

TEXT: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

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, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. ^{4:1} 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: ² Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ 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. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. — NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Lord God, you know that we are surrounded by many dangers and that we often stumble and fall. Strengthen us in body and mind, and bring us safely through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. The Spirit of the Lord is on me; he has anointed me to preach good news. Alleluia. (Luke 4:18a cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

It's was during the deep and dark realities of World War II that the propaganda machines were in full swing. In Brittain, the posters read "Careless talk costs lives" or "keep mum". In Germany, "Schäm Dich, Schwätzer!" or in English: "Shame on you, blabbermouth!" In America, the phrase was "Loose lips sink ships". Everyone was afraid of the same thing. Careless words carelessly spoken might give away strategic positions in the War that was raging across the globe. What was said needed to be guarded, thought about, carefully weighed.

I can still recall sitting in dogmatics class (doctrine class) at our seminary. Professor Bivens looked out over the men seated there, myself included, and spoke the slogan again. He wasn't concerned about German spies secretly listening to communications that might reveal locations of warships. He was trying to impress upon us the importance of correctly handling the Word of God. If loose lips could sink ships in WWII, then loose speech from the pulpit could just as easily sink churches, needed to be weighed with every bit as much care in the battle against sin, satan, and a sin-stained world.

Hundreds of years before bombs exploded in the wars that overtook the world the Apostle Paul had written with similar urgency to young pastor Timothy. If loose lips sink ships, well, itching ears aren't much better. ³ *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.* ⁴ *They will turn their ears away from the truth*

and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Our world today has a phrase for the itching ear syndrome of which Paul speaks. We call them “echo chambers”. They occur when we only listen to what we want to hear. It’s increasingly easy to do this in an internet-driven world where we can pick and choose what we want to hear and surround ourselves with any number of “experts” who agree with whatever it is that makes us feel vindicated about what is easiest or most comfortable for us. In the past, we called it the court of public opinion. Another phrase was driven into us in our doctrine classes, “the church is not run by precedent.” In other words, it honestly doesn’t matter if someone else has done it or is doing it. The real and only determining factor in the decisions of the church is the Word of God.

Unfortunately, the opposite is often true. It has become increasingly easy to look at the fallen state of the world around us and decide that we need to “get with the times”. To choose the path of least resistance and go with the flow as we seek to grow the church numerically and increase in popularity with society.

Perhaps the words of our worship planner say it best. They are printed in our bulletin under the God’s Word this week section. “Last week we saw that there can be a temptation to alter the message we proclaim to avoid apparent failure and rejection. This week we see that there is also a temptation to alter the message we proclaim because of apparent success. If a church makes its central focus things like personal improvement, healing for the sick, or social justice, that church may draw a crowd. It just fails to carry out the agenda Christ has given his Church. The gospel of forgiveness is to be the center of all our preaching and teaching. The agenda for Christ’s Church is set. It’s the same agenda that was followed by the Church’s Christ. AGENDA UNCOVERED: WHAT MUST BE SAID, NOT WHAT OTHERS WANT TO HEAR.”

Is this easy, of course not. In fact, it will often be the way of the most resistance as we go against the flow of popular opinion and seek to look sometimes completely otherworldly in comparison to the world around us but then our God often asks us to do the hard thing instead of the easy thing. So God urges Jeremiah to speak not what the world wants to hear but what God has given him. Jesus walks away from Capernaum which has become enamored with the miracles He can perform for the miraculous Word He has come to live and fulfill before their very eyes. Our Savior Himself told the disciples, “*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.* (Luke 9:23)”

This is no easy task. My flesh will revolt at the thought of it. Satan will call it complete stupidity and the World around us will laugh at us as we seek to follow God, His will, and His Word rather than the great number of people who say what our sinful nature desires to hear.

Paul of course understand this, understands the temptations that will greet young Timothy and all of us, understands the sin which rages within and around us urging us to throw away our God and His Word for the echo chambers of sin, and inspired by God urges us to return to it. Yes, even to hold fast to it in our lives.

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, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. ^{4:1} 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: ² Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

So what pulls us from the echo chambers of our own sin? What alone can shine through the court of public opinion and precedent put forth by a world ravaged by the consequences of it? What outwits the wittiness of the wretched one? Once more it is the Gospel. They alone are able to make us wise. Not by the standards of the world around us, but in the salvation which has been bought and paid for in the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Permit another reading from that Word. Paul writes the Corinthian Christians, “¹⁸ *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ¹⁹ *For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”* ²⁰ *Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* ²¹ *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.* ²² *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,* ²⁴ *but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵ *For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.* (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)”

We could chase a million fads, bounce after one opinion after another, gather crowds great enough to fill stadiums, set twitter a flutter, find one feel-good solution after another and none of it would amount to anything apart from Him. And while God’s Word might look like a detriment to the masses led astray by our spiritual foes, we know the truth. It alone saves. It saves as it feeds the faith which God has given in Baptism, it saves as it supplies the object of the faith as He suffers and dies for us and our sin on the cross. It saves as it points to the one thing that is needed. The only thing that is truly important in a world which would seek everything else. It’s this Word that has saved us and carries the promise of God to save others as we draw ever nearer to the day when He should return to judge the living and the dead, to bring His people to heaven.

So today, our God asks us to be vigilant. To study the Word regularly in Bible Studies, in our Churches, in our homes). To apply it faithfully in everything we think, say, and do. To guard it, to cherish it, to look at it with every bit as much importance as the allies guarded their strategy and positions in the war because the way we speak about our God, because the things we do as the church, because the Word matters for us and for others.

“Loose lips sink ships” and it’s not much better when it comes to doctrine and the church. Because our itching ears (filled with sin) will always seek to listen to anything but, our God once more urges us to return to His saving Word, to preach it! Because it is all that we need. Amen.