

## 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5

Twenty-first Sunday Morning After Pentecost, October 24, 2004

Three words. *As for you*. Literally there are just two words in the Greek: *But you*. I suppose I should have used two or four words. Maybe the sermon should have been titled “But You” or “But as for you.” I’m into threes these days. On Wednesday evenings we’ve been studying and continue to study the book of Jude. If you’re familiar with that short epistle immediately preceding Revelation, you know that Jude uses a lot of threes. I guess subconsciously Jude’s influence has seized me with the Trinitarian. So I’m sticking with *As for you*. Besides, that’s what’s in the printed worship guide and has been on the sign all week.

Twice in this passage, in 3:14 and 4:5, Paul told Timothy, but *as for you*. OK, I wish he had said it three times! *As for you*. It’s a phrase of contrast. Somebody else may be doing this or that, but you need to do the opposite. Someone may be going left. As for you, you go right. Someone may be lying. As for you, you tell the truth. Someone may be looking for excitement. As for you, you look for passion. What the apostle was and still is saying is that there is a need for people who are steadfast. There’s a need for people who will persevere, people who will hang in there and do that which is right and just and unselfish, even though the culture says and does the exact opposite.

The August 29 edition of the Chicago Tribune reported that there is a new trend among wealthy gentiles: throwing coming-of-age parties for 13-year-olds, patterned after the Jewish bar or bat mitzvahs, but without the religious dimension. In case someone honestly doesn’t know what a “bar mitzvah” is, it is a Jewish ceremony that initiates and recognizes a 13-year-old Jewish boy as an adult responsible for his moral and religious duties. A “bat mitzvah” is the same thing, except it is for a Jewish girl. “Bar” is the Hebrew word for “boy” and “bat” is the word for “girl.”

These coming-of-age parties are so lavish and indulgent in some cases that families take out a second mortgage to pay for them. One mother in suburban Chicago spent \$40,000.00 for her daughter’s party, even renting, ironically or dare I say “hypocritically,” a synagogue for the occasion, despite the fact that she’s Roman Catholic. Go figure. The mother said it was worth it, as her daughter now has so many more friends. Does that sound like Firstfruits living and giving? Doesn’t sound like living and giving at all. It sounds like holding back on the precious gift of life and the willingness to give it. Talk about “widening your tent!” Doesn’t sound like much hospitality, warmth, and openness, does it?

One rabbi in Chicago termed these coming of age parties a dangerous trend: “It communicates selfishness, self-centeredness, self-absorption instead of obligation. It’s the worship of the child, instead of the child’s worship of God.” He goes on to say that the best bar or bat mitzvah is one in which the child and family spend a year or more working on a service project to benefit humanity, such as shopping for a housebound elderly person or working at a shelter for the homeless.<sup>1</sup> Now that sounds like Firstfruits living and giving, don’t you think? It sure sounds like living and giving that doesn’t hold anything back. That really is a widening of the tent with hospitality, warmth, and openness.

As for you, don’t do things that are selfish, self-centered, self-absorbed. Do things that obligate you to humanity’s need. As for you, don’t worship your children, but lead them to worship the God who brought them into existence and lead them to give instead of constantly being on the receiving end. That may require you and me to stop giving them so much. It certainly will require us to be more observant.

Timothy had observed Paul’s life and more often than not, noticed that Paul, even in the midst of great difficulty, namely persecution and suffering for the Faith, had maintained a Godly approach to life that was anything but self-absorbed. Paul’s life was one of constantly giving, constantly worshipping God and not himself. And Paul knew that Timothy had made those observations.

That’s why the aging apostle, whose days were numbered – it was just a matter of time before he would be martyred in Rome – exhorted Timothy to continue in what he had learned from role models in

the Faith and from the scriptures in contrast to those who deceived others and allowed themselves to be deceived. As for you, don't be like those con artists for they, themselves, are being conned.

As for you. Those three words remind us there is a need for the real thing today. The real thing wasn't easy to come by in Paul and Timothy's day and it certainly isn't easy to come by in our day. Perhaps there are too many wicked people out there. Certainly there are too many imposters, who are going from bad to worse. All of us get caught in the trap from time to time of substituting the real for the unreal.

Some may call it a tempering of the Jesus message. There seems to be a desire among so many believers to make the yoke easier and the burden lighter than Jesus had in mind. You know it's true and so do I. Those parts of the Gospel, the ones that challenge our conventional way of thinking and living as encouraged by the culture, are sometimes neatly tucked away so we won't see them and be offended by them or run the risk of offending others and thus cut down on the number of people who might attend our Bible studies and worship services. There is a lack of seriousness when it comes to this Faith stuff.

David Brooks, a columnist for The New York Times, upholds this. He says that most Americans no longer take religious doctrines seriously. We assume religious differences are temporary, that denominational barriers will fade away, and we will all be united in God's embrace. To fill the pews, pastors emphasize the upbeat and the encouraging and deemphasize the downbeat and the discouraging, sometimes even suggesting there isn't a judgment of God.<sup>2</sup> And I'm sorry to say there've been times when I've been one of those pastors. I'm ashamed of that.

Brooks goes on to say that in seeker-sensitive churches, "the technology is cutting-edge, the music is modern, the language is therapeutic, and the dress is casual." Charles Colson, in an article in last April's Christianity Today notes, "If Brooks is right, then it is a devastating indictment of the church."<sup>3</sup> I would add. It's a devastating indictment of pastors.

**But you.** Two words. Powerful two words. **As for you.** Three words. Three words that speak loudly. **But as for you.** Four words. Four words that drive it home. As for you, don't be afraid to use the scriptures to teach, to reprove, to correct, and to train others. As for you, don't be afraid to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ regardless as to what the culture says is acceptable. As for you, don't be afraid to convince and encourage. As for you, don't be afraid to be clear-headed, to face suffering for the sake of the gospel, and to live it out in a world that needs the Jesus.

As for you, don't be afraid to be on the cutting-edge, don't be afraid to use music that is modern, don't be afraid to offer some biblical therapy, and don't be afraid to dress causally. At the very same time, as for you, don't afraid to not be on the cutting-edge, don't be afraid to use traditional music, don't be afraid to preach about sin and judgment, and don't be afraid to, every once in a while, deck yourself out for God by putting on a coat and tie, a nice dress. Go ahead preacher. As for you, put on a robe and the vestments every now and then. As for you, don't cast aside the real thing, for in doing so, you become an imposter, one who is a deceiver and one who is deceived. For in casting the real thing aside, you cast aside the truth and casting aside truth is nothing more than casting aside Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected. And none of us can afford to do that because life is too short and too valuable.

Christopher Reeve knew that. He knew that life was too short and too valuable. He died earlier this month from heart failure. He was 52 years old. A wonderful actor who entertained us as "Superman," Reeve contemplated suicide in the early days after a horse-riding accident in 1995 that left him paralyzed from the neck down. He realized he would never walk again. Friends and casual observers, however, noted that Reeve soared higher than Superman had ever soared. He raised more than \$40 million for a foundation focused on spinal cord research. He was a great guy, but he wasn't a saint either. He could be brash, even cocky at times. He could even be an absolute pain.

Now, some folks would feel sorry for themselves over such a predicament. As for Reeve, he wasn't the kind of fellow to shed tears or wallow around in self-pity. He knew time was valuable. While in Israel last year, he spent a hard day touring hospitals, visiting children and granting interviews, and

then attending a dinner party. After a grueling day, he met with a congressman who happened to be in Jerusalem, staying at the same hotel, who had requested a conversation with him around 9:30 that evening. Christopher Reeve knew that the average lifespan of a ventilated quadriplegic was just seven years. He didn't waste a moment.<sup>4</sup> And the moment lasted nine years – two beyond the average lifespan.

As you for, don't waste a moment. Life really is short. Christopher Reeve knew that. So did the Apostle Paul and the young pastor, Timothy. Truth be known, we know that too, even if we are afraid to acknowledge it. There are people in our world, our nation, even our town who are living a lie. Some of them are wicked people. Some are imposters. Some are deceivers and are deceived themselves. Perhaps some of you here in this worship room are among them. As for you, your life can be radically changed this very moment through Jesus Christ.

Perhaps some of you aren't among that assortment of imposters. As for you, don't waste a moment living for Jesus Christ. Don't waste a moment making a difference for Jesus Christ wherever you are. Carry out your ministry, which really is His ministry, fully everyday. And like Paul and Timothy and a whole bunch of others, you'll make it from this life to the next. As for you? Well, it's really up to you, isn't it?

**Sermon by Dr. Jimmy Gentry, Pastor  
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**All scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are from The New Revised Standard Version, 1989.**

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<sup>1</sup> As reported in the Christian Century 121 (September 21, 2004) 19, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Colson, "Evangelical Drift" Christianity Today (April 2004), posted on ChristianityToday.com (March 29, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Dirk Johnson, "A Job For Superman," Newsweek (October 25, 2004), p. 50.