

1 Timothy 4:6-16 “The Pastor’s Calling”
Ezekiel 33
Psalm 37:1-11

(October 2, 2011)

Read Ezekiel 33:1-20

The LORD says to Ezekiel that he is a watchman (verses 1-9),
called to sound the warning – so that he might save both himself and his hearers.

And the message that Ezekiel is to preach is that Israel must repent (verses 10-20)
and turn back from their wicked ways.

Psalm 37 seeks to reinforce the same message,
but does so by reminding us of the “big picture.”

If all you do is look at the present,
then the wicked may appear to triumph.

But David says, “Do not fret yourself because of evildoers,” (v1)
“fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices...
for the evildoers shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.” (v7, 9)

Notice that while David emphasizes the future,
he does not ignore the present:

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.
Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will act.” (v3-5)

David’s point is very much like Jesus’ point in Mark 10:30,
where he says that those who leave family and lands for “my sake and for the gospel,”
will “receive a hundredfold now in this time,
houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands,
with persecutions,
and in the age to come eternal life.”

So let’s sing Psalm 37:1-11
Read 1 Timothy 4

Did you hear Paul’s statement about the value of godliness?
“godliness is of value in every way,
as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” (v8)

Notice that for David, for Ezekiel, for Jesus, and for Paul,
their eschatological focus – their conviction that everything will be made right in the end,
also results in a conviction that therefore *some things* will be made right *now*.

Not necessarily in the way that *you* might wish!

But if we worship a God who will make things right in the end,
(and especially, since he is a God who has already begun to make things right
in the resurrection of Jesus!)
then we should expect that he will *begin* to make things right even now –
especially in the church.

Paul said at the end of chapter 3:

“I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay,
you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God,
which is the church of the living God,
a pillar and buttress of the truth.” (3:14-15)

We saw last time at the beginning of chapter 4,
that Paul is convinced that the word of God and prayer
sanctifies the creation.

The created order is good (because it was created by God),
but the created order is cursed (because of the sin of man).

Therefore, the created order needs to be sanctified –
needs to be made holy –
as Paul puts it,

“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected
if it is received with thanksgiving,
for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.”

Paul is dealing particularly with marriage and food in these verses,
but it could be applied to anything else:
science, art, music, business, law.

Everything you do throughout the week –
the labor of your “six days” is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.
(Paul will actually apply this to the question of wealth in chapter 6)

But with all these false teachers around – who promote the doctrines of demons –
how is Timothy supposed to function?

In chapter 4, Paul lays out his vision of what a pastor is supposed to do.
Nowadays many pastors have become CEO’s or managers,
whose main task appears to be organizing/running the church.
Some Reformed folk have reacted against this model,
by saying that ministers should just focus on preaching.

But I must concur with Bill Shishko in his sermon before the OPC GA a couple years ago,
that “Preaching Christ Is Not Enough.”

It is not sufficient for a pastor to preach Christ,
he must also model Christ – he must imitate Christ.

And I would suggest that you can see this twofold emphasis in both sections of our text today:
the training of the minister (verses 6-10)
and the work of the minister (verses 11-16)

1. The Training of the Minister (6-10)

Paul uses two different words for “training” in verses 6 and 7.

a. What Can Be Taught: the Words of the Faith and of the Good Doctrine (v6)

⁶ *If you put these things before the brothers,^{la} you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.*

In verse 6, Paul says that Timothy has *been trained*
in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine.

This word has to do with imparting knowledge, skill or wisdom.

In other words, Paul says that Timothy has received a thorough theological education.
He knows and understands the content of Christian teaching.

Today we would say that Timothy had been trained in
“exegetical, systematic, and practical theology”!

After all, Timothy had spent several years studying with Paul,
listening to Paul preach, helping Paul write letters to churches,
engaging in the day-to-day life of Paul’s “traveling presbytery.”

But not only has Timothy been trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine,
Timothy has also learned “homiletics” – how to preach.

Because Timothy is expected to “put these things before the brothers.”

(Or, as verse 11 says, “Command and teach these things.”)

And if Timothy does so,
then, Paul says, “you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus.”

The word translated servant is the same word (“diakonos”) found in the previous chapter.

Timothy is a deacon – a servant, a minister – of Christ Jesus.

This reminds us, first, that the word “deacon” simply refers to one who ministers/serves
on behalf of another.

It also reminds us that the officers of the church are not primarily servants *of the church*.

Your pastors, your elders, your deacons, are not agents/emissaries of the church –
but are servants/ministers of Christ Jesus, the head of the church.

So ministers should be trained in the scriptures – in the words of the faith, and the good doctrine. But there is a second kind of training that Paul speaks of in verses 7-8.

b. Spiritual Gymnastics: Training for Godliness (v7-8)

⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Paul here brings back the word “godliness” which he introduced at the end of chapter 3.

And as he said in verse 16, the “mystery of godliness” – the secret of true piety – is the gospel – the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The mystery of godliness lies at the heart of Paul’s admonition to Timothy here.

Godliness (eusebeia) – true piety – is rooted in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ. The Son of God came in the flesh – and was vindicated (justified) in the Spirit through his resurrection from the dead.

All attempts at godliness – all efforts at piety – apart from the gospel – have the “form of godliness” – but deny its power (2 Tim 3:5).

The mystery of godliness – the *power* of godliness – is found in the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection of Jesus.

And so Paul tells Timothy to train himself for godliness.

Training for godliness is contrasted with paying attention to irreverent, silly myths.

A myth, in Paul’s day, referred to legends about heroes, gods, and the like.

There were Greek myths (think of the stories of Zeus, Poseidon, etc., or, for that matter, the Greek philosophers who had their own myths – Plato’s creation story, for example)

There were Jewish myths (new stories about angels and patriarchs)

There were the eastern mystery religions with their exotic stories and rituals

And there were the beginnings of Gnostic myths

(blending all of the above).

There were lots of “irreverent, silly myths” in Paul’s day.

And there are lots of “irreverent, silly myths” in our day as well!

There is the myth of science.

This myth says that science has rendered the existence of God moot.

He may or may not exist,

but modern science operates as though God does not exist –

as LaPlace said to Napoleon, “I had no need of that hypothesis.”

So long as science is content with being (like bodily training) useful for some things –
“of some value” – then it remains a good thing –
it remains one of those good things created by God,
which is “made holy by the word of God and prayer.”
But when science tries to replace “the mystery of godliness”
and tries to become “of value in every way,”
then it becomes an “irreverent, silly myth.”

Now, notice that Paul does not say that Timothy should know nothing about these myths.
(He may need to understand them in order to refute them!)

But he should not “train himself” in them.

Paul uses the word “gymnasia” – from which we get our word “gymnasium” –
to speak of the sort of training that he expects.

This is a very different word from the word “trained” in verse 6.

In verse 6, Timothy has “been trained” (he has been instructed –

he has received training in a particular skill or wisdom)

and particularly, he has been trained in the words of the faith – the good teaching,
the good doctrine.

But the training that has been imparted

must now be implemented through Timothy’s own discipline.

Paul uses the illustration of physical training.

Bodily training is of some value.

Those of you who work out know the health benefits of keeping fit.

But training for godliness is far better.

But what *is* training for godliness?

Remember that godliness (eusebeia) means “piety” –

“behavior reflecting correct religious beliefs and attitudes” (Louw-Nida).

Training for godliness includes two things:

the study of the mystery of godliness (the incarnation and resurrection of Christ);

the practice of the things that flow from his incarnation and resurrection.

If the mystery of godliness (the secret of piety) is the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus,
then training for godliness means devoting yourself to that teaching
and the practices that follow from that teaching.

Notice that these things must be true of *me*.

They must be true of the *minister* – Timothy.

This doesn’t mean that this is irrelevant to other Christians –

because the minister is not called to be something *different* from other Christians
rather, the minister is called to be an *exemplary* Christian!

This is why the elders are urging the small group Bible studies
to include a service/outreach component.

Our training for godliness should include both *hearing* the Word and *doing* the Word.

And Paul says that Timothy should devote himself to this sort of spiritual gymnastics, because these spiritual exercises have “value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

And verses 9 and 10 talk about the goal of our spiritual gymnastics:

c. The Goal of Our Agonizing: the Living God (v9-10)

⁹*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.* ¹⁰*For to this end we toil and strive,^[b] because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.*

Paul here is reminding Timothy *why* he needs to “train himself for godliness.”

The reason why he should “toil and strive” (agonizomai – struggle, fight, compete) is because we have our hope set on the living God.

Let me ask you:
where is your hope set?

What is your goal?
What is it that motivates you to get up in the morning?
Is it because you have set your hope on the living God?

Or is your hope set on career advancement?
Or on the future of your family – your children?
Or on your own personal happiness and pleasure?

If we are training ourselves for godliness,
by setting our hope on the mystery of godliness himself, our Lord Jesus Christ,
then we will not be half-hearted in our pursuit of him!

Now, I do want to address the last part of verse 10.
“who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

This statement makes it clear that it is proper to say that God has a “saving disposition” toward humanity.

I will say here that I am disappointed that the Trinity Hymnal revised the hymn “And Can It Be” by changing “and bled for Adam’s helpless race” to “bled for all his chosen race.”
It was indeed Adam’s helpless race for whom Christ died!
(Christ did not die for iguanas – but for man)

And so God is in fact the “Savior of all people” (of all humanity).

But that does not mean that he saves every individual –
in fact, Paul makes it clear that there is a distinction between
“all humanity” and “those who believe.”

In one sense, God is the savior of the human race.
In another sense, God is only the savior of those who believe.

Countless Reformed theologians have affirmed (following Peter Lombard)
that Christ’s sacrifice is “sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect.”

2. The Work of the Minister (11-16)

a. A Commanding Example (v11-12)

In verse 11, Paul makes clear that not only is Timothy supposed to *practice* these things –
but he is also to

¹¹*Command and teach these things.*

You can see here again that Paul thinks of the minister simply as an exemplary Christian.

One might think that verses 6-10 only apply to pastors –
but then Paul says that Timothy is supposed to command and teach these things
to the congregation.

And verse 12 reinforces this.

¹²*Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct,
in love, in faith, in purity.*

We live in a day that exalts youth.

And this verse gets quoted all the time in favor of the “youth movement.”

There are churches where none of the “elders” are over the age of 30.

And it is true that Timothy was on the younger side.

Since he had been traveling with Paul for at least 10-15 years,
he was probably in his 30s or 40s by the time this letter was written.

(Tradition says that he died in 97 AD at the age of 80 –
which would put him in his early 40s at the time of this epistle).

I can sympathize with Timothy.

At 41, I still feel like I’m too young.

I don’t have enough gray hair – or the wisdom and experience that gray hair represents.

But, Paul says, that doesn’t change anything.

My calling here, before you, is to set an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

The point is *not* that you are supposed to look like *me*.
The point is that you are supposed to look like *Jesus!*

And I am to point you to him – both in my teaching, and in my conduct.

And Paul drives this home in verses 13-15:

b. Public Reading and Teaching (v13-15)

¹³*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.* ¹⁴

How is Timothy to set an example?

First: “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”

This same word for “public reading” is found in Acts 13:15,
where it speaks of the “reading from the Law and the Prophets”
and in 2 Corinthians 3:14 Paul says that when they “read the old covenant”
their minds are veiled.

People sometimes ask me why we read so much scripture in the service.
This is the answer!

Some today say that because we all have Bibles at home,
we do not need as much scripture reading in church.
But if my task is to train *you* in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine,
then I need to teach you how to understand the scriptures.
And there is no substitute for reading the scriptures,
and exhorting you to do what it commands –
and teach you to believe what it says.

Paul goes on to say:

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Timothy’s gift is likely the gift of teaching that Paul has just referred to.

Paul had spoken of this in 1:18, when he charged Timothy,
“in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you,
that by them you may wage the good warfare,
holding faith and a good conscience.”

Now Paul adds that this occurred “when the council of elders laid their hands on you” –
literally when the “presbuteriuou” – the “eldership” or “presbytery” –
laid hands on you.

We will be ordaining Jonathan Bonomo next Sunday evening at LaPorte
(I hope you all come!)

You will get a chance to see Presbyterian prophecy in action!

We will also take next Saturday as a day of fasting and prayer,
in preparation for the ordination service on Sunday.

In Acts 13 we hear that the church in Antioch fasted before sending out Paul and Barnabas.

In Acts 14:23 we hear that Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every church
“with prayer and fasting.”

Paul’s language here in 1 Timothy 4 gives us some idea of why.

In the scriptures, fasting is an expression of helplessness –
a recognition that we are weak and helpless before our enemies
(whether literal armies, or the powers of sin and death).

As Jonathan Bonomo prepares to engage the enemy in the work of ministry,

he is embarking on a task that is beyond his abilities.

He needs help!

And he needs far more help than we can possibly give him.

Therefore, the session has called for a day of prayer and fasting next Saturday,
that we may humble ourselves before God and ask him for mercy
for Pastor Jon, and for ourselves.

I’ll be sending out a special edition of the Pastoral Notes this week to explain more.

But the regular discipline – the spiritual exercises of the minister
is found in verse 15:

¹⁵Practice these things, immerse yourself in them,^[c] so that all may see your progress.

“These things” that Timothy should practice include the whole of verses 11-14.

A minister should never be content with his preaching –
but should always strive to do better at reading, exhorting, teaching.

Likewise, a minister should never be content with his example
of speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

And you should see my progress in these things.

Paul then concludes with a striking statement:

c. The Goal of Your Life and Teaching: the Salvation of Yourself and Your Hearers (v16)

¹⁶Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.

Notice again the connection between life and doctrine.

Keep a close watch on yourself – because it is far too easy to let your conduct slide,
and if your conduct falls short, you will turn people away from the gospel.

Keep a close watch on your doctrine – your teaching –
because if your teaching departs from the gospel,
you will follow the teachings of demons.

Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Have you ever heard someone say,

“I was saved by a street preacher”?

Some people (who are more theologically precise than is good for them!)
will say, “Oh, no you weren’t, you were saved by God!”

Paul says that Timothy will save himself and his hearers
by keeping a close watch on himself and his doctrine.

I once did a study on “what saves you?”

At various points in scripture, you hear that

God saves you (2 Timothy 1:8)

Jesus saves you (1 Thessalonians 5:8)

the Spirit saves you (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

faith saves you (Acts 16:31)

repentance saves you (2 Cor 7:10)

grace saves you (Ephesians 2:8)

the gospel saves you (1 Cor 15:2)

confessing Jesus is Lord saves you (Rom 10:9)

baptism saves you (1 Peter 3:21)

the prayer of faith saves you (James 2:15)

and here, Paul says your preacher saves you (and himself),

by persisting in keeping watch on his life and doctrine!

Now, it is true that *God saves*.

Indeed, *only God can save!*

But God saves you by means of the gospel that is preached,

the faith that is confessed, the prayers of one another;

he saves you by the sacraments that he has given –

and by the ministry – the pastors and shepherds that he gives to his flock.

After all, what happens if a pastor fails in his life and doctrine?

If a pastor fails in his life –

well, just look at what has happened with the scandals in the last few years.

Many people have concluded that Christianity is a farce –

because of the conduct of Christian ministers.

If these are exemplary Christians, I don’t want to be a Christian!

And if a pastor fails in his doctrine, then the sheep are led astray.

Indeed, serious departures from the apostolic standard

are nothing less than doctrines of demons,

and when the flock is led into false doctrine,

then they are led *away* from the gospel – away from *salvation*.

(Why did I become a pastor?!)

Oh – that’s right – “for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

I became a pastor so that you (and I) might be saved –

just like Ezekiel’s watchman –

sounding the alarm, “Judgment is coming.

Repent, or you will all perish!”