

2 Timothy 3:10-4:8

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[0:00] So we carry on in this great passage, this great book that we've been looking at that's been teaching us all about Timothy and the young pastor, Timothy.

And Paul, who's writing a letter to him to encourage him and for him to keep going. And today, as we move towards sort of the final section of the letter, the real emphasis that Paul wants to tell Timothy is about how he continues with his ministry as Paul is coming towards the end of his. And it reminded me of one of my favourite events in the Olympics, the relay race. Now, I don't know about you, I actually, I really love the Olympics.

I love it because what it means is that it means I get interested in sports that for four years I have no interest in. And I love that because I love becoming, I don't know if you do that, but what happens to me when I sort of do that is I become, after not watching a sport for four years, after five minutes of watching something, I think that I'm a bit of an expert in the new sport.

You watch diving, I don't watch diving, I only watch diving every four years, but within five minutes I know my tumble turns and I can tell you about my pipe, about the pipe jumps.

[1:31] And I'm sure we've all done that. As I say, one of my favourite moments in the Olympics is the relay. The 100 metres or the 400, I think the 100 metres probably just edges it as the most favourite race because of the speed that the guys run round.

The reason it's such a good race is because there's that extra level of intensity to the relay is the handing over of the baton.

You've got those three moments when the changeover takes place, when the runner or the sprinter needs to hand over the baton and they need to do it in a particular designated area.

If they drop it, that's it, they're finished. And the sprinter who's receiving the baton, he can't actually look behind him. It's all on the guy who's handing the baton over.

He has to, the sprinter, he needs to keep his eyes on where he's going. It's the responsibility of the sprinter coming up with the baton in hand to place it into the guy who's running the mixed leg.

[2:36] And that is really how those changeovers are done. That is where the race can be won, lost, or the whole team can be disqualified.

And our passage today is about passing on the baton. In a relay race that has been running since the church began. And the baton is the thing that we've talked about every week, that verse that we've kept coming back to.

It's the deposit that has been entrusted to us. It's the faith, the gospel, that we're to guard. The gospel that has been entrusted to us.

And here in this final section really, Paul is encouraging Timothy to keep on running with the word of God. With the gospel, with the deposit entrusted to him.

To continue with the right priorities so that gospel, good news, ministry takes place. And I suppose in God's providence, it's a very helpful moment for us to think about that as a church.

[3:39] As we build towards launching next week. That as we take on the baton, that we make sure that the priorities that Paul has for Timothy, we have as a church.

Because during our earthly life, this is our leg of the relay race that the church has been running. Because the baton has been handed to us.

So looking back at how Paul and Timothy run their leg, instructs us as to how we're to run ours. To keep running with the baton, with the word of God in hand.

So there's three things that we're going to look at and what it means to run with the baton. We run with the baton to be wise ourselves. We run with the baton because people wander from the truth. And we run with the baton to get to the finish line. To be wise ourselves because people wander. And to get to the finish line. And there's been, all the way through, Paul has been building to this

point with Timothy.

[4:49] All the way from, this is what Paul has had in mind for him as we remember. What he said to him, right in the beginning he said, to found the gift into flame. Because Timothy was a timid man.

He told him to be like Onesiphorus. And not like the false teachers. That it would require suffering. That it would require pointing out false teachers of the world. And false teachers of how they practiced, who lived without a faithful living.

And here we get, right from the off, that Timothy has to continue in that vein of life. Of living with the word of God, right at the centre of who he is.

And to continue in imitating how Paul has been living. Which comes to our first point. How to run to be wise yourself.

Timothy, run with this baton. To be wise yourself. The point is, that we continue with that baton, with the word of God. By ensuring it, because it is the word of God that makes us wise, ourselves.

[5:59] And Paul reminds his dear Timothy of this. Just look with me from verse 14. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of.

Because you know those from whom you learned it. And how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures. Which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

It is very reminiscent of how Paul started the letter to him. That it was the faith passed down to him. That has come all the way from his infancy.

From Lois and Eunice, his mother, his grandmother. But I think at this point, it's also a subtle pointer to Paul himself. That Timothy has matured in his faith.

He's not an infant biologically. But neither is he a spiritual infant anymore. Under Paul's mentoring and pastoring, Timothy has grown up.

[7:00] He's ready to lead and mentor God's people himself. And he's already been doing it. You can see that in verse 10 to 13. How he said, you've done this, Timothy. He says, you've followed me.

My way of life, my purpose, my faith, my patience, love. You've done it. You're on the way. You've been doing it. But the plea is to Timothy, keep going. Keep doing it.

Don't let anything knock you off course from continuing with the baton in hand. And what that means, Timothy, is sticking with the word of God. That is what it means.

Sticking with the word of God. With probably the clearest, I think, not the clearest, but one of the clearest articulations in the Bible of the word of God we'll be getting in verses 16 and 17.

What we see in these beautiful verses is the origin of the word of God. How it's transmitted. And the effect it will have onto the thing.

[8:05] And the reason why we will stick with it. Because it is able, verse 15, to make us wise for salvation. We get this wonderful definition of the Bible.

Verse 16. All scripture is God-breathing. It's probably the most important aspect of the verse that scripture is God-breathing.

What it's pointing us to is the authorship of the whole Bible that is inspired by the living God. It's pointing towards that breathing in and breathing out.

The inspiration, expiration. That when we speak, we breathe out words. We have to breathe them out. And every word in the Bible is as much spoken out by God, breathed out by him, as any word that we've spoken.

And importantly, that word for breathed out is very close to a link to the word that we have for spirit. What it's suggesting is that it's pointing to the creative force that was behind when God spoke everything into existence.

[9:18] That when he created, he spoke the world into being. He spoke the world into existence from nothing. And when we read the word of God, the word of God has that same power to it.

When he speaks, everything is God-breathing. There is a creative force behind the word of God. It is the foundation. This is really the fact that scripture is God-breathing.

It is actually the foundation of why the word of God is able to do what it does. And we get what that is in the next part of the verse. It's the reason that the word of God is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

It's because these words originate from him. They contain the living God's creative power to do something to us.

The reason they have that effect is because they have power, creative power, to change you. To equip you for a life that owns you. They equip you so that Timothy can actually live the life that Paul wants him to live.

[10 : 40] So that Paul can actually go through those difficult circumstances in life with purpose, with faith, with patience, love, and endurance.

It is the word of God that is giving him this godly character for how to keep going and how to live godly in those circumstances.

And it is the word of God that enables us to do that in our lives. Because unlike the 100 meter sprint, the relay, the race where given is not the dash to the finish.

It is more like a marathon. If you hear marathon runners talking, they often talk, I think I've heard people say, it's often about 20 miles in, they talk about hitting the wall.

And there are moments in the Christian life where it can feel like that. It can feel like hitting a wall. He's just said about his own life, Paul has said, that he's enjoyed persecutions and sufferings.

[11 : 42] And there will be moments of suffering in our own life, our own race, where we're not sure if we can run. Where it feels, where it maybe perhaps feels more like a bit of an ambo.

In those moments, in Paul's life, it was the word of God that made him wise for salvation and helped him to keep running with the baton in hand.

This is his point to his dear Timothy. My dear Timothy, stick with the word of God.

To be wise in the trials of life. While with anything you need Timothy, you're going to need to hear God speaking to you. You're going to need it. It's the only thing that will keep you going.

In everything that Paul faced, it was the word that kept him going. God working through his word, by his spirit, in his life.

[12 : 47] Stick with the word of God. Even if you're running, or even if you're ambling, ambling with the word of the baton in hand. The second reason to run with the baton in hand is because people wander from the truth.

Continue with that baton in hand because people wander from the truth. And as I mentioned, everything that Paul has been writing so far, it kind of culminates in this final section.

And we almost get, at the beginning of chapter 4, we get this, it's almost like a commissioning of Timothy. And it comes in the strongest possible terms. You see from verse 1, chapter 4, verse 1.

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. The emphasis here on this charge is actually on Christ Jesus.

And we see that because we have four descriptions of Christ Jesus in this particular commissioning, in this charge.

[14 : 03] And it's in view of his future return. We see that Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead. Christ Jesus, who will appear.

And Christ Jesus, who is the king, in view of his kingdom. It is in the presence of the living God. And Christ Jesus, who will come to judge these things, will judge, will appear, with a kingdom under him. That Paul charges or commissions Timothy. Now, that brings a certain weight to the charge, doesn't it? There's a certain weight to the commissioning.

That this is much more than a suggestion from Paul. It's not something that he's saying, Timothy, do this if you feel like it. But this is a commissioning from Almighty God.

I don't know if this were ever to happen. Unlikely. But if you were to ever get a call from the first minister or the prime minister or the king, perhaps.

[15 : 06] If you were to get that and there was a particular request for you to do something for your nation, it would come with a certain authority and expectation with regards to your allegiance to the United Kingdom.

But this commission and charge is coming from the king of kings. It is coming from the king of kings. And it's talking about, he's going to come back.

And he's going to come with his kingdom under him. And it's really highlighting, will you be, this is so important, Timothy.

Will you obey? Will you be obedient to this charge? The degree to which you're being highlights your allegiance to the kingdom of the king.

And this is what he is to do. Verse 2. Preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.

[16:14] Do you see the connection between the theology of the word of God that we have at the end of chapter 3, that statement in verses 16 and 17, and Paul's charge to Timothy?

Remember, he said the word of God is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness. And so, Timothy, you are to preach so that the word does what it is supposed to do for those you preach to.

So that the word does its work. If that is what the word does, then with the word Timothy, correct, rebuke and encourage. What Paul has just told Timothy to do for himself, to stick with the word of God, to make him wise, he is to preach to make others wise for salvation.

This is the hallmark of what good news, good gospel ministry is about. It is the word of God making people wise for salvation.

And when is Timothy to carry this out? In season and out of season. Whether you feel like it or you don't. Whether people want to hear it or not. Put your feelings to one side.

[17:32] Preach the word, my dear Timothy. Be a conduit of God's mercy and grace. So that the word of God will do for them what it has done for you.

To be wise for salvation. And this is a pressing matter. It is a pressing matter. Verse 3. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.

Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around 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. This is the issue at hand. This is what is at stake. The left of their own devices. If the word of God is absolute, people will naturally look for wisdom. Not in the scriptures, but somewhere else.

People turn to teachers to say what they want to hear. And we can see that today in our world. That people's loyalty to teaching, it's a little bit like the loyalty you might have to your favourite type of ice cream.

[18:39] I don't know if you feel particularly loyal to vanilla or chocolate. I don't. When I go for an ice cream, I tend to sort of decide what I want on the day. I decide to choose how I feel.

One day I might choose vanilla, but I really love pistachio. I don't. I'm not loyal to either. I always go for something different. And people perhaps sometimes choose the type of teaching, the type of podcast, or the type of programme that they want to listen to based on how they feel.

That is the world that we live in. Because the amount of information to consume is endless. There is a podcast on every potential topic.

This was also a problem in Ephesus, in Timothy's day. There is a plethora of teachers of all sorts of religions that led people away from the truth.

So with so many avenues of misleading information where people choose whatever they want to hear, we must carry the bag of ministry that is directed by the Bible, by the Word of God, because that's where truth is found.

[19:50] That is where truth is found. The most loving thing you can do for someone is to tell them they need a sin. Because they do. There's this famous quote, that unfortunately for the poor guy, is attributed to a monk called Francis of Assisi, but actually poor old Francis never actually said it.

We don't know who said it, and that's probably for the best, but he always gets lumped with it. And it says this, it says, Preach the Gospel, and use words if necessary.

Now that makes no sense. Because Romans 10 says that faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word about Christ.

You can't see a message, you have to hear it or read it. Now I love the work of charities, I love the work of charities, I love the work that Oxfam, a fantastic charity, but nobody sees the work of Oxfam or leaves one of their shops and says, do you know what?

Because of what Oxfam did, I think I might just turn to Jesus as my only hope in life and death. As good as they, what they do. And we celebrate what they do, and we celebrate good works, it's fantastic.

[21:11] Good works add credibility to the Word of Christ, that it has changed people, and that it really does change people because they're different people and they do good things, they don't save them.

They don't save them. Only the Gospel, only the Word of Christ, the message heard, brings life and life, where there is death and darkness.

And we must do everything we can to lead people to Jesus by the Scriptures, the power, by the Holy Spirit. That is our first thought as a church, to be directed from the Bible.

From top to bottom, the Bible from start to finish is about God and his plan to rescue people away from themselves, away from the world, from evil, to be wise for salvation.

That is what the Bible is about. And if we're going to be directed by the Bible, it stands to reason that ultimately, it's everything that we're about. And counting Jesus through the Bible in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[22:17] Okay, third reason to run with the bat is because we want to run with the bat to get to the finish line. To get to the finish line. Now, this illustration that I've been running with through the relay race, there is an aspect to it where it does, no illustration works perfectly and it starts to fall down because when Paul is passing on the bat, there is this moment when Paul will let go and then Timothy will be running on his own.

That moment will only happen once Paul departs his earthly life, when he's completed his leg of the race and departs to be with Jesus.

until that happens, it's like that moment in the relay race when Paul and Timothy are both still alive doing ministry, it's that moment when the baton is being passed on and their hands are sort of both connected to it.

At their moments, they're both on hold of the baton but they're both kind of still running. However, the real point I want to focus is that there is a moment when the baton does finally get passed on and Paul will let go.

Just look with me, this is the point, this is what Paul is really talking about in verse 6. For I am already being poured out like a drink of rain and the time for my departure is near.

[23:50] I have followed the fire, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. First and foremost, Paul wants to tell Timothy to do this for his own faith, for wondrous, but as a close third, take up this charge Timothy because I won't be here to do it much longer.

And I want to Timothy before I depart that when I leave that the gospel is in good hands that after I am gone you will continue in the same manner that you've seen in me.

And if you ever struggle if you ever struggle I want you to know this, I want you to keep your eye on the finish line as I have.

I want you to remember the finish line of verse 8. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous church, will award to me on that day.

Not only to me but also to all who have loved for his appearing. If you continue running, if you keep the baton and the gospel contained in the scriptures and you keep the preaching and the teaching of it at the forefront of your life, if you continue running like I have done, what awaits me awaits you?

[25:23] What is in store for me is in store for you the crown of righteousness. righteousness. He's pointing to the Olympics in many respects, the original Olympics when the Greek runners used to finish their race and they'd have the crown, the wreath placed upon their heads that they'd achieve victory.

But here the crown placed upon their heads is the crown of righteousness. righteousness finally, definitively declared as righteous, receiving that from the Lord himself.

And this is the promise of the gospel. This is the promise of the good news, of the rescue that Jesus promises to them, that the victory is his. Jesus wins the race.

He wins first place, but when he stood on the podium, receiving the adulation for the victory he's won, he gives the righteous crown that he should receive, that he deserves, he gives it to all who put their trust in him, that he invites you up to the podium and the victory he's achieved for winning the race himself by dying on the cross and putting it to a new life, he gives you the crown of righteousness that he's won for himself.

All our lives, there is this desire in us to be great, to be validated, we're thirsty for validation and praise from anyone that will give it to us.

[27:02] This twisted desire to be great in the eyes of everyone else, and we either respond by pursuing greatness, pursuing it ourselves, and receiving it, or we feel being rejected of not being great, and we'll do anything and hide away from opportunities where we might receive because we fear rejection, we fear that feeling.

The truth of the gospel of the good news of Jesus is that he who was truly great, who was truly great in and of himself, was rejected, made nothing, so that we, who were nothing, would be made great.

So that the validation we really are first of all would be given to us, not because of anything we've done or deserved or given to us as a gift, and as a status that would never be taken from us. The crown that we have wanted to wear on our heads our whole lives, Jesus doesn't, you know Jesus doesn't actually give us that crown, because that crown was so flimsy, it could fall off at any time.

The crown we wanted was something that we earned, but Jesus comes to give you a better crown, a crown that was won by his righteousness, his victory, and he brings the whole church on the podium with him.

[28:24] The Lord himself, the royal son who rules and reigns, saying here is my victory crown, here's the royal crown of righteousness, the way you are validated and accepted, that we all really want.

It's the permission and validation that enables you to stand before the living God, this is yours, I will give you true greatness, greatness found because you find your life in me.

And doing that, the great exchange, is what brings Jesus the ultimate glory, that his humility, his death, is actually the thing that brings him the great victory.

This is the finishing line of our life. This is the finishing line when our lay is done, this is what we will receive, this is when we've got the baton in hand and we're in the middle of America, this is where we're headed, this is where we keep our eyes up on Jesus Christ and that he will give us a crown when we meet him at the finish line.

And so keep running, keep running with the baton in hand of the gospel, keep running by keeping yourself acquainted with the scriptures to make you wise, keep sharing the scriptures with others to make them wise and keep running because the crown of righteousness will be assured.

[29:58] Let's keep running and pass on the baton ourselves. Almighty God, we do thank you and praise you for the good news of the gospel.

We thank you that you have given us a crown of righteousness, that you have saved us, that you have blessed us and that we know you personally and intimately. And help us to keep running, Lord Jesus.

We thank you that there is a finish line and we long to meet you at the finish line, Lord Jesus. In the meantime, would you make us wise for salvation?

Would you give us a love and a delight when we hear from you? And would you give us a love and a delight when we help people, those who have wanted from the truth?

We pray for those we know, those who want to have their itching ears scratched by any means possible, choosing teachers to suit their own desires.

[31:08] We ask, Lord, that you could equip us and help us to lead people away from myths, to the truth of who you are, so that they themselves can run the race set before you.

And so bless us, we pray, and ask for all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.