

No Alternative! **1 Timothy 4**

[Dr. Michael Milton](#)

President
Reformed Theological Seminary
Charlotte, N.C.

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A Crisis or a Test?

The picture: Tiger Woods clearly with a bad lie in the rough. The legendary golfer gazes down through the thicket of weeds. And we are drawn to the words: "A crisis" or "A test"? Those were the words that one ad agency used to convey its call to courageous confrontation of the times we are in. No other words were needed. We know what they were talking about.

Last year one analyst predicted, as the Dow soared at 12,000, that it would eventually climb to 18,000. Now, a year later powerful companies like Microsoft are laying off workers and once powerful Bank of America stock is around \$5.00. I know. I own it! We live in one of those *times*. But in a way every generation has *times*. It may be the Great Depression or World War II or Vietnam. However, each generation seems to face *times* of crises: of the economy, or of war, or of civil unrest.

There is a Biblical word for *times*. It is the word *kairos*. *Kairos* is a good word to describe the times, or a particular season within time. Paul wrote to Timothy about a season, a *husteros kairos*, a later, or latter season, which would contain not only threats but also a call for Timothy to take his stand. I believe that this Scripture speaks powerfully to our lives today, to our *kairos*. We see Timothy in the rough: with a young congregation, a movement of the Gospel in the first century, facing a really bad lie. Paul is writing the words over the picture of Timothy in the rough. A crisis? or A test? This is God's Word to you and me. Here is the inerrant and infallible Word of the Living God:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4:1-11

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever. Isaiah 40:8

Let us pray: Father, into our *kairos*, come with Your Spirit and shape our hearts and minds with Your Word, so that we may worship You and fulfill Your calling in our lives in these times. In Jesus' name, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

Introduction to the Sermon

One of my favorite Christmas presents this year came from my wife. After reading a positive review of the book in the Wall Street Journal she bought the book, *There is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters*. I believe we need to remember this world figure in the days in which we are living. Indeed, the world needs another Iron Lady, and maybe an Iron Man too! Who can forget the bold Lioness of Britain, who with President Ronald Reagan faced off with the Communist world and won?

Baroness Margaret Thatcher is unveiled in this fresh new biography in her rise from English middle class obscurity to the highest levels of world opinion. The book tells of how she took on Socialism in Great Britain, deregulated industry after industry, and opened up the Free Markets in a way that had not been seen since before WWII. But one of her greatest tests was not with the Labor Party or the Unions. It was with an Argentine dictator who invaded a little community of islands off the South American coast called the Falklands. These sturdy British subjects lived peaceable farming lives. It was often argued that there were more sheep than people. In fact there were 1,820 British subjects and 600,000 sheep! But for Margaret Thatcher an "Argentine invasion had taken place and...the lawful British Government of the islands had been usurped."

She ordered a fleet of Navy and Royal Marines to retake her Majesty's property. Voices were heard against this both within the House of Parliament and in America. The thinking was, "It is only a few people. Why bother?" But as Margaret Thatcher said when some asked her to turn back the fleet:

Unthinkable...I cannot possibly give it up at this point, one simply doesn't trust burglars who have tried one to steal your property! No...absolutely not, the fleet must steam on! (page 172)

And the rest is history. The Argentineans were repelled, the Union Jack was re-hoisted, the people protected and the enemy was dealt a decisive and overwhelming defeat. Today the peaceful island community farms and enjoys tourism. And the sheep are even more prosperous.

Through all of this one thing became clear: Britain was back! Because for Margaret Thatcher "there could be NO ALTERNATIVE."

I want to say that in our time we need Christians who will stand and say, "THERE CAN BE NO ALTERNATIVE!" King Jesus' world must be reclaimed. Satan's demonic hold on human beings and nations must be broken, broken by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now more than ever we must continue her vision, even expand that vision to see "the world as our parish" and to leverage everything we have, our experience, our faculty, our staff, indeed all of our resources, to reach the world for Jesus Christ. We must see everything we do as preparation for leading in the battle: a battle for the minds and souls of men and women, boys and girls, a battle that is fought in the strength of our Captain Jesus Christ.

Indeed, as I read 1 Timothy chapter four, I affirm, "There can be no alternative!"

There are four reasons that I see for such an affirmation in this text:

- 1. We must pray and support this vision now more than ever *because the times demand it.***

We read that in "later times" *husteros kairos*, there would be a great time of a crisis: in which God Himself says, through Paul, that Timothy would face apostasy (v. 1), demon devised doctrines that put people back into bondage and corrupt the free offer of grace (forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence as if that would produce holiness before God). And Paul doesn't say, "Well, the times will be hard, so just conserve. Just fortify yourself until the storm is past." No. Paul calls on Pastor Timothy to confront the crises. There can be no alternative.

Imagine with me a US Airways management team meeting in early January. And someone might have said, "If we cut pilot training just a bit, not much, but just a bit, then we can really save some big bucks." But who would think of making that proposal after the well-trained pilot glided a US Airways jetliner, with 155 people on board, over the Washington Bridge and landed it perfectly in the middle of the Hudson River? No one! They would have said, "Are

you kidding? Training is what caused that pilot to save those souls entrusted to him! Cut training? That is how we are realizing the mission!”

Brothers and sisters, the training of Gospel ministers and teachers, as Paul was teaching Timothy, is not an ancillary function of the Church. Jesus commanded us to pray for workers for the Harvest. Your classes, your studies are His training ground for His pastors and missionaries, Bible teachers and leaders who will be entrusted with the eternal souls of human beings. I believe that this is a call for all of us to see that now more than ever we must focus on our vision for digging deeply into God’s Word. In a good economy or bad economy, in war or in peace, governed by Democrats or Republicans, we have no alternative but to boldly move this vision forward *because the times demand it*.

2. We must pray and support this vision now more than ever *because God’s servants require it*.

Paul says in verse 6:

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

We read not only about faith and doctrine but also about the proclamation as well as the teaching of the Word of God. We read about the public reading of Scripture in worship. If you have ever wondered about the Biblical basis for our strong classical curriculum, you need look no further than this passage.

The training of ministers and leaders of the Gospel is central to the building up of the Body of Christ. We know that from Ephesians 4 that pastors are given to the Church for the building up of the Body of Christ. This passage teaches that pastors must be trained in faith and doctrine. Paul was the faculty member encouraging this young man, if you will. This was Paul’s way. He would say in 2 Timothy 2:2 that Timothy should not only learn from Paul but also teach others who would be able to teach others. God’s servants require training, grounding, mentoring so that they may be good soldiers. They are being called upon to face the challenges of the day: immorality, oppressiveness of governments that harass the people of God, and an open door into Latin America, Africa, India, and China. There can be no alternative for the work at hand.

I sometimes hear about questionnaires being sent out to pastors with the question, “Did seminary prepare you for the ministry?” Oftentimes pastors “No.” Sometimes that is because they went to a liberal seminary or an inadequate conservative seminary. Now we know we cannot do everything that a pastor needs to fulfill his ministry. Some things are going to come from just going to the first session or deacons’ meeting! Or finding the right words to comfort a grieving widow. Or seeking to handle a couple whose marriage is falling apart. Like a medical doctor, much of what we learn is learned in residency or in internships. I am happy to say that we do a lot of that and try to facilitate our pastors in *residency* and in their *internships* under seasoned pastors and elders in real life congregations.

But as Dr. Tim Keller, senior pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, put it to me when he came to Charlotte last year, “ just because a physician goes through residency should he not have medical school?” He was saying that medical school gave the doctor the anatomy of this subject, but his residency put legs on that knowledge. In a real way that is what we are doing at RTS. We are teaching the doctrines of the inerrant and infallible Word of God. We are teaching the Gospel of grace. We are tracing the lines of God’s sovereign rule and reign in church history. We are teaching the basics of preaching the Word, of leading in worship, of the faith that is passed on from one generation to another.

We do not allow surgeons to operate on us who can’t tell a liver from a kidney. We don’t need ministers preaching to us who don’t know the difference between Justification and Sanctification. We need physicians of the soul, now more than ever, who can rightly divide the Word of truth. There can be no alternative.

3. We must pray and support this vision now more than ever *because God’s glory deserves it.*

And so we read:

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe (1 Timothy 4:9, 10).

That “Living God” is Jesus Christ Himself, the Savior of all people, the One who is sufficient to save a thousand worlds and who is efficacious to save His own from out of this world. He is the focus of Timothy’s ministry. The later times had come. False teachers were going about teaching errors that blurred the beauty of the Gospel of God’s grace and diminished the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross. This could not be. There could be no alternative. Timothy would have to stand up: because God’s glory required it.

A student at RTS Charlotte told me about a trip he made across the United States. On his travels he stopped in Salt Lake City. He said that it was beautiful. He toured the Mormon Temple. As a young lady gave him a tour and began to teach her beliefs, he was so disturbed by the false teaching that he ran to the restroom to weep. He said that he felt that the teaching was an affront to the glory of God and the Gospel of Jesus. He said that he felt God was calling him to plant a church in Utah. We have had others who have and who are there now laboring in the midst of that beautiful but spiritually blighted country to shine the Gospel to human beings in need. In his heart there could be no alternative.

Those who labor in preaching and teaching to prepare these men and women to become pastors, missionaries and Bible teachers must not retreat in this time of crisis.

4. We must pray and support this vision now more than ever *because God’s people must have it.*

Paul goes on to show that Timothy must not be deterred by his youth. He must go on, but with what? He must continue to be an example to the flock. He must continue with the public reading of the Scriptures, with exhortation and teaching, with remembering how God had worked in his own life. He had to practice the things he had learned. And why?

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (v. 16).

Friends, the people in our land are in desperate need of God's truth. They need the reading and teaching and preaching of God's Word. Jesus said that you shall know the truth and it shall set you free. The more truth you get, the more freedom you have. The greatest threat to people is not a lack of money in their 401Ks but a lack of truth in their minds and a lack of love in their hearts. We preach the grace of Jesus Christ, the truth of His Word, which saves people from sin and hell. In doing so we save ourselves, says Paul.

Conclusion

So I am saying, "Now more than ever. There is no alternative." This vision and mission must go forward. You must prepare yourself for your Ephesus. You must heed the call of God to teach and preach with all of your heart and all of your consecrated life.

We must do this because we have seen that:

- The times demand it
- God's servants require it
- God's glory deserves it
- God's people must have it

I have recently returned from teaching on church planting to Mexican pastors and preaching in a local church. This movement is being led by Pastor Andres Garza, an RTS alumnus, who is heading up an MTW team to plant seminaries and churches. One church in Monterrey ministers to Indians in the area who have no last name. They only have nicknames. They are a people without a history. They were outcasts. But now they have a new name and a new identity: Christian.

Our partners are planting churches to reach the professional classes of Monterrey. They are training pastors to become professors. They are reaching out to street children. They are reaching out to students. They are being poured out like drink offerings. They are giving their lives away to generations they will never see in order to bring the Gospel to that great city. One day Andres and I stood at a pinnacle above the city. As we looked out he and I could see a vast urban development going for hundreds of miles in between the Sierra Madras mountains. I watched as Andreas looked and I thought of Jesus looking out over Jerusalem and weeping over the city. I asked Andres about what led him to this. He said that he had been at the highest levels of leadership in the city as a city planner for three mayors. But he gave it all up to leave and go to RTS. His family and friends thought he was crazy. He told

them that God had called him to do a different kind of city planning: *the Kingdom of God had to come to Monterrey*. He said, in so many words, “*There can be no alternative.*”

That is what Paul teaches Timothy. That is what God is calling us to do. I believe the Gospel call to us today is, “Good times or bad times. This vision goes forward. Christ is preached. His Word is taught.”

This is our vision. This is our time. There can be no alternative.

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