

LIFE: Standing Strong

Standing Strong

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Bible Text: 2 Timothy 4:1-5

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If you are a first-time guest or visitor I want to welcome you. In fact, I want to welcome everybody, even those of you that have been here every single week of this message series through the book of 2 Timothy. I want to welcome you to chapter four. I want to welcome you to the last chapter. I want to welcome you to the time that we have been desiring to get to. Over the course of the last couple of months we have been going verse by verse through the book of 2 Timothy trying to understand this concept: How do we live this thing called life?

We spent the first couple of chapters dealing with how to see life from kind of a 30,000 foot perspective. What are the decisions that need to be made, the perspectives that need to be seen? In the last couple of weeks we spent in chapter three discussing really kind of a sports concept that I laid out before you that before we can go on offense, we need to first go on defense. We discussed what it means to draw a line in the sand. To say that the temptations of this world, the sin of this world, the lusts of this world that are out there vying for our time and our energy that we come to a point where we say no more. No more in my life, no more in my family's life. No more in my community's life, my church's life, that I draw the line and say, "We are going to make the defensive stand here."

Today as we prepare to hear from the book of 2 Timothy chapter four I want to share with you that we are about to learn how to go on the offensive. We are about to learn from the Word of God how do we engage this thing called life? How do we begin to make sense of it? How do we progress? If I were to lean on the book of Ephesians, where it talks about the devil taking ground in our life, that which we have given over, the yardage we have given over to the other team, how do we gain those yards back? How do we have overcoming? How do we have accomplishment? How do we "succeed" in taking back the ground that we have yielded to the enemy, to the devil? How do we begin to march forward and to make progress in our faith?

As we turn to 2 Timothy chapter four it is going to speak to us about standing. And we are going to talk about standing strong today. And you may think that that is a weird concept. How do you make progress by standing? Doesn't standing mean to not actually make progress?

Well, what we will see today is this. The Word of God makes it very clear that in order to go forward, in order to have progress, in order to have victory in our faith, it cannot be because of our energy or our labor, but because of his.

John 15:5 Jesus says you can do nothing apart from me. The book of Zechariah says it is not by might nor by power, but of my Spirit says the Lord. And so this morning as we turn to 2 Timothy chapter four we are going to discover how to stand strong in our faith. And because we have stood we actually begin to make progress and to go forward. It says in verse one of 2 Timothy four:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.¹

How do we begin to take strides forward in our faith? Three simple concepts. The first one is this. In order to stand strong in our faith we have to have a proper perspective. And to gain a proper perspective we need to understand what it is that we need to understand? Look in verse one. It says that God will judge. What we need to grasp today desperately, is that in order to learn how to live for today is to understand that it may be tomorrow that we stand before God himself and to give an account of our life.

The book of Hebrews 9:27 says, For all men... That is a generic term for human kind, by the way. For all people must stand ... or must die once and face the judgment.

Now I know I tease you all the time about what the word all means. But do you know what it means? Without exception. It means all men; that every single one of us is one day going to “die” and face the judgment. This should be the perspective that changes your life for today, because every single one of us, no matter what our socio economic level, no matter what our educational level, no matter what our background or our baggage, every human being will die and face the judgment. That means that if you understand that possibly tomorrow you will stand before God himself, that should give you a new perspective on how to live for today. That is what our perspective should be. We will stand before God himself.

The second question in light of that is: Where or when will this occur in our lives? Notice what it says in verse one. That he would judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and at his coming.

In the book of Ephesians 2:1 speaking to believers it says that Jesus Christ has quickened us who were once dead in our trespasses and sin. The Bible is true. All of us must die and face the judgment. But it also is very clear that there are “two” separate means of this judgment. There is a judgment of the lost, those who have rejected Jesus and a judgment of the saved, those who have believed in him.

¹ 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

Allow me to share with you the difference. In the book of Revelation chapter 20 toward the very end of your Bible it says that there was a great white throne judgment. And at that judgment the books were opened and the books were according to men's works. And then there was the book of life. And those who are not found written in the book of life were judged according to their works. And it talks about death and hell giving up the dead and everyone of them—remember every means every—judged according to their works and it says they were cast into the lake of fire for all of eternity. The Bible makes it very clear that if we live this life, no matter how we have lived it, where we have lived it, what manner we have lived it, if we live it according to our own righteousness, our own abilities, our own skills, our own set of standards, our “works,” that the Lord actually gives us an opportunity one day to see how our works compare to his standard. And according to Revelation chapter 20 it says that everyone that was judged out of the book of works was cast into the lake of fire.

When we rejected Jesus day after day, month after month, year after year, when that final breath is breathed, yes, judgment is looming. But what about those who have believed on Jesus? And I will be honest with you. The audience that we have on the radio, on the internet and, in particular here in person, I would be willing to venture that the overwhelming majority of people listening to this message have already come to that point in their life of understanding the reality that they are a sinner, the reality that you can't do it on your own. You are never going to be smart enough. You are never going to be good enough. You are never going to be “righteous enough.” And because you realize it, there is a major gap between your life and the standard that God has laid out for humanity. We call this gap called sin. You have realized you need a bridge. You realize you need something to go over this gap and you believe and you have trusted that the only solution and answer is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And at some point in your life you have confessed, just as Romans 10:13 says that you are a sinner in need of saving. You have called out to Jesus and he has saved you.

Let me share with you. The Bible says you are born again. The Bible says you are saved. The Bible says you are a new creation. The Bible says you also one day will stand before your Savior Jesus Christ and give an account of your life.

The book of Romans 14:10 says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Second Corinthians 5:10 explores this and says we must give an account, that which we have done in the flesh whether it be good or whether it be bad. And if you want a very elongated explanation of this event in 1 Corinthians 3 beginning in verse 11 it says there is no other foundation that may be laid in our lives, but the foundation that is Jesus Christ.

In other words, just as in Matthew 7 when Jesus said, “You can build your house either on the shifting sand or on the rock, there is only one true solid foundation, Jesus Christ.” And then in 1 Corinthians 3 it talks about how we build our house on that foundation.

Now this is written to believers. This is written to people who have come to that point of believing that Jesus is their Savior. And it says that after you are saved you can either build wood, hay or stubble or gold, silver and jewels. And it says that there is coming a day, as alluded to in the book of Revelation 1 when the apostle John saw Jesus high and lifted up with those flame-of-fire eyes, there comes a day when you stand before Jesus and you give an account of that which you have done whether it be wood, hay, stubble or gold, silver and jewels. And it says that our works are tried by fire. It does say in 1 Corinthians 3:15 of that passage yet so we shall be saved from fire, meaning that when that event occurs in the life of a believer there is no fear of hell. There is no fear of damnation. There is no fear of anything but this. Realizing that we did not live the life God called us to live, and we did not present ourselves the way that we could have and we should have.

So when we talk about making progress or going forward in this life, understand that you are never going to go forward, you are never going to take strides until you realize that one day you will stand before Jesus Christ himself and give an account tomorrow of what happened today. That is what gives you a perspective.

Now understanding that reality, the second thing we have got to deal with is then what do we do? I want you to notice what verse 2 says. Preach. It says preach the Word.

Now this is important as we are going to discuss in a moment. The definition for preaching is not pastoring. It is not ministering. It is not vocational ministry. The word preach simply means to proclaim. Let me give you an illustration.

Guys, how many of you have talked to somebody at work one morning and said, “Boy, last night my wife was preaching to me”? You know what that means, right?

Kids, how many of you all have texted your friends and said, “Well, my parents are preaching to me.”

We know what the word means. It means to declare something emphatically. Almost every person in the state of Georgia and Alabama was preaching to the TV last night. You were preaching. You were proclaiming loudly and passionately and hopefully righteously, but that is another story. Nonetheless, that is what the word preach means. It means that the fact that we are going to one day stand before Jesus, our life ought to be pictured by a proclamation of what we believe and who we are. Now I want to break that down for you in verse 2. What does that mean?

The first thing is this. Who preaches? It is easy to get caught up, well, that is the pastor’s job or that person’s job. According to 2 Corinthians 3, beginning in verse 18, writing to all the saints at Corinth. The devil has blinded the eyes of the lost, that we have been called to preach the glorious message of Jesus Christ. Let me tell you who the “who” is; the “who” is you.

Very recently I had the privilege of celebrating what I call recessive genes. I have a child

that plays basketball. I find it hysterical that I have a child that plays basketball. But that, nonetheless, we are at a little league basketball game and it was one of those games that I enjoy. It doesn't matter what sport it is. This is one I know I am going to have a good time when the team that you are playing has some really good friends of yours on it. That means you can razz them without guilt. I mean, you think about it. If you... perfect strangers. Don't... hopefully you feel guilty for making fun of them. Hopefully you do. But when it is somebody you know and you have had meals with, gone to school with, I mean, it is just fun to kind of pick on each other, right?

Nonetheless, we are getting ready for this basketball game and they are sitting one bleacher over from us. There are about three feet between their family and ours. And immediately right before the tip-off one of the family members leans over and says, "This isn't a fair fight. You have got a preacher on your side."

And all the people in the bleachers are going, "Preacher? Who is the preacher? Where is the preacher?"

I just started ducking on the back row and saying, "Oh, that is me."

The reason I share that with you is that word preacher is equated in our culture to pastor. That is not what this says. It didn't say pastor. It doesn't say minister. It says preach the Word. And so when he is speaking to Timothy, he is speaking to every one of us who knows Jesus as our Savior, that we are to proclaim with our lips, we are to proclaim with our lifestyle who and what we believe.

The next question is: So what is it that we preach? I mean, we live in a world of opinions and ideas and concepts and even spiritually speaking it is theologies. What does it say in verse two? Preach the word, not opinion, not idea, not circumstance. It says that which we are to proclaim if we want to go forward in life, if we want to make progress in our faith, then we need to live out and proclaim the words of God.

I had the privilege in recent days to have kind of a theological conversation with a long-time friend of mine and a new-found friend of mine. This new-found friend is a brilliant man. I don't know if you have ever had the privilege of being in the presence of someone who is so smart you feel like just like a minion. This guy is brilliant. And our mutual friend kind of came as a mediator because he was having difficulty with certain passages of the Bible. He thought for some reason I would be a good person to bring. And so he is in the middle and we are talking and having this Bible study. And we get to a certain passage of the Bible and the man begins to do what I call biblical gymnastics. He begins to dance around what it says and say "Well it actually means, or if you look at this this way or culturally speaking..." Every time he said that I just kept looking and said, "What does it say?" And he would do something else. Finally we had gone back forth eight or nine times. It was like a tennis match or a ping pong match. He looks at our mutual friend like he's asking "is he not going to say anything else?" To which our friend looks at him and says, "Guess what he is going to say next? 'What does it say?'"

And that is exactly what we are called to do. If you want progress to happen in your life and in faith, ignore opinions. Ignore ideas. Ignore philosophies. What does it say and then live it? That is what it says. Preach the Word.

Now the question is: When do we do this? Notice what it says. In season, out of season.

Let me expand on what that means. When it is convenient, when it is not convenient. When you have got time, when you don't have time. When you feel like you have all the answers and you feel like you don't have any answers.

I know there are many of you in the room both as parents and grandparents who can understand what I am about to share with you. We desire in our home every single night when we put our children to bed at the very minimum to have a time that we pray over them. Most nights, almost every night we have a time of Bible study, a devotional time where we sit down and talk about the things of God and answer questions and just spend some time with them. But, guys, I understand. There are nights that are later than you expected. There are things that come up and there are those days. I know it. We have all had them where you are going to bed later than you expected, more tired than you thought, more exhausted than you thought and you just say, "Go upstairs, brush your teeth, get your PJs on. We are going to come up and pray over you."

And I don't know if you will understand but parents I know you do. You know one of the most blessed, just one of the greatest blessings at the end of a hard day is a sleeping child. Have you all ever noticed that? Just a wonderful blessing. And they are around there in the bed and it is on those nights, when we are going to bed later than we thought, we are more tired than we thought, we have had a bad day and, inevitably, a statement is made, a question is asked that just doesn't need to wait till the next morning. And that is out of season.

Or let me rephrase that. Maybe you have a coworker. Or maybe you have got a classmate that has noticed your faith in Jesus Christ and you have talked to him and you have invited him and done some different things with him. And it may be you get off at 5:30. And you have scheduled to meet your family. You haven't had a meal with them in a while. You are scheduled to meet with them and at 5:29 that coworker whom you have been talking to and asking questions shows up to your cubicle with a Bible in hand and says, "Hey, I have got a couple of questions for you."

Do you know what that is called? Out of season. And what I have learned is this. Often times the greatest opportunities to make a statement for what we believe are not the most convenient opportunities. Sometimes the hour is not what we like. Sometimes the day is not... sometimes it is just not... how many times have you said, "I just don't have time"? And yet he says, "When do you do this?" When you have time and when you don't. When you feel like you have got the answers and when you feel like you don't. That is when we "preach" the Word.

But there is another question I want to address here. It is the question of how. Notice what it says in verse 2. Reprove, rebuke and exhort.

Now the last time I checked that means two out of three were negative. We live in a world today where everybody wants everything positive. Everybody just wants to get around in a circle and sing kumbya together. The last time I checked the overwhelming if not great portion of the Scriptures are negative. Parents, that is how you teach your children not to touch the hot stove. You don't say, "Hey, touch it a couple of times. See how it goes." You say, "Do not touch it. Do not go into the street. Do not drive until you have a license." I could keep going. That is negative talk. And our world says, "Well, you just need to be a little more positive." I will be positive. I don't want to take him to the emergency room with a burned hand. So negatively don't touch it. That is the point. He says, "You need to rebuke. You need to reprove."

Hey, the Ten Commandments are not positive. Do not, do not, do not. But do you know what is positive? When we do what God asks us to do and don't do what he doesn't ask us to do, we end up with very positive life. And yet the world says, "Oh, we just need to be fluff and kum-bay-yah."

He says, "No, no. You need to reprove. You need to rebuke."

So the question is: Why would we do this? Why would we proclaim with our lives the Word of God? Why would we take a stand for things that are not popular? Why would we take a stand for something that appears at least on the surface to be negative?

I want you to skip down to verse 5 and we are going to come back to verse 3 and 4. It says watch in all things, endure afflictions. Do the work of an evangelist. Make full proof use of your ministry.

When it says there "watch" it is much like 1 Peter 4:7 for it says the return of Christ is at hand, therefore watch unto prayer. The illustration goes back to the book of Ezekiel chapter 33 where it talks about a watchman sitting on the wall. And the picture that we get in the biblical days is that they would have a fortress around a city that was on a hill and the watchman's job was to look out and to see the enemy approaching or to see harm coming. And when they saw it coming their only job was to turn to those who were below and warn them of what was coming. The Bible makes it very clear that when a watchman saw the enemy coming or when a watchman saw harm coming and they tucked their tail—that is the new Jeff revised version—and ran away, that not only were those in the city caused harm, but also the watchman, when he was finally found, was to bury them. And the Bible says their blood would be on his hands. When it says here watch and do the work of an evangelist, I want you understand something. Based on the first point, every human being is going to stand before God and if they do not know Jesus as their Savior, we are to warn them. They will face God. If they do know Jesus and they are living in sin and they are collecting wood, hay and stubble, we need to warn them that it is going to be burned up. The point is the reason that we speak up, the reason that the

standard is the Word of God and because we all will stand before him one day. That is why we do it.

So our perspective is judgment. Our calling is preaching. But I want to give you a prophecy. And when I say the word prophecy I want you to understand what I mean. This was written chronologically about 2000 years ago and he says the time will come. Look at verses 3 and 4. The time will come. And when I speak of a prophecy he said it “would” occur. But you and I may actually be living in the days in which it is happening.

I want you to notice verses 3 and 4.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.²

What it is saying is there is going to come a time where humanity at large and even the “believing” community will not want what is true, but they will only want what they want, when they want it and where they want it. But I want to show you what this prophecy looks like. And understand that when we put these words on the screen I am saying that it will, but yet may have already occurred based on how you want to look at things.

The first one is this. The prophecy involves what I call the great exchange. Notice what it says that they are seeking after, teachers. Here is the great exchange. A teacher for a preacher. That is the exchange.

Now let me share with you what that means based on definitions. A preacher, what we have already talked about, is someone who just tells the truth, not looking to make friends and influence folks, not looking for everybody to bump with him and say you are the greatest person, most popular. A preacher proclaims truth. Here is what a teacher’s role is. A teacher’s role is to get the student where the student wants to go.

Now those of you who technically are in school right now may disagree with this definition, but let me give you your parents’ perspective. They want you to graduate. They want you to read. They want you to be able to make a living and go, go, go. That is what they want. And so the teacher’s role is to get them to read. The teacher’s role is to get them to understand economics. The teacher’s role is to get them to understand math so that they can function.

When we go to college or trade school or even in the military, those teachers are there to facilitate learning so that we are capable, we are competent. A teacher is employed by us, theoretically speaking, to get us where we want to go and what we want. A preacher is someone who tells the truth whether we like it or not. Let me share with you a very vivid illustration of how this happened very recently in my life.

² 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

I was watching “Christian” television and if you watch Christian television you will find preachers and you will find teachers. The preachers are the ones just staying with the Word of God and deal with it. The teachers are the ones who are always promising you you can have what you want. Well, one day I caught a clip of an individual who I would say is a great teacher. It is all about what you want. It is all about getting what you want in this life. And he made one of the most heinous, most ridiculous statements I have ever heard in my life, particularly coming from “the pulpit of a church.” He said that if we will speak something over our life, God will bring it to pass. Just speak. And then he said that sometimes it may take five years before you know if it has come to pass.

So I thought we would put him to the litmus test, ok? We are going to find out if—and I know—if this individual is a false prophet, because over the last eight days I have been getting in front of mirror every day saying, “I am six foot four.”

You all laugh because it is not happening, is it? It is not a lack of faith. It is a bad gene pool. That is what it is. You know what that is? That is a teacher. It is someone who says, “What is it that you want in life? Just go get it.”

What that does is that makes God bend to us. What a preacher does is to say, “This is what the Word of God says and you must bend to him.” That is the great exchange which leads to the final point that a life of easy believism. Let me unpack this real quickly before our time of invitation. It is this. I will ask you a rhetorical question to know if you have fallen into this trap. Are you more interested in holiness or happiness? Easy believism leads you to happiness. I am happy because I had this experience. I am happy because I have these products. I am happy because I have this, whatever that may be. That is a happiness thing. Holiness is that my life conforms to God’s will no matter whether I “on the outside” am happy or not.

Let me give you an illustration. In the book of Acts chapter 16 the apostle Paul who is writing 2 Timothy here finds himself in the inner prison, I mean the middle of the jail. His feet are shackled together. His hands are shackled together. He is back-to-back with his buddy Silas. Bars all around, probably deprived of food and water.

Do you know what the Bible says they are doing at midnight? Singing. They are singing. You know, one of the unique things about Christianity is that it is the only singing faith. Why? It is the only thing that ultimately produces happiness. But I want you to understand that Paul’s happiness in that jail cell came out of his holiness to the Lord. He did not have any possessions. He did not have any power. In fact, he could not even move six inches to the right or to the left, yet his happiness was when he was exactly where God wanted him to be doing exactly what God wanted him to do. And the most important question you can ask yourself as a believer is: Am I seeking happiness or am I seeking holiness?

The world promises you happiness. The Bible delivers holiness. The choice is yours.