PASTORS' CONFERENCE SERMON • 2 TIMOTHY 4:1–8

AN URGENT CALL TO PREACH THE WORD

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BISRAT APOLOGETICS • MANUSCRIPT EDITION

MANUSCRIPT EDITION

The preacher’s sermon preserved in full

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SERMON

An Urgent Call to Preach the Word

Text: 2 Timothy 4:1–8
Preacher: The Rev. Sivuyile Lurai
Setting: Pastors’ Conference

Central argument: In the pastoral ministry, there is nothing as urgent as the preaching of God’s Word.

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AN URGENT CALL TO PREACH THE WORD

BACKGROUND

I have been given an enormous task of setting the stage or tone our time together. It is a privilege for which I am incredibly humbled. Among the many causes for the sense of humility, its because in life I think you don’t get many opportunities of speaking to a group of people where both the person who officiated your wedding and the person who prepared you for the journey of marriage are both present.

Now, friends, as you may have seen on the programme for this address, I have been given a topic around the: ‘A Call to preaching’. I do intend to bow my neck under that topic. In other words, I don’t want to deviate from it.

Brothers, you will agree with me, that like many other topics, this topic can be approached from several angles. For example:

I can speak to you from the practical theology aspect of it, especially because preaching is one of the core topic/module in our practical theological departments in our Bible Schools/ Colleges. (or least it should be).

Or I can approach it from historical theology or from the history of the church, where for example, we look at the different epochs of church history and study the men who were greatly used by the Lord in the area of preaching.

The likes of Ambrose, Augustine, John Chrysostom, John Wycliff, Luther, Calvin, Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, Spurgeon, Llyod Jones, John Stott…

This would indeed be a fascinating study. Because these men under God have stood as towering figures in the cause of preaching.

Or I can also approach it from a canonical aspect (from Genesis to Rev – beginning with Noah, who is labelled as the preacher of righteousness right up to the two witnesses who were preaching/prophesying in the book of Revelation at a time of fierce persecution for the church).

Or just focus on Old Testament Prophets as they provide a classic model of commitment to preaching

Or maybe focus to NT apostles as they also display another model of commitment to preaching

The point is there are lots of angles through which this can be approach.

But I have chosen the methodology of singular Bible passage.

And I hope you will see shortly why I chose this.

And the passage I have chosen, you will agree with me that this passage is a classic and quite fitting passage to the topic I have been given. It has crucial elements regarding the task at hand.

I have also chosen this passage, because it is convenient in displaying the type of preaching, I advocate for, as I know many of you do, i.e. expository

So, I will do an exposition of that.

TEXT: 2 Tim. 4:1-8

TOPIC: An Urgent Call to Preach the Word

This topic is taken from the first 3 words of verse 2. ‘Preach the Word.’

Because even a superficial reading of that whole passage, shows that this imperative to preach the word is the crux of the whole passage. Verse 1 is driving towards this. Then everything that comes after it, is explicating and expounding that main imperative 'to preach the Word.' As one can see the connective connecting clauses.

Friends, I am sure I don't need to be recounting the background of the Letter. We all know that this is Paul's last letter, writing it to Timothy, his son in the faith. A man who is currently overseeing the church of Ephesus. So, it is a farewell speech to him. A goodbye speech. As we all know ke, befundisi, bam that when a man is about to the leave the stage or lying on his death bed. He does not talk about trivial things. But focuses on important things. Again you just only need to take a quick glance on the Bible and look at the Farewell speeches in the Bible and see the things that were said, 'Look at the Patriachs, (especially Jacob), Moses, Joshua's, Samuel, the Lord Jesus on the upper Room, Paul leaving the Ephesians Elders.

So, hereto Paul is hitting the nails for the last time in his Son. That's the context. And there is one central purpose. To encourage his son to press on in the work of the Lord. You can see this clearly right on the opening passage of this book. For immediately after Paul gave thanks to the Lord for Timothy's healthy spiritual family background, he says in verse 6 of Chapter 1: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us not the spirit of fear, but of power, and love and self-control". To fan into flame. Meaning re-kindle! Meaning ufuna avuseleleke. That's what he wanted. And one of the bulk of what he wanted to rekindle in him is Timothy's relationship and commitment around the ministry of the Word. (1:8, 13-14, 2:2, 2:4).

And I must say, therefore, friends that the purpose of this talk of mine, as we look at this call to preach the word, it is similar in terms of idea to that of the apostle Paul. And this is this:

PURPOSE: Not to inform you something that you are not familiar with or don't know. But it is to remind and encourage each other of something that we know of.

Now as we look at this call, brothrers. I want to make this argument/contention, which again it may not be something new for us. Or it may be. And here is my argument:

ARGUMENT: In the pastoral ministry, there is nothing as urgent as the preaching

To put it slightly different: For a Pastor, in all his pastoral ministry activities, there is no activity as urgent as preaching the word.

For a pastor, in all the ministries he is overseeing, there is no ministry that is as important as the pulpit ministry.

And friends, I am making this argument because I believe that this is the internal logic of this passage. As it calls for ministers to preach the word. From the passage I have 3 legs that support this assertion that, for a pastor there is nothing as urgent as the preaching of God's word. The first leg that supports this would be for me to say:

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AN URGENT CALL TO PREACH THE WORD

1st The gravity of the call to preach the Word (v. 1)

The utter seriousness of the call to preach. Paul opens verse one, with a charge. With a commissioning. He says, "I charge you...".

Indeed those of us who are using the more literal English Bibles can see that. I do know that the translations such as a NIV, for readability purposes they don't begin with that word. They say 'in view'. And ke unfortunately, they loose or delay the sense of immediate gravity, which sets the stage for this call.

But in truth that is the mood that Paul is creating right at the opening of this passage. Creating that sense that surely what is going to be said here must be actually important. In fact, some translation, the way they translate that one word, 'I charge' is I 'solemnly charge you'. Its important!

And that is exactly that.

But it is what he says next that just thickens the seriousness of everything and create more suspense. As he says, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his kingdom....", do what, "Preach The Word".

Brothers there you have the context wherein this call is made. And everything about this context shouts one message. And it is this: This call is grave. It is serious. Because friends again, look at the witnesses who are present in attending this charge for Timothy to preach, which is recommissioning by the way. Look at those who came to grace the occasion. Basically, look at the witnesses. As we all know that sometimes you can judge the importance of the occasion by looking at the guest list. By looking at who is attending and witnessing the occasion.

And in that passage, as you can see you are given 2 distinguished witnesses. God the Father and God the Son. That friends tell you of the gravity of this moment. We saw the similar thing in 1 Tim. 5:21. But this one carries a sense of urgency. Because as Paul refers to Jesus Christ, he refers to him in connection to judgement. This is not a judgment that is there in the distance future, but a judgment that is quite immanent. Again, a literally reading of that phrase, that says who is to judge, is actually, as 'who is about to judge'.

But it is the next phrase of that verse that brings out this concoxion of serious urgency even more clearer, when it comes to the preaching of the word. Paul, says I charge you by his appearing. By his appearing. In other words, Paul says on the ground or basis of the immediacy of the second of the Son of God, I charge you to preach the word.

As you are listening to this you could be tempted to say, Aha! But Paul, this is too much for the young man. Ziyoyikisa ezi zinto uzithethayo. And guess what he comes with another one. End of verse 1, I charge you by Jesus' kingdom.

Brothers that sound quite serious! And that is the point of the apostle Paul. - Hence we said, there is nothing for a pastor that is as urgent as the call to preach.

I know sometimes people throw words loosely and say, our calling is a heavenly calling. But the truth of the matter is that it is. It is a kind of calling that is given in view of the judgement of the world and Christ's kingdom.

All this speaks of the gravity of this call. It is a serious one! Hence I argue that there is nothing as urgent as the preaching of the word in the pastorate.

No wonder some of our heroes have said some of the exalted things about preaching.

Listen to what John Wycliff (1384) – dubbed as the Morning Star of Reformation: “The highest service that man can attain on earth is to preach the Word of God”

Listen to what Martyn Lloyd Jones said when he was giving lectures at Westminster Theological Seminary in the State on preaching and praise the Lord those lectures have been turned to a book, which is entitled: Preaching and Preachers, this is what he said, as opens: “But ultimately, my reason for being very ready to give these lectures is that to me the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called. And he continues and said: If you want something in addition to that I would say without any hesitation that the urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching…”

Lest I commit an unpardonable sin, I have to quote Charles Spurgeon: “To be a minister of Christ is in my estimation an infinitely higher honor than the world can bestow. The he said: My pulpit is to me desirable than a throne”.

Now, you can laugh at what this particular guy yena said when it comes to the urgency of preaching. This is what Dick Lucas (who lived in the 20th century), another important English preacher. He said: “God had one Son and made him a preacher”

All this friends buttresses the importance of preaching. It is Paul said: “Woe unto me if I do not preach the Gospel”.

How can then such a call be number 2 in the list of the things that we do in pastorate.

Friends, I put it to you if we are dreaming of the presence of healthy churches in our township, the first place we should build is the pulpit. This should be at the heart of all our strategies.

Application:

So, if as a pastor there is something else that is more important than preaching, then I would advise that you leave the pastorate before you bring shame to it.

If overriding desire is to make your name great or you are overwhelemed with an insitiable desire to be a big shot in ministry and – then leave the pastorate, like now.

If your chief passion and transcended zeal is on building institutions, including Christian NGO's and feed the power, teach life-skills, or educate the poor, you too leave the pastorate and focus on that with the blessing of the Lord. You will not be sinning, before you turn the church into a thing it was never meant to be.

It is the apostles who said: 'it is not good for us to leave the ministry of the word and focus on the tables'.

If your highest dominant dream is to write books ( ) and your name be on the cutting edge of important articles and journals– then you too go and write your books and articles.

If people like myself and utata' uMaseti who are also involved in the academy, if for us to get our next degrees (Phd's) is more important than our Sunday preaching at our local churches, then we should leave the pastorate too, before we turn LLBC and MaCassar Baptist Church before we betray the vision of those men we planted the churches together.

The point is: No one should be in the pastorate or plant a church if there is another noble desire that is dominating in his heart than for flourishing of the preaching of God's Word. Such a person uzasenzela ingxaki, regardless of who he is and how gifted he is! And that person will include the one who is preaching to us!

Befundisi, as you will agree with me. Asidlali apha. And for a long time, there have been people who make the pastorate a ladder to their greatest desires in life.

An urgent call to preach the word. Remember my argument: In the pastoral ministry, there is nothing as urgent as the preaching of God word.

Look at the gravity of the call

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2nd Look at the execution of the call to preach the Word (v. 2)

Basically how it should be done. This verse gives us the manner in which this call is to be executed. Look there again, friends. After Paul said to Timothy he must preach the word, look what he says next. ‘Be ready in season and out of season’:

That friends paints this urgency we are talking about. There Paul says, this call must be executed when it is timely to do so and when it is not timely. Firstly lets look at the timely part. Basically, when times are favourable, convenient, and fitting.

Actually, the word in season there is the same as the word that was spoken by Mark when he describes the perfect timing Judas was looking for in order to hand Jesus over. It says he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Which means from that time onwards he was already ready to hand over Jesus, just waiting for the perfect timing.

So, this is the kind of preacher is indeed worthy of commendation because, ready he is to preach the word. He is just waiting for the perfect timing. No, no the sermon is always ready.

I mean you have to give this person credit he has understood the urgency of the call.

But friends, that is not urgent enough. Because Paul says be ready to preach even if the timing is bad.

In those very moments when other well-meaning preachers say, this is not the time to preach, but to just love people.

We will talk more shortly about this theme. But for now I must say that of course, this does not mean we must that we must not use common sense when it comes to rest, or be like the likes of George Whitefield in the 18th century whose commitment to preaching was shown in that even during his Honeymoon he kept his preaching schedule, he would go out and preach, as an evangelist. That’s not wise.

But at the same time we must never forget that our calling caries a sense of uniqueness, because we are called to preach/announce a message that knows no season. We are carrying a word, whose nature is actual eternal (across

time). Hence you have passages that state: “The grass withers and flowers fade my word will endure for ever”.

Again as we look at the manner of the execution of this call, we hear that Timothy is to reprove and rebuke.

Both words describing the negative element of preaching the word. Where particular behaviour is confronted and discouraged.

Actually, as Timothy is doing this he is using God’s word appropritately, because in Chapter 3, these are some of the elements which God’s word is profitable to do. Remember 2 Tim. 3:16, “All Scripture is God-breathed and it is profitable for teahhing, for reproof/rebuking, correcting and for training in righteousness…”.

Friends, I know that probably none of us like to be confrontational and rebuking in our sermons.

Or some of us its just not in our personality to rebuke people, confront and correct.

Others, bayawuphepha this aspect by over analysing the text and explain its meaning meaning,

Or they tell lots of stories, just to fill up their sermons. But be absent when it comes to confronting certain sins through their preaching.

Actually, there is this tendency that I abhor of delivering very smooth sermons, that create no friction. Its frictionless sermons. And this is not just with motivational preachers out there. Even among Reformed circles, there is a tendency to bulk our sermons with overload of information, that either drown the congregations or stimulate their minds, but never confront them their sins.

Friends, let’s remember that our call to preach includes this aspect. And it is an urgent one. Remember we are preaching on the brink of judgment. Terrible and irresponsible is a preacher, who knows that a bigger river is filling up north and children are playing church below, yet he does not warn them. But is telling them jokes and entertaining their brains. Actually, upon the head of that preacher the blood of those people is going to be required. That preacher, God is going to judge him according to Ezekiel, because he has failed on his task of being a watchmen who should blow the trumpet – warn people. and one of those ways to warn them is rebuking them.

But but friends, look at the last aspect of how this calling is to be executed. Paul says this reproof and rebuke is to mixed with exhortation.

You are to exhort. You are to encourage. You are to come alongside the people.

So it is not to be all negative but must be positive

But friends look at that encouragement. Paul says it must be done with complete patience and teaching.

Just to lash on that aspect of patience.

You know this is one of the aspect that when you are young, reformed and restless, perhaps you are likely to need more help on.

You know in our early days of encounting sound theology and expository sermons, this issue of being patient with people in your preaching we had to learn quickly.

Because when you are young and have seen the value of a reformed theology and expository sermons, you are kind of expecting others to get it like that.

And therefore, at times you see oppositions where it does not exist. And you blast everyone who smells like an enemy.

But friends, though at times things maybe more complicated, however we need to remember that we are to display patience as preachers of the word. I mean Paul expects us to be patient even with people who have come under error.

Remember the words, he spoke to 1 Timothy 2:24, “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome, kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil…”.

The point is friends, just because the task that we have been given is urgent it does not mean then that we must not be patient with the people we minister to. Urgency and patience are not two contradictory attitudes. They are not mutually exclusive. They live together as twins.

As people who want to see the healthy churches spreading our townships, we need to cultivate this element of patience. Because most of the people who will join our churches are coming from different backgrounds. This I can

assure you. The point is they may not get it quickly what we are trying to do and they may show that non-getting in strange ways. We must just not forget to patient.

I am always scared that maybe at times one of the reasons why church planting work struggles to take root in our township, maybe because we have the correct doctrine but not the accompanying patience. I don't know. (maybe we can talk about it).

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AN URGENT CALL TO PREACH THE WORD

3rd Look at the motivation of the call to preach (vv. 3-8)

There are two motivations of why we must preach the Word. And both show the urgency that is behind this call.

Firstly it is in verse 3-5. Paul writes that 'For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths"

Basically they will be tired of listening to healthy sermons or healthy doctrine.

They will have no appetite and no time for healthy teachings.

Instead, through their lustful ears, they will want other things.

They will want to be entertained.

They will be like the Israelites who lost appetite for manna, the very bread from heaven, that they were daily getting and instead they wanted cucumbers, onions, garlics, melons of Egypt.

But what is surprising friends is that this state of affairs is actually the motivation why preachers to preach the word. Did you see that!

I mean people don't want to hear it.

Why we continue with the preaching. In fact, in verse 5, that is exactly what Paul says to Timothy, that in this climate of lack of appetite for God's word,

as for him, “He is always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist and fullfill his ministry”. In other words, he is not to be affected by this. But he is to go against this.

But still how can the fact that people who don’t want to hear God’s word can serve as the motivation of why you should actually preach the very word they don’t want to hear.

You see, you need remember that in the Bible, great and massive preaching ministry took place at a time when people’s appetite for God’s word were gone.

I mean look at the likes of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hoseas, Amos, - look at the amount of their preaching and sermons.

These guys were called to preach God’s word when the nation of Israel was feeding their lustful appetites through idolatory and other sins – worship foreign gods.

They preached to them for decades and the nation never turned.

They preached them to Assyria and Babylon because their state of affairs increased the urgency of preaching the word of God.

Brothers, let’s not forget that most of our preaching ministry and evangelistic ministry exists because God’s word is not obeyed.

Friends, I put to you, If the sheep can stop going astray, if the sheep can be perfectly able to feed themselves, if the sheep could lead themselves, then there will be no need for us to preach the word.

Listen rebellion and lack of appetite of many of the people around ministry is the very fuel that drives the urgency of our preaching.

Here is the second motivation as to why we must preach the Word. Because faithful preachers are leaving the stage.

Listen to verse 6, “for I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Hencerforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved their appearing.

This seals Paul’s farewell note to Timothy.

And this is yet another motivation that heightens the urgency of this call to preach.

Friends I am sure that you have seen that key Evangelical men who have influenced us in healthy teachings have actually left the stage.

Here I am thinking of guys like – Sproul, J.I. Parker, John MacArthur, Voddie Bachaan,

And there are others who like next in line –

the likes of John Piper, D. A. Carson – they are about to leave the stage.

And others are bowling their last overs,

the likes of Albert Mohler, Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan

Even on our very own, otat' uNgcwatywa, likes of Mr. Neil Henry, Mervin Elloff

Before you know it, we will find ourselves being the senior members in our own reformed evangelical world.

If I was in another context, I was going to say the Moses are passing on, the Joshuas must arise,

The Samuel's are leaving the stage, the David's must arise

The Elijah's are taken by Chariots of fire and the Elisha's must catch the mantles

So, friends, we have no time to play but to run with the task of preaching.

Because those who led at the front are going home.

But the question is: Will we be faithful?

Illustration:

In a book that is written edited by D. A. Carson, with several prominent Preachers, contributing, one author by the name of Edward Copeland, who is a Baptist pastor in the States tells of a true story of what happened when he went to visit his critically sick friend in hospital. Now, his friend had been a pastor for many years.

He says: 'My friend was fighting for every breath. He had called me to his room in the ICU. His reason for calling me was that I must help him draft his

last will and testament (umyolelo). He told me that the books in his extensive theological library were to be divided equally between a select group of young preachers. He told me that his estate was to be equally divided among his children. However, his ultimate concern was less of legal dministration of his property, but more theological. The legacy he was most concerned about was not the type that can be disposed via the draft will. As he was struggling to get comfortable because of the air that was being pumped into his lungs through the ventilators, my friend drew closer to the edge of the bed nearest to my seat. I also tried to lean in to hear his last and secret desires. My friend, with a face that looked unsure, he whispered to my ear and said: 'Who will succeed me as a pastor? And continues, "Who can I trust to hold the line of truth?". My friend went on to complain heavily about the fact that there is a generation of preachers who are looking for glory where Christ promised tribulation. 'They want big things and big names. But they don't know how to handle the truth".

May the Lord help us, friends that we may never be counted among such preachers, who want big names but don't know how to handle the truth. But may we keep the urgency of the call to preach the Word ugently!

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AN URGENT CALL TO PREACH THE WORD

Conclusion:

Actually, I am mindful, friends that in some places of my talk I have sounded quite strong and sometimes graceless. But may I remind and encourage you that I have spoken in the manner that I have spoken regarding this call, because of the grace of God to us, which he has channelled through His Son. You see this call is grounded on him.

The very call is grounded on him as we saw it in the opening

Remember he is the driving force behind our charge to preach the Word.

Our call is grounded on him and his work as the judge

Now, the reason why he would come to judge its because he did come first to offer salvation by his incarnation, teaching but supremely through his death and rising from the dead.

And thus as a risen and ascended Christ he gave gifts and one of those gifts are Pastor-teachers of which we are

So, as we run with his calling we are running with what he has given us.

And we desire to be faithful stewards of that gracious calling.

I repeat that Jesus is the ground of our calling, the very spring board of our preaching.

ABOUT THE PREACHER

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Profile source: George Whitefield College · gwc.ac.za

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