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New Series
Vol. XX. No. 3

JULY
1949

"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

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NEW SERIES

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“PREACH THE WORD”

EDITORIAL

Last letters, written under the sense of an approaching end, are often tinged with a certain solemnity and appeal. Paul's last letter to Timothy, written just prior to his martyrdom, is an outstanding example. He weaves into it the notes of mingled challenge and pathos; the broken sighs and brave courage of a heart bereft of most of its loving ties; warnings of looming dangers; restful faith and even quiet joy in spite of chains and privations; words of teaching, counsel and encouragement: All this, and much else, shine through these stirring sentences.

As if gathering up the surging emotions of an over-full heart for a final appeal and exhortation to his beloved child in the faith, remembering Timothy's natural shrinking from bearing the responsibilities of a testing leadership full of pitfalls, he adjures him finally in words of noble feeling and affection—

**“I charge thee . . . before God and the Lord Jesus Christ . . .
PREACH THE WORD, be urgent in season, out of season”!**

This is the fifth reference the apostle has made to the WORD, written or oral, and each reference reveals an increasing emphasis. Let us note these references first:

The *first* is a call to “*guard the Deposit*” committed to Timothy's trust (ch. 1:13, 14). Innumerable and subtle enemies are ever eager to snatch away the Good Seed, or in some way destroy its worth in the hearts of men. To Timothy is given the stewardship both of possession and transmission of this saving Word. Let him see to it that he discharges that stewardship faithfully. No more vital message is entrusted to the messenger of the cross than the “Word of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18).

The *second* reference (ch. 2:9, 10) is an exulting assertion that “*the Word of God is not bound*”, whatever men may do to bind it, as the Philistines did Samson. Paul himself was

bound as he dictated his letter in a Roman dungeon, but the Gospel he preached and now entrusted to Timothy was even then speeding on its mission through lands afar, free as the breath of the Almighty, like the winds over the moors! Then he adds something heroic and noble: "Wherefore *I endure* all things"! His very bonds (as *he* viewed them) laughed defiance at Nero's efforts to crush the Message by caging the Messenger! He accepted his chains with that holy and hilarious courage which voices a challenge to every true-hearted disciple to follow his example fearlessly and persistently.

The *third* occurrence (ch. 2:15) is an appeal to "*handle aright the Word of Truth*", for by so doing he would be enabled to "present himself approved unto God, a workman that would have no cause to be ashamed". Elsewhere (2 Cor. 2:17) the apostle indicates that there were "many" who, whilst professing to be teachers, descended to "corrupting (making merchandise of, or huckstering,) the Word of God". Timothy's ambition was to be far otherwise. He was to apply his energies of mind and heart to the high ideal of becoming "approved"; having the hall-mark of an unimpeachable motive and unsullied conscience before God and man. Imbued with this spirit Timothy is to "hold a straight course" in the Word so that all might know the Truth and walk therein with confidence.

The *fourth* mention, in chap. 3:14-17, consists of an extended description of the nature and quality of the "sacred Writings", too long for us to deal with now. But it is a fundamentally important statement, more than ever to be emphasised in this day of unbelief and shallow beliefs. What other "word" than that which is "God-breathed" can bring life eternal to dead souls? Only such a Word is ultimately sufficient for the man of God if he is to be "thoroughly furnished unto every good work." Let us make sure that we possess a clear understanding of the nature and potency of this Word; for just here there is much loose thinking and lack of conviction amongst many who hold the pulpits of the so-called Christian world. Can we wonder at the shallow principles of living it produces in the rank and file?

The *fifth* and last is the one we are now considering: "Preach the Word". This Word is the word of God (as already seen in ch. 2:9). It is from God, bears the authority of God, gives us the Message or Gospel of God for the whole world, "which must be preached in every nation." It is this Gospel humanity

needs today more than anything else. All the myriad schemes for the uplift and regeneration of human nature have had their day and proved their failure. The sin of the soul persists in its devastating progress towards a black eternity. The world's moral and spiritual bankruptcy is no longer hidden. It has, in fact, become the most discussed subject of publicists and politicians, educationists and social reformers. They all know the cause, but cannot agree on the remedy. Passing strange that men still persist in refusing the *only effectual* remedy—the Gospel of God!

With this remedy in our hands we dare not falter in our task. We must take or send this life-giving Word, this healing Message for mind and soul, to every corner of the earth. It is the day of opportunity, the day of challenge, for every true witness to do his or her duty. The meaning of the verb *kērussō* is “to herald forth”, to proclaim aloud and afar the tidings of the Kingdom. As if to add greater emphasis the tense is aorist, implying immediacy of action; and the succeeding verbs are also aorists: “I adjure thee, remember—to preach, to persist, to reprove, to rebuke, to exhort—*Go to it*, in God's name!” Never let down—be instant in season, out of season! “Today the noise of battle; the next, the Victor's Song”!

But it is not merely to the will and the conscience that the charge is addressed; it is even more to the *heart*, for it comes from the heart of a man who *felt* profoundly for human suffering and sin. Paul was no maudlin effeminate, but he could “weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:16), and shed tears over the erring (Phil. 3:18)—so close did he walk with his Master who wept over Jerusalem. And it is only in the measure that we *feel* the burden that we become dauntless in heralding forth the word of life.

The apostle would further drive home the challenge by making pointed reference to certain matters for Timothy's consideration and watchfulness. Each reference separately and all together seem intended to furnish motive and force for action. We must examine these briefly next.

1. The first, in verse 3, is introduced (as they nearly all are) by the little conjunction *for* (Greek, *gar*): “*For* the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine”. It raises the whole point of *opportunity*, and implies that the *time to preach* is running out. If the Gospel is to be proclaimed effectively it must be done *now*, or the human heart will so

harden, become so overcharged by error, that the Good Seed will have no chance! We can, in fact, see that happening in our midst today. Hence opportunity spells *urgency* for every preacher of the Gospel, every missionary to foreign fields, every Christian everywhere.

2. Next, in verses 5 and 6—the two verses go together to get the connection of thought: “Fulfil thy ministry; *for* I am already being offered and the time of my departure is at hand.” In other words, tried leaders, men of experience and wise counsel, are passing on. Gaps are occurring in the ranks which are *hard to fill*. Paul states in a previous letter, “I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for the flock; for they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 2:20–21). He does not doubt the loyalty of his faithful companions, but he sees the grievous scarcity of Spirit-filled men who will take the Torch of Salvation from failing hands and bear it onward in the strength of God.

3. Once more, he calls Timothy to come to his help, “*for* Demas hath forsaken” him, having loved this present world (v. 9). Such defections strike home with peculiar poignancy. But the Lord Himself foretold that “the love of many would grow cold.” (Matt. 24:12). Yet such defections instead of cooling should only add fuel to the fire of devotedness to the Cause—for nothing is so contagious and catastrophic as spiritual defection in any form.

4. The reference in verse 11 to John Mark contains a note of thankful reassurance. This young man had been sorely tempted and for a time left the path of service and hardship in the Gospel. But recovery had come; and now the apostle wants him by his side—“*for* he is useful to me for ministering.” Writing to Philemon Paul calls Mark a “fellow worker”, and he tells the Colossians that Mark has been “a comfort” to him (ch. 4:11). Thank God, Mark refused defeat. Is some fellow-Christian reading these words who has suffered a reverse, and would like to “get back”? You may! Take the step the Prodigal did: “*I will arise and go to my Father*”!

5. Finally, there is the word of warning against any false charity towards the *enemies* of the Word (v. 15). Opinion is divided on the identity of this notorious coppersmith; is he the Alexander of 1 Tim. 1:20, or the one of Acts 19:33? The former apparently was a Christian heretic; the latter a

renegade Jew. We are inclined to think he is the former, though actually it matters not—the real point is the warning against any trafficking with the enemy. There are those today whose teachings, both written and spoken, are making shipwrecks “concerning the faith” amongst Christian communities, “of whom be thou ware also”! A “liberal theology” has demonstrated its ability to produce a “libertine morality” in the masses. Nothing is so capable of damping down the fires of evangelical zeal as this same “liberal theology”. The “word” the apostle speaks of is the *unadulterated* word of Holy Scripture, not *man's* word *about* Scripture. We have to hold fast to the purity and powerful dynamic of the Gospel Paul preached, and refuse all else of admixture and conjecture of human reasonings.

In closing, turn for a moment from Paul to Paul's Lord and Master: Listen to *His* arresting declaration, as the multitude “would have stayed Him that He should not go from them” (Luke 4:42, 43)—“*I must preach*”, He cries, “the Good Tidings of the Kingdom of God *to the other cities* also, for therefore *was I sent*”. Here is the supreme Example! Other great examples may fail for one reason or another to rouse our zeal; but behold *this* Man! His words, His every action, His holy zeal, His selfless devotion to the welfare of perishing souls, and every single feature of His life and service—do these not lay upon us His people the most solemn and weighty obligation to “follow in His footsteps” whilst it is called TO-DAY? For Him it meant the Way of the Cross. But unwaveringly He declares His solemn obligation: “I MUST PREACH”! Paul, His martyr-servant echoes, “Preach the Word”!

And “I heard the voice of the LORD, saying, Whom shall I send and who will go for us? Then said (*Isaiah*), Here am I; send me”! Will you follow Isaiah, Paul, and Christ?
