1 Timothy 3:14-4:16 // The Church That Saves the World

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Date: 15 June 2025

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[0:00] As you see on the screen above, today's reading can be found on page 1192 of the Pew Bibles.

! 1 Timothy 3.14-4.16. Reasons for Paul's instructions.
Although I hope to come to you soon, I'm writing to you soon, I'm writing to you with these instructions, so that if I'm delayed, you'll know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.
Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great. He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached upon among the nations, was believed on in the world, and the spirit of the faith.
The Spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.
[1:23] They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.
If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teachings that you've followed.
Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives tales. Rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.
This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. That is why we labor and strive, because we've put our hope in the living God, who is the savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.
[2:40] Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you're young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given to you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.
So be diligent in these matters. Give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely.
Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.
Thank you, Lamont, for reading that for us. And if you could keep your Bibles open on page 1192, that would be a great help, so that what matters much more than what I say is that we're hearing God speak through his word as we come to this together.
[3:58] And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful as we look at this portion of scripture together. And let's pray. Let's ask for God's help. Mighty God and gracious heavenly Father, we thank you for your Holy Spirit breathing out the words of the Bible as a fresh word to each of us today.

And we ask that you will graciously give us ears to hear, minds that can understand, and hearts willing to change and follow you. That we would be refreshed, that we would be nourished and encouraged, that we would seek joy in the Lord Jesus.

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And there will be fruit that lasts, springing up in our lives, an abundant crop that points people around us to you. For we ask these things in Jesus' name.
Amen. Well, this morning, this afternoon, holds out for us the opportunity to have lives that really count for something.
In the recent research there's been about how there's been a significant increase in the number of young adults going along to church in the UK, when they ask people what they're coming for, one thing that was mentioned was a desire for their lives to have purpose, to have meaning.
[5:24] We feel that the world is fragmented, it's unsafe, it's uncertain, and we feel lost in our lives without a purpose. Well, we come to 1 Timothy, and we see that God has a great purpose in our world today, and it is to rescue people, to bring them back to himself, fully forgiven with a fresh start, and enjoying life with him that lasts forever.

In chapter 2, we heard that that is at the heart of this letter, 1 Timothy. If you just turn back a page, in verse 3, we heard that God is a savior. Verse 4, who wants all people to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
That is the saving truth about Jesus. God is at work doing that in the world today, and in our city today. So how does God do that saving work? Well, in chapter 3, verse 15, we hear that the way people hear of the truth that will save them about Jesus is through the church.
Verse 15, we've looked at it every week in our series in 1 Timothy. Now at last, we're actually there. Chapter 3, verse 15, the church is God's household, and it is the pillar and foundation of the truth.
So I said a couple of weeks ago that the church is to be a bit like Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square, because we all know it's a huge column, and at the top is Nelson that is important for everyone to see, because of his great victory that saved England.
[7:00] And Callum was preaching last week, obviously didn't like that, so he pointed us to a Glasgow version, and here it is in George Square, a great pillar, showing us a guy that, it turned out none of you know who it is anyway.

So the illustration doesn't work, Callum, because no one knew that it was Walter Scott, but it is. So the same idea, you get the idea. So this week, I've got a new one. It's a bit like, I was thinking, we'll go Superman.
Whatever genre of Superman you watch, the Daily Planet, where Clark Kent works in Metropolis, at the top of the skyscraper is the giant globe that says the Daily Planet.
So wherever you live in Metropolis, if it were real, you would see, shining above you, the Daily Planet, and it would remind you, there I go for truth, okay? And the reason it's so high up above Metropolis, above the skyline, is because of the great building underneath that reaches up to the sky to hold it aloft.
And the big idea here is that what God wants is for his church to do that with the truth about Jesus. That all around us, people would know that truth, they would see that truth, because we as God's people, the church, by the way we conduct ourselves and the words we speak, hold on to that truth and we hold out that truth.
[8:20] And God will save the world through us. Like bookends in our passage then, we get this great offer at the end of our section today, in chapter four, verse 16.

The section is full of punchy commands from Paul to this church leader, Timothy. And verse 16, he says, of chapter four, watch your life and doctrine closely, persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.
So, Paul wrote this letter to Timothy. He's put in charge of this church in Ephesus that he planted. And he's got all these commands here at the heart of the letter that he wants Timothy to do.
We've had instructions through the letter for how the church should conduct ourselves, chapter one, men and women. The kind of people Timothy should appoint as leaders last week. It's a noble task to desire to be an elder of the church, but they're to be godly in their character.
And now he says, Timothy, this is what you are to do. And if you do it, you will save yourself and you will save your hearers. The stakes are high. God does his saving work through the local church and he does it through the work of ministry.
[9:38] The work that we're going to hear about today. And there are special things here about Timothy's role in the work of ministry. He has had an ordination of some kind into ministry that we think of as church leadership.

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So, chapter four, verse 14. Paul says to him, Paul says to him, Do not neglect your gift which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. So, like, he was ordained into this role of being the lead pastor.
But this is a crucial portion of the Bible for all of us. We all need to know what kind of Christian leaders we should follow and trust. That's vital, isn't it, in choosing a good church.
Some of you will move on this summer from Glasgow and you'll go to a new place and you'll need to look for a good church. When a church is choosing its next minister, what is the role that you're recruiting for?
What is the job? This section of the Bible is vital because we all make assessments about what we think of our ministers, don't we? And we each have to think, what do you encourage your minister to do?
[10:47] And what do you pray that they will do? What exactly is the job of a pastor? What are they really meant to be doing? Now, these verses are also crucial because we think about the work of ministry very broadly.

If you're involved in children's work or youth work or you're helping lead one of our inquirer's courses, the life course, or you're leading a small group or you lead a band or a serving team here at church, or you meet up with someone to talk about Jesus, or you're a parent, you are involved in the work of ministry.
You're in Christian leadership. And what Paul calls Timothy to do is, by extension, true for you, is relevant for you. And this is also vital because Paul clearly wants Timothy, what he intends Timothy to do and to be, he wants it to catch on.
And we see that very clearly in chapter 4, verse 11, as he tells him to set an example for the believers. And in verse 11, he says, command and teach these things to others. So the life that Timothy lives should catch on to us today and through us should catch on to others around us.
For all of us then who are engaged in the work of ministry, this is an extraordinary promise, isn't it? In chapter 4, verse 16, I think it's extraordinary that God says, chapter 4, verse 16, that that big thing he's doing in the world today, saving, he will do through you if you watch your life and your doctrine.
[12:28] So our first heading is, a good minister keeps a careful watch on his teaching. This theme runs right through the letter and it's right through the central passage.

Have a look at it in chapter 4, verses 13 and 14. Until I come, Paul says to Timothy, until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.
So this is the fundamental work of the pastor, the minister of a church. As Paul corrects false teaching in verses 1 to 5 of chapter 4, look at what he says in verse 6.
He says, point these things out to the brothers and sisters. If you point them out, you will be a good minister. That's the word for servant. You'll be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.
So whatever we've grown accustomed to expecting a church leader to do, what is the role description that God gives us for the minister?
[13:36] Well, they are to immerse the church family in the word of God in the Bible. That's the idea behind commanding Timothy to read it out publicly. This is in a culture where people wouldn't have had Bibles at home.

And so how do you immerse them in Scripture? You devote yourself to its public reading that it would fill people's minds. And then the minister is to preach and he is to teach.
They feed the sheep. And they are to be sheep themselves. Did you notice verse 6? He says, if you do this, you'll be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.
Nourished. So a good question to ask me or anyone in a ministry role where they're involved in ministry to you, is what's been nourishing you at the moment in God's word?
They should have an answer to that. And would you have an answer to that if you're involved in ministry, any kind of ministry? Could you ask yourself today, what is nourishing me in the Bible?
[14:45] Am I spiritually feeding on God's word as my daily bread so that I'm nourished and in turn I can feed others? Now there was a problem in Ephesus with false teaching.

And we saw in chapter 1, Paul instructing Timothy to stand down some false teachers. And we see more about it at the start of chapter 4. And there's a very real enemy behind it if you look at verse 1.

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The Spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. It's quite dramatic, isn't it?
A way of describing a form of the false teachers in the church. It's demonic, what they're teaching. There's a real enemy there. And this can happen not just in Ephesus then, but any time between Jesus' resurrection and his return.
Because it says in later times this will happen. We're warned of it. And the nature of the teaching is surprising. Because we might expect that demonic false teaching would be permissive.
[15:49] That it would say something like, Christians, just do whatever you want. Drink as much alcohol as you want. Take as many drugs as you want. Sleep with as many people as you want.

Spend your money on yourself. And God will still bless you. A kind of cheap grace. And we think, ah, that doesn't smell right. That sounds demonic. But the issue of false teaching that was hitting Ephesus is not teaching that was too permissive.
It's teaching that was too restrictive. Unduly restrictive. So verse 3. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.
So the danger here is teaching that goes beyond scripture to restrict how Christians should live and enjoying good gifts from God.
And that is dangerous because it fails to honor the goodness of God in all that he has made. And the solution then is the same as now.
[16:55] That the church to be healthy needs faithful church leaders. A pastor who is a teacher who does verse 6.

Command and teach these things. Point these things out to the brothers and sisters. Verse 6. In other words, part of the work of a faithful pastor is to continually be putting pegs in the ground to be saying these are the parameters of what we should believe, of the truth, so that we recognize what is false.
Verse 13. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and to teaching. So here's a key point for us today to bring it home to our church life.
When you look at our church, St. Silas, and how we operate, we are not to think, please do not think, that we focus our energies and resources and time on teaching and preaching the Bible because we happen to be Bible kind of people.
Because we are temperamentally bookie people. Or we're a particular kind of Christian, a Bible-y Christian. It's not a matter of preference or of temperament.
[18:15] It's because God tells us that this is the job of church leaders. This is what they are to do. I know that we could do a better job of it.

I know that's true. But this is the job. This is what we are to aspire to. This is the work of ministry. So we move on to our second point. A good minister keeps a close watch on his life.
Let's pick things up in verse 7 of chapter 4. Halfway through there, just towards the end, you see that he says, Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.
Now the word here for train yourself is the word, Gymnase. Where we get, yeah? Gymnasium. So this is especially helpful for us today, for any of you who work out, who go to the gym, who run, who swim, you've got weights at home, you do a fitness class, you watch Joe Wicks, you do any exercise.
Whatever it is you do, be affirmed today by the start of verse 8. You see that? The Bible says, Physical training is of some value.
[19:39] Okay? That is a good Bible verse, isn't it? To, you can make a key ring with that on, and you could put it on your gym locker key. Yeah? Or your swimming bag. Physical training is of some value.

Literally, bodily gymnasia is of some value. In other words, it is a good thing in the Christian life to look after yourself physically.
But Paul goes on to say, doesn't he, Have you got your priorities in the right order? Do you focus more on your physical training than you do on your training in godliness, in becoming more like Jesus?
Do you find it easier to be motivated to get your physical training in during a week, more times in the week, than you make time for godliness, with a systematic, disciplined plan to spend time in God's

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word and in prayer?
For Paul says, Gymnase yourself to be godly. I think of a friend who said, in light of these verses, I've worked out the area in my life where right now I most need to focus on my godliness, and every time I go swimming, I'm going to discipline myself to make time after I've swum to pray for progress in that area.
[21:06] Now why would we do that? Why would we decide that what, in our priorities, that the godliness training thing is going to be higher than the physical training thing?

Well, most of us, for most of us, what gets us to the gym is discipline, right? We do it, not because we love it, because we trust the results will be worth it.
And Paul encourages here to think about godliness in the same kind of way. Verse 8, that he says, Godliness has got value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.
So when you bring your life under the obedience of God's word, it's got promise for the present life. Hopefully, you can think of an area of your life where that's true.
That where you've, if you're a Christian here, that you've taken an area of your life and you, no matter how hard it was, you brought it under the obedience of Jesus.
[22:10] And you look back and you think, that has been good for me. It was good to be godly. Well, on top of that, of course, godliness holds promise for the life to come.

One day, Jesus is going to come back. When we grow more like him now, we prepare for ourselves a great reward in eternity, as we prepare our hearts to be more and more satisfied with the joy of being with him forever.
So the next thing Paul says along these lines about watching your life to Timothy, is he says, be an influencer in your public life.
Verse 12. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.
Whether we like it or not, all of us is influencing other people. This is why it can be so hard when we are under the influence of a Christian leader who fails to set a good example because their example really matters to us.
[23:23] And in verse 12, it invites each of us, to the extent that we are an example to others, is the example that you're setting a good one or a bad one?

So if you think of yourself in your own life, if you're a Christian here, if a younger Christian who knows you follows your example, would that be good for them?
Or would it be bad for them? Your faith in Jesus should profoundly affect the words that people hear you speak, and the life that people see you live.
Paul wants the people in Ephesus, in Timothy's church, to be able to see Timothy's life, and from his life, to learn godly speech, and to learn holy conduct, and to learn faithful love, and to learn committed faith, and sexual purity.
And all through the chapter, we get this demanding language, do we not? Did you notice that as it's been read language that's about wholeheartedness, about drivenness, about diligence?
[24:40] So if you look at verse 10, Paul says, that is why we labor and strive. Look at verse 13, until I come, devote yourself. Verse 15, be diligent in these matters.

Give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. And then verse 16, he says, watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere.
And some of us may well be thinking, if only it was a bit easier. If only it was different. If only the fruitful, productive, effective, Christian life, a life that counts, involved more relaxation.
But could we instead find ourselves spurred on by the language in this passage? Because ambition is good for us. And lots of us here today are very ambitious people.
There are areas of our life where we are driven and ambitious. It might be at work, it might be in a sport or a hobby. An area of life where we're driven. Well, focus that drive here in your Christian life, your walk with God.
[25:50] God calls us to see our Christian life as more than a hobby. Could you see it as all-consuming? As something costly, demanding that you would make it your ambition to be more godly?

And isn't this a great and important word for any of us here who've been a Christian some years now, some time now? Because it's all too easy, isn't it, to plateau in the Christian life.

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To look back on earlier years as a Christian and think, yeah, there was a lot of change back then. There was a lot that needed to be sorted out in those first few years. But now, I've kind of settled for the way I am.
And people around me, they've just got to get used to it. My character flaws, my grumpiness, my laziness, my selfishness.
There's not going to be much change anymore. Well, instead of that, let's hear the call to set up a new spiritual, personal fitness program.
[26:55] Gymnase yourself to be godly. Influence others well by your conduct and words to be more like Christ. Nourish yourself in God's Word, the Bible.

Immerse yourself in these things. But all of that will be impossible for us in our own strength. So how are we going to do it?
Well, that brings us to our third point. The good minister keeps a close watch on his Savior. Let's step back and remember that great aspiration that Paul has and shares with us, the Holy Spirit has, for his people, the church.
That by our godly lives and our good doctrine, God will save the world through us. How then does Timothy himself grow in godliness? And how does he move a church to be more godly?
Well, enticingly, Paul tells us in chapter 3, verse 16. And it's a remarkable start to this little verse, isn't it? So chapter 3, verse 16, look at what he says first.
[28:00] Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great. Isn't that amazing? Drum roll.

What is Paul going to tell us? I've been waiting for that mystery, the mystery of true godliness. And he's about to tell us. And what he writes for us next isn't a technique or a course or a new five-step program to roll out in our lives or in our church.
He gives us a hymn about Jesus. We read on. He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.
We can explore the details of this, but the big thing we see is that in every line of this confession, it's all about Jesus. So that Paul is saying to Timothy and to every church leader, make your ministry, your teaching, your preaching, all about him.
And how striking this is as you think to yourself, what do you want your church's ministry to look like? For example, what do we think we need to hear when we walk into church or when you walk into your midweek group?
[29:25] When we walk into church, we've got all kinds of things going on, haven't we? We're worried about Iran and Israel. We've got all kinds of problems in our lives.

Problems on the inside of stress and grief and shame and sickness. Problems all around us. Sometimes we're in conflict in relationships with others, or we feel upset or angry or overwhelmed. And we might come on a Sunday or to a midweek small group thinking, I really hope the teaching today is going to help me with some of this in my life.
I hope it's going to address some of this. Don't we think like that? Well, what does God say? God's plan in the midst of every season of life and whatever's going on in our lives is that we will be godly. It really matters to him. He wants to save us and save the people around us by us being godly, whatever's going on in our lives.
[30:37] And he says that a godly life, a life that is effective, fruitful, optimistic, strengthened, enduring, loving, patient, joyful, it springs from having your eyes fixed fully on the Lord Jesus Christ.

So when the public ministry of our church moves us to fill our minds with Jesus, and we open our hearts to be captured by him, God equips us through that to face whatever's going on in our lives and be godly.
Even if sometimes it's not addressing specifically the challenge we're facing, but we're so helped by having our eyes lifted from that challenge and being reminded, look at him.
Look at what God is doing in the world today through him. Look at what he's already done. The hymn has three pairs of lines, and in each pair, one line is about Jesus in our world physically, and then the other line is about Jesus spiritually or in heaven.
So each pair works together to say he's the man who is fully human, and we as humans put our faith in him and we follow him and we make him known to others, and he was fully God, raised, ascended, exalted, glorified.

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[32:08] The first pair are all about Jesus revealed, the revelation of Jesus. He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit. That is that the eternal Son of God came into our world, born in the royal line of King David, and he lived a life that reveals for us who he is, and that he was raised from the dead, vindicated by the Spirit, revealing for us that he is Lord forever.

Christ revealed. The second pair are all about the witnesses of Jesus. So it starts, he was seen by angels, the heavenly host at his birth, celebrating that he'd come.
The angels who helped him when he was tempted in the wilderness, and he had to pass the test that none of us had ever passed. The angels in the garden of Gethsemane, who strengthened him as he looked ahead to the agony of the cross.
And then wonderfully, the angels at the empty tomb, there to tell the disciples, he's not here, he's risen. And then we move from the supernatural witnesses to his human witnesses.
He was preached among the nations, as the apostles took the news out in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, that Jesus is God's saving King.
[33:40] Then the third pair are all about the reception of that news, the reception of Jesus. He was believed on in the world. So every time someone believes in Jesus, it is a miracle of God.

It's extraordinary, isn't it? The apostle Paul could go to these great cities of the ancient Roman Empire as a weak man with all those pagan temples all around, and speak about Jesus.
And people started to believe in him and follow him. And today, it's an extraordinary thing that anyone in secular Glasgow would become a follower of Jesus.
But he gets believed on in the world, the Spirit's work. And then from his worldly reception, the hymn ends with his heavenly reception.
He was taken up in glory. Just picture Jesus as he ascended into heaven, the way the angels must have been waiting for him, to applaud him, to acclaim him, to crown him, to worship him, because he would reign from then on in the throne room of heaven, so that they can celebrate him as the savior of the world.
[34:56] He is our pioneer. He's our captain. He's our inspiration. Fully manned that he can relate to us, and sympathize with us, and forgive us, and pray for us in heaven.

Fully exalted now that he can lead us, and transform us, and save us. So how do we have a life that is fruitful and effective? A life that counts in the things that really matter?
Because how do we have a ministry that saves others? Well, for every one look within, we take ten looks at him. Let's pray together.
Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you that you are a good Father, that you are a saving Father, a Father of grace.
May all that we've heard from you today shape our culture as a church. May it shape our understanding of the work of ministry. And may your spirit be at work in us.
[35:59] So centering us on the Lord Jesus, that we would be a people who feel our godliness really matters to us. And what we believe about Jesus really matters to us.

That through us you would save ourselves and others. Making the truth about Jesus known. For we ask in his name.
Amen.

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