

EFC Preaching

October 13, 2019

2 Timothy 2:4, 1 Peter 3:15

“Always Ready”

Good morning, and welcome to English Fellowship Church. My name is Jeremy, and I am one of the Pastors here. I am glad to be here with you this morning. If you'll remember, last week we finished our series in the Gospel of Mark, being challenged to respond to Jesus by faithfully proclaiming the good news of salvation and new life in Him. I mentioned that we were going to have a four week focus on living on mission with Jesus flowing out of that call. But given the events across Ecuador over the past week, this morning is going to be a bit different than planned. What we'll talk about this morning is still missions focused, but I also felt the Lord laid on my heart the need to talk with you about our hope in times of uncertainty. So that's where we're going to start this morning. You will see that there is still a missional aspect to what we'll talk about, but probably coming in an unexpected way.

Pray.

Obviously, Ecuador is going through a challenging and unsettling time. I don't know about each of you, but this has been the most political unrest that I have personally experienced. And I know that everyone goes through different degrees of emotions during such times. From significant fear, to an underlying anxiety, to increased stress, to simply a greater awareness and preparedness, these sorts of situations can be unsettling for us.

I personally haven't felt too extreme, but still, going through this has made me think about some things that I often take for granted. Without even noticing, we often find sense of security and our sense of well-being in our circumstances. But when so much gets interrupted, it makes us realize just how insecure the normal things around us are. I've never seen Supermaxi so empty, that's for sure. Hearing about drinking water systems being interrupted in Ambato makes you realize how fragile some of the systems we rely upon really are. Limitation on travel can make one feel a little helpless. I could go on, but over the past days it has struck me that so much of what we take for granted for our well-being is really fragile and uncertain.

And it was into this atmosphere and situation this past week, that I think the Lord was speaking to me through a couple of passages of Scripture that are very related. Both of these passages give us a command as to how we are to live in this world – regardless of our circumstances. And they both point us to the foundation of why we can live that way.

The command for the life of every follower of Jesus that connects these two passages is this: always be ready and actively engaged in pointing others to Jesus, regardless of your circumstances. Let me say that again: Brothers and sisters in Christ, God wants you to always be ready and actively engaged in pointing others to Jesus, regardless of your circumstances. Let me read the two verses that point us to this:

1 Peter 3:15 but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...

2 Timothy 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season...

Always be ready. Do you see that theme in these two verses? Peter says we should always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks us why we have hope. And Paul tells Timothy to proclaim the word “in season and out of season.” Let me make sure we understand why this means that we should always be ready to point people to good news of Jesus, no matter the circumstances.

First, if we look at the context of what Peter wrote, he is writing to people who are suffering because they are following Jesus and obeying God. Even in the hard times, Peter expects that Jesus’ followers must be ready – always ready – to share the reason for their hope. And, looking at what Paul wrote to Timothy, the picture of “in season” and “out of season” makes the same point. Where I grew up in New York, there are different seasons – spring, summer, fall, winter. As a result, there are some things that are “out of season” or “in season” depending on what time of year it is. Right now it is the fall in New York. Leaves are changing, the days are getting colder, and it’s apple season. And with apple season in New York comes cider and cider donuts. If you’ve never had fresh cider and cider donuts, you are missing out – let me tell you! They are in season, and if you ever get the chance.... But if you travel to New York during any other season, cider and cider donuts are not in season. There is a time for cider, and a time that’s not for cider, and it’s based on the climate and the sunshine and the time of year. But Paul tells us that it is always the time for telling others about Jesus, regardless of the “season” or the circumstances.

I think of it being “in season” to tell others of Jesus when it makes sense to do so – when things are going well in our circumstances it might be easier for people to see that God is good; when we know that someone is interested to hear about Jesus; when it “makes sense” that you would trust that God is good and that He loves you. I think of being “out of season” to tell others of Jesus when it doesn’t seem to make sense to do so – when things are not going well in our circumstances and it is harder for people to see why we believe that God is good; when we know people aren’t really interested in hearing about Jesus; when it doesn’t “make sense” that you would trust that God is good and that He loves you. The circumstances we find ourselves in are kind of like the season – good circumstances are the “in season” and difficult ones are the “out season.” We are to proclaim the Word of God regardless of the season, always ready to give a reason for our hope.

But if we are going to be able to do that – if we are to ALWAYS give a reason for our hope, regardless of the seasons and the circumstances – then that means we have to have a hope that is deeper than our circumstances. And that is what we have in Jesus. No matter what we face in life, no matter the circumstances confronting us, no matter the “season” we find ourselves in, our hope is secure and certain.

Think of it like this. Let’s say you have \$1000 hidden under your mattress in your house. One night, robbers break in and steal that \$1000. Would that be a loss? Yes, it would. But how devastating of a loss would it be? It depends on how much of your treasure and needs that \$1000 represents. If it is all you have, you will be devastated. But let’s say that you also have

\$100,000,000,000 in the bank, which the robbers cannot touch. Sure, \$1000 is a loss – but taken in perspective, it is not the worst thing that could happen, for you have so much more. This is kind of a picture of why we have hope regardless of our circumstances, only what we have in Jesus is so much more than \$100,000,000,000.

You see, you and I – and every follower of Jesus – have a hope that is certain and secure. No matter what is going on around us, we have the security of knowing that God is sovereign, His plans are perfect, and His promises are eternally sure. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus, and He will never leave you or forsake you. God withholds no good thing from His people – as a prayer I was reading earlier this week put it, “God gives you the greatest good He possibly can”. He is the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will, and He works all things for the good of you, His child. In His generosity toward you, you have been caught up in His great kingdom work in this world, and through you He is spreading the gospel of the goodness of God in Jesus Christ. All of God’s promises are “yes” to you in Christ Jesus, and He is for you. And your eternal future, forever to enjoy God more deeply than you can possibly imagine, is guaranteed and it can never be taken from you. Though you are surrounded by chaos and uncertainty, though enemies rise up and attack, though persecution and challenges come, God is God and He is yours and you are His – forever! And nothing in this world can ever change or challenge Him or any of His promises. Do we have a hope in whatever season we find ourselves in? Do we have security regardless of our circumstances? Do we have a certain future even if we suffer in different ways in this world? Yes, praise God, we do in Jesus Christ.

As the Apostle Peter put it, “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” (1 Peter 1:24-25)

And that, brothers and sisters, is why we can be always ready to give a reason for the hope we have, and always be ready to proclaim the word of God, both in season and out of season; we have an unshakeable hope, for the word of the Lord remains forever.

So tomorrow morning, when you head back into the office and your coworkers are talking about how worried they are for the future of Ecuador, you have an opportunity to tell them where unshakeable hope for the future is found; it is found in Jesus and not in any resolution or change or compromise or concession. When you are talking with your neighbor about the events, and they ask you why it is you’re as overcome with worry as everyone else, you can point them to your confidence that God is in control, and He cares for all who trust in Him. When your children confide in you that they feel insecure and uncertain, you can give them space to express their concerns and as you do, help them bring those cares to Jesus who cares for them.

And when things take a turn differently than you had hoped tomorrow or next week or next year – whether it is related to this crises or another – you can know that God has not changed, and your hope still stands. And you can be ready and engaged in pointing others to the hope that is offered to all who trust in Jesus. God alone is our true refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. God alone is the reason we can have hope in season and out of season, regardless of our circumstances, for He alone is God unchanging and unfailing. So trust in Him, preach the

word in season and out of season, and always be ready to give a reason for the hope that you have. He is, after all, the only hope of all the world, and you are His witness.