages, the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace to him if he flinches at that one point.

It's in light of all this, the charge is given to preach the Word. Don't miss the logic of this. Paul says, "Preach the Word! Why? Because they're not going to want to hear it." Did you get that? But what do so many of our churches say today? "Since they don't want to hear it, let's give them something else. Let's try to meet their felt needs. Let's give them what they want to hear. Let's make them feel good." But Paul says, "The reason why you need to preach the word is because they won't put up with it!" That doesn't sound like a very pragmatic approach to growing a church! "Give them what they don't want."

Let me ask you, moms and dads, what would happen if you gave your kids exactly what they wanted to eat all the time? They'd be so unfit you'd have to carry them around in a wheel barrel. But you don't do that. You give them a balanced diet. You don't give them what they want; you give them what they need. And as they grow and mature, they develop a taste for the right things. As we grow and mature in the faith, we come to savor the truth of God's Word. We know even when it's hard to swallow, it's just what we need. When people get a taste for quality food, they can never go back to junk.

The necessities of the charge

In order for us to complete this charge in an atmosphere of opposition and apathy, there are certain necessities we'll have to keep in mind. These are given in verse 5.

First, "*keep your head in all situations.*" Don't panic; don't go scurrying about trying to find the latest gimmick. Why do restaurants try to get people in the door through gimmicks? Because the food is terrible! Paul says, "Keep your head. Forget the gimmicks."

Then he says to "*endure hardship.*" You're going to have some bumps in the road, some days when you'll want to bail out. In the years to come,

it will become harder and harder to be a Christian. But you need to hang in there. Don't quit. Keep fighting.

Next, he says, *"do the work of an evangelist."* An evangelist is one who leads people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Why would Paul have to tell him to do this? Perhaps it didn't come naturally to Timothy. Perhaps it wasn't his gift, but he needed to do it anyway. This isn't my gift either. I'm a pediatrician, not an obstetrician. But when a baby needs to get born, you don't tell it to wait; you deliver it.

Finally, he says, *"discharge all the duties of your ministry."* Don't be side-tracked. Keep at it. Do all the things you need to do right to the end. This has personal meaning for me. While my ministry at CPC has been fulfilled, my ministry has not. I still have work to do, and it's not on the golf course. Well, the truth is I have a lot of work to do on the golf course, but that's another story!

All of this is what Timothy needed to remember, and that's what we need to remember as well. And so, to you, the people of CPC, the staff and elders who I love and respect so much, that is my final charge to you. And I give you this charge with love for all of you and gratitude for letting me be your pastor for the past 35 years.

In John Pollock's biography of Billy Graham, there is recorded an incident that occurred when Lyndon Johnson was elected President. The President asked Billy, who he'd been friends for years, what particular position he'd like to have in his administration. Without a moment's thought, Billy said to him, "Sir, I believe Jesus Christ has called me to preach his gospel. To me, that is the highest calling any man could have on earth."

I've been so blessed to have that same calling. For that, I give thanks to my God, to my family, and to all of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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