

Preach the Word
2 Timothy 4:1-5 (3:14-17)
Key Verse: 4:2

"Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction."

Happy New Year, 2012! Most people want to make a new start, so they make new year's resolutions. According to the U.S. government the most popular ones are: drink less alcohol, eat healthy food, get a better education, get a better job, lose weight, manage debt, quit smoking, recycle more, save money, and volunteer to help others. It is commendable that people want to improve themselves and live better in the new year. However, when we analyze these resolutions, the focus is on improving one's self on the level of the flesh. In contrast, children of God should have a clear spiritual direction and think about how to please God, not just ourselves. In today's passage Paul sets a very clear direction for Timothy: Preach the word. It is Paul's last charge to Timothy, like a last will and testament. It is the most important thing Paul wants Timothy to remember and practice. Yet when we hear this command, it seems burdensome. Some younger people think that preaching the word is for the older generation. Some older people think that they have already preached the word and now it is time for the younger generation to do so. Why did Paul give this charge to Timothy to preach the word? Why should we preach the word in our time? Today let's think about the deep meaning of preaching the word and set a right direction for our lives and ministries for the new year. In this passage Paul gives three clear reasons why we should preach the word. First, the word makes us wise for salvation. Second, the word equips us to grow spiritually. Third, the word is urgently needed.

First, the word makes us wise for salvation (3:14-15). At the time of writing 2 Timothy, Paul was in a Roman prison. This was different than his first imprisonment, which we read about in Acts. The first time he had been accused by the Jews and was protected by the Roman authorities because he was a Roman citizen. So he could live in a rented house and freely study the Bible with visitors. However, Paul's last imprisonment had been instigated by the Roman authorities. He was not treated well at all, but was put into a cold dungeon under the Emperor Nero, and sensed that his death was imminent. 2 Timothy is his last known letter. The main theme of this letter is to suffer for the gospel as a good soldier of Christ Jesus and to preach the word.

What does Paul mean when says "the word"? In the context of chapters 3-4, "the word" refers to the Holy Scriptures. This includes the gospel as it is broadly contained in all of the Old Testament writings. Scripture, that is, the word, largely does two things: it makes us wise for salvation and it equips us to grow spiritually.

3:15 says, "...and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." There are many kinds of knowledge in the world, such as scientific knowledge, philosophical knowledge, psychological knowledge, business knowledge, and so on. Such knowledge helps us to improve our lives and to master nature. We need this kind of knowledge. There are also so many thoughts and ideas. The National Science Foundation estimates that the average person has 12,000 thoughts per day, while deep thinkers may have 50,000. Yet all these brilliant thoughts, ideas and knowledge cannot give us life. A most popular recent book is the biography of Steve Jobs, the founder of the Apple Company, producers of I-pad and I-phone. Many want to read his book and learn his secret to success. This book may be helpful. However, it cannot make us wise for salvation. The Holy Scriptures, on the other hand, are able to make us wise for salvation. This is true for anyone, regardless of nationality, social status, educational level, or so on.

In 1866, the Welsh missionary Robert Thomas, boarded the General Sherman, an American ship, and sailed up the Taedong River for Pyongyang in what is now North Korea. As he went, he threw gospel tracts along the shore of the river. For various reasons, the Korean governor ordered the ship to leave, but the captain defied the order. In the battle that ensued, the ship was set afire and everyone had to run to shore, including Robert Thomas. There he was beheaded. Yet just before this he cried, "Jesus, Jesus," and threw his Bible to one of the Korean soldiers. Not knowing what it was, the man used the pages of the Bible to wallpaper his house. Inadvertently, he began to read it, and as he did so, he accepted Jesus and received salvation. Many people visited to read his wallpaper Bible. His house became a church.

Another example comes from the life of Christopher Yuan. He is the son of Chinese immigrant parents, and he grew up here in Chicago. As a child he was often ridiculed for being Chinese, loving music and art, and for being poor at sports. In his feelings of alienation and rejection, he began to find acceptance in the gay community and pursued that

lifestyle. He also began to deal in drugs. But one day he was caught by the police and sentenced to 12 years in prison. Just after entering the prison he was found to be HIV positive. At that very low point in his life, he passed by a garbage can which had a new Gideon's Bible on top. He opened the Bible and began to read. Then the Holy Spirit worked in his heart to convict him of sin and bring him to repentance. He accepted Christ and found new life. His time in this world may be limited, but he is sure that he has eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Surely the word makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Christ alone can give us salvation. In John 14: 6 Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In Acts 4:12 the Apostle Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." We are led to Christ by the word of God. Therefore, we can say that only the word of God gives us the knowledge of salvation. Only the word of God gives us the forgiveness of sins. Only the word of God gives us true joy and peace. Only the word of God gives absolute meaning to our lives. Only the word of God gives us eternal life and the living hope in the glorious kingdom of God. This is why preaching the word is so important.

Second, the word equips us to grow spiritually (3:16-17). 2 Timothy 3:16-17 say, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Scripture refers to the Bible. The Bible is organized into 66 books written by some 40 authors from various periods, spanning about 1800 years. Surprisingly, though, the concept of a Messiah develops very consistently: first a seed, then a person, nation, kingdom, remnant, and finally Jesus Christ. In truth, there is one author of Scripture: God. So Scripture is the very word of God. Many people think that the Bible is out of date. But it is still the best seller. The French writer and philosopher Voltaire once said, "In one hundred years, Bibles will be found only in museums." One hundred years later, Voltaire's house became a printing house for a Bible publishing company.

The Bible is the most wonderful book in the world. At the 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the Archbishop presented her with the Holy Bible, saying, "Our gracious Queen, we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing this world affords." Abraham Lincoln has been respected as the greatest of all U.S. presidents. He himself credited his mother Nancy, who died when he was 9 years old. Her last words were, "Today I give you the most precious gift in the world. I'll be gone, but the words in this book will lead you in the right path." Abraham Lincoln gained life's wisdom from the Bible as he meditated on it daily. He said, "In regard to this great book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to men." The Bible has profoundly influenced science, philosophy, literature, music and art in every aspect. John Calvin said, "Only in the Bible can we find the living water of salvation." Any individual, group, or nation in human history which has deeply studied the Bible, including our Puritan ancestors, has been greatly blessed. We need to discover the riches of the Bible.

As the word of God, the Bible is everlasting and it has authority to speak to all peoples of all nations universally. It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. When we study the Bible sincerely, it convicts us of our sins and wrongs, teaches us how to live, and helps us to grow as godly men and women. Through Bible study we can realize that our selfishness is sin and learn to love God and love others. Through Bible study we can find forgiveness of sins and learn how to forgive others. We can have a right relationship with God and with others. The word of God helps us to be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Third, the word is urgently needed (4:1). Before giving the charge to preach the word, Apostle Paul emphasizes the urgency to do so. Look at 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." This charge came from God and from Jesus Christ. Paul didn't give this charge as fatherly advice. Paul gave it with divine authority. Paul stood in the presence of the awesome God. God is the Sovereign Ruler, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who lives in unapproachable light. No one has seen or can see him (1 Ti 6:15-16). Christ Jesus is the Judge of the living and the dead. When he came into this world the first time as our Savior, he was a humble and gentle baby in a manger. But when he comes the second time he comes as the Judge with power and great glory. When he comes, all the kingdoms in this world will be destroyed. Only his kingdom will remain forever. When Apostle Paul thought about God and Christ and his appearing and kingdom, he realized that preaching the word of God was the most urgent thing in the world. His charge was not just a recommendation, but a command. It is not a suggestion, but a mandate. Actually, this command came from our Lord Jesus. At the end of every gospel book there is Jesus' command to his disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:18), "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mk 16:15), "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk 24:47), "Do you love me? Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:15), "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Ac

1:8). Because of Jesus' command, many people left their homes and nations and went to the place God showed them to preach the good news to others. God gives this command out of his broken shepherd's heart for people of all nations. God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Ti 2:4). Sometimes people wonder why God does not judge the world right away for all of the wickedness that is going on. But God is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Pe 3:9). Without the preaching of the word, nothing happens. People are perishing without hearing the words of God. This is why we must preach the word.

What then does it mean to preach the word? Let's read 4:2. "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction." What does it mean to preach? When we hear the word "preach" we usually think only about one-sided proclamation. Yet we learn a variety of methods from Jesus. Sometimes Jesus taught in parables in order to give people as much as they could understand. Sometimes he used audio-visual aids, such as when he washed his disciples' feet. Sometimes Jesus had intimate conversations, such as with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. The book of Acts tells us that Apostle Paul tried to persuade people through preaching the word (Ac 18:4). Paul also had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus with dedicated Bible students (Ac 19:9). The core message of the gospel cannot be changed (Gal 1:6-7). However, the method of preaching may vary, including--proclamation through a message, conversational evangelism, one-to-one Bible study, dramatic presentations, dance, and art, etc.

What does it mean to "be prepared in season and out of season"? People misunderstand that this means to "preach the word in season and out of season." This is not the meaning. Rather this means to be ready in season and out of season. No matter what season we are in, we must study the Bible diligently to prepare study materials. Then, when the opportunity comes, we can share the word of God effectively (1 Pe 3:15).

Verse 2 says, "...correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction." People don't like the words "correct" or "rebuke." Why do we need correction? We can learn from trees. When they grow naturally, trees sometimes become crooked. They need to be corrected by having some kind of straight guide to follow. In the same way, if people grow only naturally, we can become crooked. From conception the inclination of our thoughts is always evil. We don't have to teach babies to be selfish; they know how to be selfish already. This sinful nature needs to be corrected by the word of God. Jesus rebuked Peter when he had a wrong idea and did not accept the gospel message. Jesus also rebuked his disciples' fear in order to plant faith in their hearts. Correcting and rebuking is not done out of emotion. It is done with great patience and careful instruction. If we rebuke people emotionally, things get worse--even though the person may be wrong. But when we rebuke with great patience and careful instruction out of love, it can be very effective. Young people who have grown up without a father do not understand that rebuking is a form of love. Rather, they are offended and feel rejected. But rebuking is a high level of love. It expresses real concern for one's soul. So we should appreciate rebukes. Then there will be a great improvement in our lives and ministry. We also need encouragement. Hebrews 3:13 says, "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

In verses 3-4 we find the kind of atmosphere Paul anticipated in the future. People would not put up with sound doctrine. They would become irrational to satisfy their sinful desires. They would gather around them a great number of teachers who would say what their itching ears wanted to hear. People would turn their ears away from the truth, and turn aside to myths. These days we confront relativism and many mixed ideas that people try to substitute for the truth of God. There are many kinds of modern myths such as computer generated avatars, and there was a movie called "Avatar" and there are superheroes like Superman, Batman, Iron Man, and so on. In 3:1-13 we find that Paul anticipated terrible times in the last days. The most striking thing is that people love all of the wrong things. People are lovers of themselves, lovers of money, not lovers of the good, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. We are living in these terrible times. In this kind of spiritual atmosphere, preaching the gospel is a spiritual battle. It is not easy to focus on preaching the word. Many things distract us. So Paul says in verse 5, "But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." When we do so, there is in store for us the crown of righteousness which the Lord will give us when he comes again in victory and glory.

America was established and has been deeply rooted in the Bible's teaching. We still see many Bible verses engraved on government buildings, schools, courthouses, and so on. However, the culture of America has been changing. People are abandoning the word of God. As a result, we are declining rapidly in morals, ethics, spirit, economics, politics and every area. We have to come back to the Bible and preach the word. When we do, we can

experience the kind of deep, fundamental change we need. In this New Year, the most important thing to do is to preach the word. Then God will bless our personal lives, our families, our community, and our nation.