

## 4. His Appearing and His Presence

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[ 0 : 00 ] We thank you, Heavenly Father, that we have good news to proclaim, good news for all the earth. And we thank you for the one whom we proclaim at this time of year, and indeed every time of year, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to the world to save sinners.

And we pray that you would help us during the short period we have this afternoon to understand more about his coming and to rejoice in it and to serve you in proclaiming that message to the world.

Help us to concentrate in the busyness of this time of year. Give us clarity of mind. And please would you speak to us in our different situations in life. Hear us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, I'm going to read from 2 Timothy and chapter 4. And if you're following in one of the Bibles and the chairs, you'll find that on page 996.

The climax of this very important letter, Paul writing to Timothy, his young missionary colleague, I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word.

[ 1 : 33 ] Be ready, in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. 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.

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

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. Henceforth 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 his appearing.

Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia. Titus to Dalmatia.

[ 2 : 49 ] Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Trias, also the books, and above all the parchments.

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

At my first offense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it.

So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. Well, this is our final visit to 2 Timothy, and to a short series based on some statements in chapter 2, verses 8 and 9.

[ 4 : 02 ] Please turn to chapter 2, verses 8 and 9. The series is called, Remember Jesus Christ, an Antidote to Christmas.

Let me read verses 8 and 9 of chapter 2 again. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I'm suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.

But God's word is not bound. This is a time of year that often, frankly, people don't enjoy all that much.

It's dark and cold and wet and busy, and the Christmas rush comes at the end of a long period of darkening and wetting and busying, does it not?

It is not unusual at this time of year for Christians to get all worked up about putting Christ back in Christmas. He is the reason for the season, goes the slogan.

[ 5 : 08 ] This week I came across nine tips for putting Christ back into Christmas. See if these help you. One, play Christmas carols.

Not just Christmas folk songs like Frosty the Snowman or Jingle Bells, but actual carols such as Silent Night. Two, display nativity scenes.

Three, read and or display nativity stories from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Four, donate to charities. The best birthday present we can give our Lord is by giving to those most in need.

Five, attend church. This one will interest you. When we attend a loved one's birthday, we make an effort to visit that person. We do not have a birthday party without the birthday boy, and our Lord should be no exception to this general rule.

Six, give religious Christmas cards to family or friends. Seven, when greeting others, wish them Merry Christmas, not the politically correct happy holidays or season's greetings.

[ 6 : 18 ] Eight, think about the importance of Christ and of his birth. Imagine what it was like for Mary and Joseph anticipating the coming of the Messiah promised for so many years. And nine, learn to play a Christmas carol.

Either one you already know and like, or one you do not know well. Does that do it for you? That put the Christ back in your Christmas? Might I be forgiven for suggesting that some of that just feels like a Christianized version of the stuff that we all grown at so much at this time of year?

Yes, instead of Santa, we have the birth of the baby in the manger, but all we really get in that kind of advice is the baby in the manger. Remember Jesus Christ, says Paul to Timothy.

Is that what remembering Jesus Christ is all about at this time of year? Remembering the baby in the manger? The birthday boy? I came across something else this week.

This is, of course, the season of Advent. Advent means coming to or arrival. A time when Christians traditionally have reflected on the coming of Jesus.

[ 7 : 36 ] And here is a prayer for Advent. For the third Sunday in Advent, in fact, that is last Sunday. And this is from the Church of England Book of Common Prayer.

Now, I know I am on dangerous ground here. I know that to suggest to a Scots congregation that we might have something to learn from the prayers of English is to enter Tiger Territory.

However, I am brave enough if you are. Listen to these words. O Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming did send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee, grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way that at thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight.

Now, isn't that a very striking prayer? It's a prayer in the run-up to Christmas, but you see where it's looking not so much back but forwards. Not at the baby in the manger, but at the one who is coming to judge the world.

Isn't that striking? And did you notice also that a certain activity was in view in that prayer? Not the displaying of nativity scenes or even the singing of carols, but the proclamation of the gospel.

[ 9 : 00 ] Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may make ready thy way. The person who penned that prayer did not have modern Christmas in mind, but he might so easily have had 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 1 in mind.

Look at that, would you please? What does Timothy need to remember about Jesus Christ? I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom preach the word.

What does Timothy need to remember about Jesus? That he's coming to judge the living and the dead. And what does he need to do? He needs to proclaim the word because of that. the judge is coming, the word must be proclaimed.

If we're going to remember Jesus properly at this time of year, our remembering would do well to have those things in it, would it not? that the judge of the world will appear and the gospel must be proclaimed.

And those concerns run all the way through chapter 4 and we're going to look at that briefly under two headings. First, remember his appearing.

[ 10 : 23 ] This is the very climax of Paul's letter to Timothy and notice that the appearing of Jesus in the future runs all the way through the chapter.

We've already seen it in verse 1 but look on to verse 8. Henceforth 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 his appearing.

Do you see the appearing of Jesus in the future to judge? It's right there. Look also at verse 18 at the end of the chapter. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

To him be the glory forever and ever. Remembering the appearing of Jesus means looking forwards, not looking back. Let me ask you a question.

Why does it need to be remembered? Answer? Because that appearing will affect every human being.

[ 11 : 33 ] We often measure the importance of things by how many people they affect. Why are the current worries about the economy so significant? Well, because it affects lots of people.

Why do we worry about the state of the health service? Because it affects lots of people. Why do we worry about the climate and climate change? Well, because potentially it affects everyone alive, potentially.

But the appearing of Jesus to judge affects everyone who has ever lived. Verse 1. Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead.

who else is there apart from those people? No one. It's pretty comprehensive that, isn't it? All who are alive now and all who have been alive in the past.

The appearing of Jesus is bigger than health care, bigger than the world economy, bigger than global warming, the biggest event possible because everyone without exception will be affected by it.

[ 12 : 38 ] you look at the Christmas cards and the appearing of the baby in the manger and frankly you can take him or leave him because he doesn't seem all that important but this appearing is a whole different ball game because on that day no one will be saying oh I can't be bothered with him, let's have a drink and watch the queen.

he will have to be bothered with by everyone on that day. Question, why does Timothy have to be reminded of this?

I mean surely he ought to know he's an experienced Christian worker. Well the answer is he needs to be reminded of it because he has people all around him whose eyes are merely on the present world.

We met some of them a couple of weeks ago. Chapter 2 verse 17 just flip back to that if you're there already. Paul mentioned Hymenaeus and Philetus and he says in verse 18 they have swerved from the truth saying that the resurrection has already happened.

Their message is all about how good things are now. Their eyes are on the present. That is very common amongst Christians and Christian teachers.

[ 14 : 07 ] we're so keen to emphasize how good it is now that we spend lots of time and energy making it look good now. And people who teach that are often very impressive looking and make the real Christian like Timothy feel inferior and substandard.

And it is so easy even in Christian ministry as Timothy is to have your eyes on the present age and this world and to find the hymenaeus and philetuses of this world very intimidating because they look so good.

We get another example of this in chapter 4 verse 9. Do your best to come to me soon for Demas in love with this present world has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Paul is talking here about one of his co-workers who has left because his eyes are really on the present world and therefore it's quite difficult to be associated with a suffering apostle when your eyes are on the present world.

Let me say that you may well be surrounded by Christians and Christians workers whose eyes are really on the present world. It was happening to Timothy back then and it happens all the time now and it made Timothy worry whether he an experienced Christian worker was really a Christian at all.

[ 15 : 45 ] Can you imagine that? If you are surrounded by that at the moment in your church or the people you know you will probably be feeling inferior and lonely.

family. And so you along with Timothy need to remember the appearing of Jesus the judge. It is not the present that is ultimately important.

And the Christian message is not primarily about the present at all but about his future appearing. He's coming to judge the living and the dead and that's the day that matters for you and for everyone.

And let me say that that is a very good day to be living for and looking forward to. Look at verse 8 again. Henceforth 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've loved his appearing. For those who look forward to the appearing of Jesus well that's a great day to look forward to. because on that day none of the difficulties of this present age will matter anymore.

[17:02] On that day you will no longer be troubled by the sufferings you're troubled with today because everything will have been straightened out rightly by the righteous judge.

On that day you will no longer have to fight against your own personal inadequacies and sins that are such a struggle in this world because on that day you will be made perfect by the righteous one. On that day you will no longer be troubled by guilt and shame ever again. On that day no one in the whole universe not even the most impressive looking Christian teacher will be able to look down on you or make you feel inferior because the righteous judge will have declared you and made you perfect.

Can you imagine that? Remember Jesus Christ remember his appearing as judge amazingly because of the gospel that is a day that can be a good day for you not a terrifying day. so look forward to it says Paul to Timothy remember his appearing. Second and more briefly proclaim his word.

[18:30] Verse two you could not stack up a bigger set of motivations than Paul stacks up in verse one could you? He's putting the pressure on at this point.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom preach the word.

That's what you're supposed to be doing he says. Preach the word. Why does Timothy need to be reminded to do this? He's been to theological training has he not?

Yeah of course he has. He's got loads of ministry experience has he not? Of course he has. He's a seasoned Christian worker by this point. He knows what he's supposed to be doing.

Why does he need to be reminded in these terms? Answer. Because actually it's very difficult to keep doing that. And this chapter is just full of the examples of the difficulties that are encountered by somebody who wants to keep doing that.

[19:38] The key words and ideas I think in chapter 4 are departure and a desertion. It's not a very encouraging chapter in many ways. Let me introduce these themes to you.

First, here's departure, verse 2 and 3. Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and teaching because the time is coming when people will not endure healthy teaching.

But having itching ears, they'll accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

People will depart from the truth. That's why it's hard to keep doing it. The idea here is of turning away from listening to good things and turning towards listening to garbage.

church. It's not one or the other, it's both. Away from good towards bad. Now, can I just point out to you how very difficult that is to bear if you're trying to teach the truth.

[20:50] You see, it's not that church has emptied where Timothy is in Ephesus. It's that certain teaching is no longer tolerated in church in Ephesus.

And if that's your church, you'll know how heartbreaking it is to have to endure that. Where once the truth was tolerated and welcomed and now it is no longer. Let me give you an example.

I met after a church service a number of years ago in this country a minister. I got chatting to him after the service. He preached a sermon which was, well, it was okay, it was quite good in terms of content, but it was terribly short and rushed and all that kind of thing.

And when he heard I was in ministry, he wandered up to me and he said, I'll bet you get half an hour. I said, well, sometimes I get 35 minutes.

He said, if I go a minute over 15, they start tapping their watches. Now that might not seem a big thing, but it had worn him down.

[ 22 : 00 ] and he lost heart for that work. And he had good things to say, but he could no longer endure the unwillingness to hear. You would hardly believe it possible, would you, that people actually come to church in order not to hear.

But they do. Every Sunday churches are full of people like that. don't you think it must be difficult to keep doing that work? You bet your bottom dollar it's difficult to keep doing that when they start tapping their watches at 15 minutes.

You've got to have rhino hide to be able to keep going in that. There's also, verse 14, active opposition.

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

Timothy might run into this bloke, Alexander. Again, we don't know much about this person. But let me say that there are some people who you'd expect to be on your side, because they're in church, who in the end turn out to be brutal and malicious opponents of the gospel message.

[ 23 : 24 ] Sometimes they come out when things are particularly hard. And at times of testing, people like this are there in churches. People who make it very difficult for the one who needs to proclaim the word to keep doing it.

And will make life very uncomfortable for anyone like Timothy, who might keep doing the same thing as Paul has been doing. Watch out for him, says Paul to Timothy.

You're likely to bump into him. He made it very difficult for me, and he'll probably do the same for you. Again, you wouldn't credit that, would you? That there are people in church looking like Christians who actually do all they can to resist the message going forward.

But if you've done any Christian ministry or been involved in any difficulty in your church, you will know that those people exist. Christ. We've already had the desertion, the desertion of verse 10. Well, look at verse 16, and here's a different sort of desertion. At my first defence, this is Paul appearing on trial, at my first defence, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.

[ 24 : 44 ] May it not be charged against them. His colleagues left him alone. Because it was difficult to be associated with him. At his point of greatest difficulty.

Don't you think that must have been hard to bear? I imagine, of course, that happens all the time, don't you, in this country at the moment, that good gospel workers are abandoned by those who they thought were on their side, but actually when the going gets tough, everybody runs away. It's so common for that to happen. To find yourself like Jesus on the cross, isolated, because everyone has run away. And there's a very cross like prayer there, isn't there?

Verse 16, may it not be charged against them. Echoes of the cross, isn't it? Forgive them, they don't know what they're doing. Just like Jesus, desert it, and praying for mercy for those people who have deserted him.

notice, notice, however, who didn't abandon him, verse 17, but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed.

[ 25 : 55 ] You see, the proclamation of the message is the important thing in view of the coming of the Lord. Friends, if we feel daunted by the prospect of living for Jesus in this world, if we're daunted by the prospect of what we might need to do for the gospel to advance in this world, take heart in this, the assurance of scripture that at a time of difficulty, God never deserts his people.

And the Lord Jesus who experienced such hostility from human beings in his gospel enterprise, does never desert those who in the same way experience hostility for what they are involved in doing.

And notice how that fuels Paul's enterprise. You see, he's still about the gospel thing. He's in prison. He's facing further trial. But look at verses 9 to 11. Do your best to come to me soon.

All the other boys have run away. Luke alone is with me, verse 11. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he's very useful to me, for ministry. You see, he's facing trial and he's in prison, but he's still got ministry in mind.

Isn't that amazing? He's still looking for the opportunity, even in this difficult situation, to try and get the word of God out to people. It is tremendously encouraging to see somebody living out that kind of example.

[ 27 : 22 ] I think of my previous boss in Christian ministry. He conducted a long and robust ministry of the gospel, taught the Bible, preached the gospel faithfully when there really was not that much encouragement from anybody else around.

He didn't lose heart in it. He didn't deviate from it. He was always thrilled when somebody new was there to hear the gospel. He retired a few years ago and moved to the country, to a little village with not much gospel.

Within no time at all, he and his wife were running Christianity Explored in their local village hall. half the people who came to it went to the local village church, but they never heard the gospel and never understood it.

Instead, they came to the local village hall and heard it from him. Now he's pastoring another church in his spare time. He's busier in retirement than he ever was, it seems to be, in ministry. Amazing faithfulness and energy.

So encouraging to see that, but it's just like the apostle Paul, he's just the same. Bring Mark, he's very useful in doing gospel stuff. And there's still opportunity here. Do you see that? Urgent.

[ 28 : 31 ] Remember Christ Jesus. Remember Jesus Christ. Remember his appearing and therefore proclaim the word. Our time is gone.

Three questions. Big questions in life for all of us. first, first, what will we love?

The visible world and the present age or the invisible Lord and the age to come?

What will we love and live for? What will fill our vision, our ambition, the visible world and the present age or the invisible Lord and his appearing at the end of this age?

Second question, what will we do? Proclaim the word and support that proclamation?

[ 29 : 41 ] it's the only way to a crown of righteousness in the end, the only way? Or busy ourself with stuff that will just pass away at the end?

What will we do? And third, and perhaps most importantly from this letter, who will we side with?

For that's the issue for Timothy in Ephesus. will you side with the apostle Paul Timothy? Endure the same difficulties that he's enduring?

Or will you in the end side with the much more impressive looking this age orientated preachers in Ephesus?

Who we side with, who we stand up beside in times of difficulty? That will tell us precisely what we're living for.

[ 30 : 49 ] Let's pray. Let's pray. remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as proclaimed in my gospel, for which I'm suffering, bound with chains as a criminal, but the word of God is not bound.

we thank you heavenly father for the scriptures and we thank you for this urgent reminder today of the appearing of the Lord Jesus who will judge the living and the dead.

We thank you that because of his work on the cross that is a day that can be looked forward to with joy rather than with terror. and we pray that you would make us people who have our eyes fixed not on the present age, but on the age to come.

Not on the past and the baby in the manger, but on the one who is coming to judge the living and the dead. And we pray that we would give ourselves to and support the proclamation of the gospel message, the only route to a crown of righteousness on that last day.

And we pray that you would give us courage to stand up beside those who are doing that work and not to be ashamed of them or of you, the one who endured similar hardship for the salvation of the world.

[ 32 : 37 ] Hear us we pray in Jesus name. Amen.