

Your Charge

A Sermon Based on 2 Timothy 3:10 – 4:5

You've made it to the end of another year, Congratulations! So how was it? Or maybe a better question is, how did you do? How are the resolutions for 2009 coming along? Did you lose the weight? Maybe you lost it, put it back on, and now you get to lose it again... Did you get more organized? Did you spend more time with your family? Did you tackle that one problem that just keeps on bothering you every year? Do you even remember what your resolutions were? Maybe you didn't make any, so any accomplishments are just icing on the cake... But even if that's the case, I still want you to still think about how you did tonight—in the things that really count. How much of a part of your life was Jesus? How well did you fix God's words in your heart and mind, like he tells you to? How well did you preach the Word by your life so that others would be drawn to the only one who gives hope for 2010 and beyond?

You see, whether or not you consciously made New Year's resolutions for 2009, in a certain sense, you had them. You had resolutions, or you might say, missions, or charges. And they were from God. But if you're anything like me, you were just as bad at fulfilling your resolutions from God as you were with keeping your other New Year's resolutions.

But it seems like God is giving you another year. 2010 will start in a few hours—another year of God's grace and another year for you to accomplish your resolutions from God. So as you go through all the nostalgia of the past year, as you think about your failures and your triumphs and focus on making the next year better than the last, don't forget to focus on the challenges that God has given you.

Tonight we have a section of scripture before us that is about one of those challenges, those missions, that we have from God. As the Apostle Paul wrote the last letter of his life to his good friend Timothy, he was in prison, and he knew that not only was his year ending soon, but also his life, as he would soon be executed. So Paul wrote the letter that we have before us still tonight. In it, he asked Timothy to come and visit him before he was killed. He warned Timothy of the difficult times that he knew were coming for Christians, but perhaps most importantly Paul wanted to encourage Timothy on his charge, his life's mission. Listen again to some of the last words that the Apostle Paul ever wrote.

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.¹

Did you catch Timothy's mission? Really, it was the very best that anyone could ask for. It was to take hearts loaded down with guilt and regret and release them from their burdens. It was to rescue human souls destined for eternal agony put them on a path to heaven. Simply put, Timothy's resolution from God was to preach the Word. God did not want Jesus' life and death to be in vain. God wants all men to be saved. And Timothy's charge was to be a part of that by living and preaching that message.

But Paul knew that his charge to Timothy was a difficult one. That's why he said Timothy would need "great patience." People were not always going to greet his message and ministry with open arms. Paul knew this because he had experienced it.

You, Paul said, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured... In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived...²

He also said,

For the time will come when men 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...³ ...continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of...⁴

So that's Paul's charge to Timothy. But this sermon is not only about a mission and purpose for Timothy's life. It is about a mission for you as well. Now, your calling, your mission, is not exactly the same as that of Timothy. Timothy was a public minister of the Gospel. He was to "preach" the word, publicly. But while it is true that you don't have a call as a public minister here at Trinity, you have a mission not all that different from Timothy's. In fact, your charge is really the exact same as Timothy's, it is just on an individual level.

In view of the fact that Christ will come again will judge the living and the dead—and it might be in 2010—and because people have a chance to escape the judgment that they deserve, you also are to preach the Word. No, most of you will probably never do it like I'm doing it right now, but don't think that excludes you from this charge. You also are to preach the Word. Preach it to your children. Preach it to your friends. Preach it to your co-workers. Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. As Paul says, you are to do this in season and out of season; that means when it's easy and when it's difficult.

2010 will certainly have both the easy and difficult times. If you're not going to tell people what their itching ears want to hear, they may not have any use for your Christian words, and that may even lead them to not having any use for you. Children don't like to be corrected. Teens don't like to be rebuked by their friends about their sinful habits. Adults don't want to hear that God's standards aren't flexible. People like to think of God as a senile old man who sits in heaven and naively smiles at people down on earth, no matter what they do. The basic fact that people are sinful to the core and that God does send people to hell is kind of repulsive to people. Many people don't even want to hear the Gospel either, because they don't think they need it. But nevertheless, our charge remains. We are to share the Word in season and out of season, when that's easy and when it's not.

However, that's easier said than done, isn't it? We're tired; we're weak; and we're sinful. But your experience isn't all that different from Paul and Timothy's. Paul commonly spoke of how weak he was, how he had a thorn in his flesh, how he came to people in weakness and trembling. Timothy also was young and seemingly rather timid. And, in addition to all their inward weaknesses, Paul and Timothy constantly dealt with people who tried to mess up their work whenever an opportunity presented itself. Some of their enemies started riots, others got them arrested, and some simply worked behind their backs to un-teach everything that they had taught.

But that's why it was a good thing that the power to fulfill their missions did not rest on them alone. Both Paul's and Timothy's competence as ministers and as Christians came from the Word of God itself. We read, "**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**"⁵

The power live and share the Word is not something that we have to conjure up from deep in the recesses of our hearts. That power comes from the Word of God itself. Think of the power of God's word: God spoke, and he brought forth the universe: "Let there be light. And there was light."⁶ Jesus spoke, and the wind and the waves obeyed.⁷ Jesus said, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"⁸ and the once dead girl awoke to life. God spoke and, and the murderous Saul became the apostle Paul.⁹ God spoke to you, "Take heart, your sins are forgiven." And your dead heart became alive.

Since Timothy and Paul used the word of God as their tool to accomplish their missions, they could be assured that they could complete the tasks set before them. They were competent as ministers of the Word because of the Word. With the word of God as his shield and weapon, Paul stood before mobs, scholars, and emperors alike and testified to the truth without fear. Because of the power of the Word, the young Timothy could lead the churches of a huge city.

You may not always feel up to the task which lies before you as a Christian. You may have many of the same weaknesses as Paul and Timothy. "Whenever I speak, I sound foolish, like I have no clue

what I'm talking about... People will never listen to me because I'm too young... No one will take me seriously; they know me too well. They're just going to call me a hypocrite... I'm sorry, but I just don't want to be rejected by my own family..."

But my friends, the competence to fulfill this charge for 2010 and for the rest of your life does not come from you. God's powerful words will accomplish every purpose that God intends them to accomplish. God's powerful words will correct you when you need correcting. They will rebuke you when you need rebuking. And they will encourage you when you need encouraging. And they will save those with whom you have shared them, and who by grace believe them. God grant that you would fulfill this and every other mission that he has for you, and that you would have great joy in seeing his missions accomplished through you in this next year and throughout your life. Amen.

¹ All scripture references taken from: *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. (2 Ti 4:1-2)

² 2 Ti 3:10-13

³ 2 Ti 4:3-4

⁴ 2 Ti 3:14

⁵ 2 Ti 3:14-17

⁶ Gen. 1:3

⁷ Mark 4:39

⁸ Mark 5:41,42

⁹ Cf. Acts 9