



five Sundays, saying, "You're right, Pastor." "I will Pastor." "This is important, Pastor." Maybe you even spend your time in God's house thinking about someone that you know that you could speak to.

But what happens? You will go back to work tomorrow and those deadlines from the boss will again demand your attention. You will look at the calendar and see how full it already is. And the reality is that this important mission that we have received from Jesus will get pushed to the side once again. And we'll again offer the excuses, "I'll have another chance," or "I'll bring it up the next time." "Right now, I have other responsibilities, and those deadlines tell me that they are more important." "I've got time," you reason.

Paul knew that you would do that. So today, he isn't just given you a directive; he's also giving a deadline. In fact, sandwiched around his charge to preach the Word, Paul reminds us that there are two looming deadlines when it comes to our mission to speak of Christ's love.

In verse 6, Paul says this, "**For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.**" When Paul wrote these words to Timothy, he was imprisoned in Rome. Though he had been a prisoner there once before and had been given his freedom, he knew this time that would not happen. This time things were different. Instead of living in a rented home under house arrest, this time he was held in a dark prison cell. Instead of being able to go out into the city, this time he was in chains. Instead of being able to welcome friends and visitors, this time they did not even know where he was. For Paul, there was a deadline. He knew that he was in his final days. Death was coming. The time that Paul had to speak was coming to an end.

Paul connected this comment about his upcoming death with his charge to preach the Word for a very specific reason. To Timothy, to us, Paul was bringing this message: "Consider your life. You are not guaranteed 80 years upon this earth. You are not guaranteed tomorrow upon this earth. More importantly, that person that doesn't know about Jesus and his saving work has no guarantee on the length of his life." The deadlines that we face in sharing our Savior are very real. Death is coming.

Closely connected with that deadline of death is the deadline that Paul mentions in verse 1. There he says, "**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.**" If death were just an end to this life, there would be no urgency.

But we know that the end of life on this earth brings the day of judgment for each and every soul. That is a real deadline.

For those who don't know the saving news that Jesus died for their sins, that deadline looms dangerously. Because, if the deadline comes and they have not been reached, the results are disastrous. The results are an eternity in hell, separated from God.

Consider what is at stake here: Every time you and I pass up an opportunity to speak about Jesus' love, the reality is that we are putting someone's eternal well-being at stake, and while we say to ourselves that there is plenty of time and there will be other opportunities, that is simply not always the truth.

Thinking about those deadlines that Paul has given to us could add a lot of pressure and stress to that call that we hear so often to go and preach. It could fill us with a lot of guilt as we think about all of the opportunities we have passed up, and the eternal results our reluctance could have.

But there is something that takes that stress and pressure of those impending deadlines away; there is something that removes the guilt of missed opportunities. It is why we see no fear or desperation in Paul, even as his deadline quickly approached. Paul knew that he personally was ready and prepared. Paul knew that he was forgiven for all that he had failed to do. Through the work that Jesus Christ had done personally for him through his sacrifice on the cross, Paul knew that when the end of his earthly life came, he had an eternal crown of victory waiting for him. As Paul carried out his duty to preach the Word, he was not tallying up a list of accomplishments, or digging a hole with his many failures that would impact his eternal welfare. His reward had already been won by his Savior.

And though Paul had been given this tremendous task of sharing the Gospel with people who desperately needed to hear it or else, Paul also did not feel pressure there because he knew that ultimately God was in control. It is God who brings people to faith and he has promised that not one of his children whom he has called, elected, and saved will miss out on heaven.

Though he did not need to feel stress or pressure, he still felt urgency. He wanted to get the work done that God had graciously given to him.

As we consider the deadlines in front of us, let us take comfort in what Paul knew. You are ready and prepared. You are forgiven for your failures and reluctance and passed opportunities. Jesus Christ

died for your sins, and he is waiting to give you the crown of life when your time on this earth is over. His work is your personal assurance.

While you have been given the very urgent task of taking the Gospel to people who are up against a deadline, you can take comfort in the knowledge that God is the one who calls and gathers and enlightens people from the darkness of unbelief and sin to the light of the Gospel, but don't let that comfort take away your urgency.

Because the call is there: to reach out to those we know with the message of Jesus' love. Put it on the calendar. Make it a priority each and every day. Preach the Word. Speak of Jesus' love. Deliver the calming word of peace to those facing the pressure of a deadline.

Amen