

Series: Be Strong – 2 Timothy

VBC

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2 Timothy 4:1-5

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“God’s Word for Heretical Times”

On a morning walk at Cannon Beach I came across the red truck with those words—Haystack Rock Awareness Program

- setting up signs around the massive rock that is a refuge to lots of creatures
- they do this every day—to educate, make people aware of environmental dangers

Mediating on 2 Timothy—it dawned on me that Paul is doing much the same

- that we have to maintain an awareness—there is something out there that needs to be protected
- even more significant than intertidal and bird ecologies—it is the CHURCH—read 4:1-2

- there is a certain gravity in his words—a sense of urgency in his voice—and why not?
- time was ticking down for Paul—this was his final letter
- and this was the last part

- he is calling witnesses together to stress an urgency
- to underscore that we will be held accountable
- and for good reason—there was a growing concern that a variety of heresies—pseudo Christianities were increasing their influence in Ephesus—already the faith of some had collapsed—1:15
- the work of planting and growing this church was being threatened
- and more than we realize—this is happening today

- it will demand followers of Christ with the core disciplines of readiness to turn the tide—beginning with this—

1) BE READY TO STAND FOR TRUTH

- truth was Paul’s passion—
- his intellect was entirely harnessed to and saturated with Scripture
- the Word shaped his imagination, informed his decisions, and formed his life
- and so he continually called Timothy back to it—
 - guard the truth—what has been deposited, entrusted to us—1:14
 - keep the pattern of sound teaching—1:13
 - correctly handle the Word—2:15
 - continue in what you have learned—3:14
 - and here—preach it—declare it, live it, manifest it!

- no matter what—no matter when!

- convenient or inconvenient—opportune or inopportune—take your stand
- this is not insensitive brashness—not a biblical warrant for rudeness
- but it is a command to stand ready, be radically available to share truth, live truth
- preach as one upon whom necessity is laid—I Cor 9:16
- as if everything is on the line—BECAUSE IT IS!!

a) preach to CORRECT

- speak it to the unbelieving—so that sin is exposed and hearts are drawn to repentance

- b) preach to WARN
-speak it to those getting off course—to those who have been lured away by seductions
- c) preach to ENCOURAGE
-speak it so that those seeking forward movement are reassured

Do all of these with steady patience—with a spirit that does not get irritable or despair
-with a core aim—clarifying, teaching, solidifying one's faith
-moving people beyond adolescence

There's good reason for this—read vss 3-4

-it's here Paul warns of a subtle war going on
-aimed to distort, deceive people into apostasy, abandonment of the faith—be ready!

- a) People will not put up with sound teaching
-Paul warns of times when people will no longer have a stomach for sound teaching, solid biblical nourishment—will instead prefer junk food
- b) People will accumulate teachers according to their own desires
-they will accrue voices that agree with their cravings, teaching that suits their fancy
-they will fall in love with teachers who present themselves as a cut above the masses
-who choose their words not for their truthfulness but for their seductiveness

-Paul had to contend with this everywhere—
-“for if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we have preached—or if you receive a spirit other than the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough!”—2 Cor 11:4

-here in Ephesus—more than put up—they will accumulate, stockpile false teaching
-because the desire for novelty and sensationalism is so great it cannot be satisfied
-the ears keep itching
-so they move from one teacher to another, one church to another, one new fad, novel idea to another

- c) People will turn away their ears from truth
-eventually they will make a decisive turn—from dabbling to defecting
-rejecting sound orthodoxy

-they will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits—I Tim 4:2
-spirits that tell them that God wants to fulfill their cravings for wealth—I Tim 6:5
-spirits that tell them they can be their own god—live their own version of spirituality
-spirits that entice them to pursue certain mysteries—initiate one into the secrets of the spiritual life
-into an inside knowledge (Gnosticism) acquired by initiation and intuition—the things falsely called “gnosis”—I Tim 6:20

-and finally—

- d) People will ultimately be turned aside to myths, fables
-to apocryphal stories with Jesus smoothed out and universalized
-a Jesus more palatable to sensitive souls

-what is unnerving here is the shift of voice from the indicative to the passive voice
-suggesting a tipping point—where they are no longer doing the action but receiving it

- there comes a moment God may give us over to our desires
- if you continue to mess with untruths and come to reject the truth—there may be a no return point
- like sailors shipwrecked and beyond recovery
- they have been “turned aside”

APPLICATION

What is scary is that much of this is being played out right now, underscored by two recent books—

- the first—*The Juvenilization of the American Church*—Bergler
- who warns that when no one was looking—the church devolved into a feel good faith that appeals to our self centered desire for fun—*an extended youth group*
- we go for messages that emphasize an emotional relationship with Jesus over intellectual content
- we have become a generation that dumbed down truth to the lowest common denominator of “adolescent cognitive development”
- a faith emotionally driven and intellectually empty

Illustration—why go to seminary—just preach John 3:16—that’s all that matters

- Bergler’s point—we conformed the church to this because it worked in youth ministry

- the second book—*Bad Religion*, Douthat
- describes the same progression Paul warns about—
“a slow motion collapse of traditional Christianity and the rise of a variety of destructive pseudo—Christianities in its place...religions that stroke the ego and indulge or even celebrate our worst appetites” –Douthat, *Bad Religion*

Point—more than we realize, we have stockpiled our own false teachers, TV preachers and self-help gurus who tell us what our ears want to hear—

- We can have a financial portfolio to our own limits*
 - for Jesus is the means to financial prosperity
 - God is a Giver who does not demand
 - that if you don’t have a lot—it is because you haven’t prayed hard enough or thought big enough
- We can have a Jesus of our own choosing*
 - a Savior who more conveniently fits our preconceptions
 - a Jesus without the tensions—either fully God or fully man—take your pick
 - a Jesus who is merciful with no connection to a vengeful God portrayed in the OT
 - a Mary Baker Eddy reimagined Jesus as the original Christian Scientist
 - a historical Jesus—one academics have created to fit their rationalistic bent
 - a mere mortal hero whose miracle stories were merely myths to make him seem superhuman
- We can have a Bible rearranged to our own liking*
 - thanks to teachers who thin out the Word, eliminating tensions by subtracting them
 - denying certain Scriptures that we do not like—creating or finding ones we do
- We can have a truth of our own enlightenment*
 - there has always been this desire to pursue a higher knowledge
 - acquire gurus to take us to a higher “gnosis”
 - Gnosticism is a virus in the bloodstream of religion that keeps resurfacing with every generation
 - that offers its own inside knowledge for the enlightened
 - a spirituality without the inconvenience of repentance and righteousness
 - an enlightened faith without the annoyance of the one true God
 - and so we buy the latest Da Vinci Code to get the low down on the lost gospels—the real truth about Jesus—concealed for centuries

e) *We can have a God of our own preference*

- thanks to people like Oprah and Elizabeth Gilbert—who popularize a God Within theology
- who tell us that our highest religious obligation is to discover the spark of divinity within and bring it into alignment with the divine Spirit in the universe—thus blurring the distinctions between God and man

And on it goes—novelists and clerics, journalists and armchair theologians who call themselves Christian and claim a Christian warrant—who have created their own Jesus, their own Bible, their own Christianity

- speaking words that titillate, scratch the itch—that give a an intoxicating rush
- but the hangover is a killer* (Douthat)

-no wonder Paul tells us—you will have to be ready—ready to stand for truth—and here are four more—*read vs 5*

2) *BE READY TO KEEP YOUR HEAD*

- don't run off to the next fad
- rather—be sober—balanced, self controlled
- in contrast to those inebriated from false teaching, keep clear of heretical intoxicants

3) *BE READY TO BEAR THE PAIN*

- for preaching the truth exposes sin, offends a tolerant culture that attacks those with any convictions
- embrace the pain that comes with following Jesus
- and endure the pain of losing people looking for that which appeals to their desires

4) *BE READY TO SHARE THE GOSPEL*

- the good news that there is a Savior, a way back to God
- confront those who have created their own gospel

5) *BE READY TO COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENT*

- fulfill your ministry, accomplish your service
- leave nothing essential undone

CONCLUSION

I'd like to hope these are the core disciplines we want to embrace

- that we are less concerned with trying to be relevant—more concerned with being orthodox
- less concerned with being cool—more concerned with growing up
- will we?