

Sermon Text  
2 Timothy 4:1-8

### Do Your Ears Itch?

What makes the WELS unique? You could answer my question in several appropriate ways. Maybe you would say we have great respect for Martin Luther and the biblical teachings in his catechism. Maybe you would say that a worship service from one WELS church to another is very similar. Or maybe you would say that we have the best potlucks of any Christian denomination. I bet you could mention many other characteristics of the WELS that make us unique from other churches. Yet, I think there is one important truth about the WELS that sets us apart from many other church bodies: we are committed to preaching and teaching both law and gospel. While some churches shy away from talking about sin, we proclaim that all people are sinful and deserve to be punished eternally, but that Jesus Christ died to rescue us from sin – the sweet gospel message found in the Holy Bible.

God comforts us every time He speaks to us in His Word – a message about the Lord’s mercy, love, and grace. Isn’t it a joy to sit in the pews on Sunday and hear about how Jesus has redeemed you? Don’t we long for the crown of righteousness that Jesus promises? Aren’t we all looking forward to the great and glorious day when Jesus will give us new life? That’s all great!

But what happens when you hear your pastor tell you something that you don’t like? Something that makes you uncomfortable, upsets you, or exposes you? Paul warns about the temptation that all sinners face when preachers proclaim things they don’t want to hear:

**“The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”** (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

Brothers and sisters, the truth is that we are living in that time. It is an age when people do not put up with the correct teachings of Scripture. A time when people handpick teachers who will only say what their itching ears want to hear.

So, I suppose the question each of you must answer today is, “Do your ears itch?”

When I read verses 3-4, I can’t think of a more accurate description of what our American culture is like. Whenever someone says something that people don’t like, what’s the response? Cancel them! Block them on Facebook. Report their content on YouTube. Suspend their Twitter account. Americans are so good at turning away from things they don’t like or agree with. Then, their next step is to find and follow some other group that supports whatever they believe.

Now apply that to Christianity. What happens when pastors preach a sermon declaring that God has a standard for how society is to live? Like what a healthy marriage is? Or how families should function? Or how we treat others in the community? Sadly, sinners refuse to accept God’s will. To make things worse, they turn aside to myths – any false doctrine. If a pastor will not preach whatever flatters their egos, gives them credit, and satisfies their evil desires and lusts, they shut their ears. Instead, they scratch their itching ears by listening to those who tell them, “It’s okay to disrespect your authorities. It’s okay to love whomever you want to love. Your opinion matters most.” A sad, sin-stained reality is that some Christians will wander away from a church having sound doctrine and flee to another – where they make the rules, not God.

But that would never happen with you, right?

I know my own sinful nature. Deep down, I admit that God says things in his Word that I don't like. For example, God expects me to put Him and everyone else first. Or when He commands that I forgive my friend, even after he's burned me so many times. Or when he says that should be patient with that coworker who always seems to get on my nerves.

Sometimes, I picture our sinful nature as a little child who doesn't want to listen to his parents. He knows his mom is scolding him so he plugs his ears out of disrespect and defiance. Have you ever experienced that? Perhaps he even gives you some lip: "I'm not listening." We treat God like that, don't we? We plug our ears. We look away in defiance. We say, "I'm not listening" when he rebukes our ways of living.

Do your ears ever itch to hear something else? Perhaps less convicting? Less demanding? More accepting? More understanding?

As pastors, it's never easy to tell people what they don't want to hear. I'd much rather write a sermon about all the warm fuzzies of the gospel. Why? Because sinners don't want to hear about how they are sinful; they definitely don't like when someone rebukes them; and they resist correction.

This is why Paul urges Timothy to fulfill all the duties of his ministry, not just the pleasant ones. It's why Paul warned him to prepare for the challenges ahead. He knew that great patience and careful instruction were truly needed in this great task. God gives this same charge to all men whom he calls to be shepherds of his flock.

**Preach the Word.** Paul's message to Timothy may be summarized in three short words: preach the Word.

Earlier I asked what makes the WELS unique. Another unique truth about the WELS is our dedication to preaching the gospel. In fact, at our Seminary, there are three Greek words right above the chapel doors which translate to: preach the gospel. You see, we understand from Scripture that it is a great responsibility to preach God's Word regularly and faithfully to his people.

That is why the WELS objectively has one of the most rigorous trainings of pastors out of any Christian denomination. While other religious organizations ordain pastors after only a few months of online training, if that, we send our pastors out into churches with a Master of Divinity degree! We want to make sure that, as Paul encouraged Timothy, our pastors are **prepared in season and out of season; to correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.** (2 Tim. 4:2) After eight years of studying God's Word and learning from former pastors how to be pastors, each spiritual shepherd is ready at all times, whether convenient or inconvenient, to share the message.

Now, please understand that I'm not telling you this to toot my own horn as a current pastor. However, I want you to ponder for a moment what a blessing it is to have a pastor like Pastor Jenkins. Someone who has been thoroughly instructed, who has resolved to preach the truth, and who cares deeply about all of you.

So, what can you, as his flock, do to support your pastor? Several things. Encourage him in his ministry. Provide for all his needs. Pray for him. I've only known Pastor Jenkins for about a year now, but I know that he is preaching the Word. My prayer for you is that you listen carefully and respond faithfully.

Where will you find the strength and determination to do this? It's simple – God's Word. That wonderful Word tells you about the love of Jesus and assures you that you are righteous in God's sight through faith in Christ. As you hear His Word, God promises to work faith in your hearts. As you put your hope in Jesus, you will have the same mindset as Paul, who longed for Christ's appearing. When Christ returns, He will give you the crown of righteousness. Then you will enjoy a new and perfect life in heavenly glory. In the meantime, fight the good fight! Keep the faith! Amen.