



Itchy and Scratchy 2 Tim 4:1-5

1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and because he is coming to rule as King, I solemnly urge you 2 to preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), to convince, reproach, and encourage, as you teach with all patience. 3 The time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine, but will follow their own desires and will collect for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear. 4 They will turn away from listening to the truth and give their attention to legends. 5 But you must keep control of yourself in all circumstances; endure suffering, do the work of a preacher of the Good News, and perform your whole duty as a servant of God.

A momentous television milestone (or is it millstone?) this week. The Simpsons are 20 years old – which is remarkable as none of them has aged a day! Now I know Homer, Marge and Bart may not be compulsory viewing for most of you – I don't suppose it is for me either but adults and children like it – children for the slapstick and adults for the quite sophisticated humour for a cartoon series. Here are a few thoughts of Homer Simpson (catchword “d-oh!”)

(reading a computer manual) “To start, press any key. Hey, where's the Any key?”
“The three little sentences that will get you through life. 1. Cover for me. 2. Oh, good idea Boss. 3. It was like that when I came here.”
“English?? Who needs that. I'm never going to England?”
“Homer the plant called in and said that if you don't show up today, don't bother going in on Monday” “Whoh ho – a four day weekend!”

What made the Simpsons relevant to what I have to say tonight is that it's a ridiculously perverse programme that tends to underline all those strange things we think of as normal in modern society but which don't actually make sense when we think about them.

Two of the characters in The Simpsons are a Tom and Jerry- like characters called Itchy and Scratchy. Unlike Tom who usually loses to Jerry but survives, the cat called Scratchy inevitably is killed by the violence meted out to him by Itchy, which of course happens in real life when for example somebody drops an anvil on your head!

But reading the verse *For the time will come when men 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*, I immediately thought of Itchy and Scratchy versus Tom and Jerry. Tom and Jerry is perverse because Jerry always gets up gain, but Scratchy dies like in real life – well, until the next episode! We live in a world of Tom and Jerry religion where people think that sin is OK because we seem to escape the consequences – or other people do. So we think it's OK to lower our standards and think that a holy God will accept any old nonsense.

But Paul knew that there were those already going around the churches teaching people to either be religious, or teaching that in Christ sin doesn't matter. Both are untrue but the itchy ears of many saw the allure of easy morals whilst others saw the easiness of religiosity. Both are an abomination to God and not according to the Word of God. I could be more precise about the myths Paul refers to in the verse: They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But the truth is take your pick. Most of the anti-Christian myths of the 21st Century are just new re-hashes of the same old rubbish that's been going around for 20 centuries. They are like dodgy double glazing firms. When they are discredited, they just change the name and start gain.

Last Sunday we saw how all Scripture is God-breathed and *is useful for teaching, rebuking,*

correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Now we see Paul changing Timothy to Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. We are going to explore that phrase when I next get to preach in the morning but for now we need to understand as people who are more mature spiritually that we must continue to cling to the word of God rather than allow our ears to get itchy with the pressure the world gives to go soft with sin, or to become too legalistic in our faith.

And this table stand as that reminder who Jesus is, what He has done and also that it is “until He comes. Paul’s charge to Timothy was 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. Whatever the pains and pressures of this world – we are all heading for an end – not doomsday as the environmentalists might say, but that time when Jesus IS going to return.

It’s something we talk about so little these days. That’s because a generation ago there were too many itchy ears to the latest theories which were thoroughly discredited. The answer to bad truth isn’t no truth, but the truth that comes from God.

And one of those truths is that we have been given this aide-mémoire until He comes. But it is more than an aide mémoire – it’s the Lord’s table and we meet with Him, remember what our faith is all about so that we remain firmly grounded in our faith when we truly do meet with Him.

So as we come to take the bread and wine, let’s encourage ourselves with the truths of God-breathed scripture afresh and meet Jesus around His table.

MRBC Felixstowe 17/1/10
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