

Sunday 29th March 2020 10 am

'Being useful to God'

Welcome to all

Opening Scripture

Scripture (page)

Prayer

Reading Matthew 25:14-30 (page 994)

Reading 2 Tim 2:19-21 (page 1196)

Ephesians 2:1-10

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph 2:10 NIV)

Sermon title 'Being useful to God'

See service sheet for the same date

Listen to the sermon on the above passage from the website www.knbc.org

Reflective prayer what does this mean for me Lord.....

Audio file 20_03_29_2tim2_19_21.mp3

Closing Prayer:

Close -----

Exordium

Good morning brothers, sisters and friends of Kings Norton Baptist Church Who would have thought we would be doing this. It's new territory for us all - and Churches are approaching this in a number of different ways.

We need to keep ourselves encouraged, and to continue to be strengthened in our faith and walk with the Lord. And to work out our faith in practical terms as best we can in our new circumstances. It is also crucial that we find opportunities to be light bearers in our dark world with so many people fearful and confused, a little difficult when we are kept at home, but thank God for the communication opportunities and other positive aspects of our modern technology. *For me it has helped me look at my time and to pray more*

Over the last six months we have in our Sunday morning sermon series looked at those Jesus met to see what we can learn from them. We have also have been going through the pastoral epistles 1 Tim and now 2 Tim.

Here Paul is telling Timothy how to strengthen Christians so that they, - and we - can live a life in a way that increasingly glorifies the Lord. He bought us so that we might honour Him in our inner being and also as we engage with those around.

Please turn with me to 2 Tim 2:19-21 it is on page 1196 pause

19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. 21 If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

Pray

The sermon title is 'Being useful to God'

While the sovereign God who rules this world uses all for his eternal purpose, it is only Christians who become willing servants pleasing and useful to him. I don't have time to expand on this this morning, except to illustrate by pointing you to Onesimus.

Do you remember him?, the runaway slave? He was useless in his sinful rebellion, but that changed once he came under the sound of the gospel. He was transformed, and once remade in the image of Christ he returned to the house as a willing and obedient servant. He became useful... which is what his name means.

20 In a large house

Paul is talking to Christians here; so the **house** I suggest speaks of the church. Paul uses that picture elsewhere, describing the church, the people, as a building.

It is a **'large' house** or a **'great' house**, the word in the original is 'megas' so we are talking about a 'mega' house. So a place fit for an important master, is not the head of the house, the church, our great king?

In a small house with just a couple of rooms probably sparsely furnished there would be just enough utensils to go round, and used together.

Not so here, in a large house there are many **articles** and we are told **not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay**; articles of different types, in the main dining hall is the best silver and gold goblets etc., while downstairs in kitchens and servant's quarters would be the wood and clay, the earthenware vessels. What a contrast. Two groups, - nothing in the middle.

- A while back at a youth meeting someone didn't do too well in a competition and at the end they were called up to receive... yes you guessed it... the wooden spoon. Not a very nice experience. I bet they wished it was gold.

I wonder if this is where that saying originated from?

How do we interpret this passage? We have already established that this illustration is about the church. Just as Timothy was leading the church there at Ephesus. This is the obvious interpretation.

This is not drawing a comparison between born again believers and those who are not, the men and women of faith compared to those who have yet to bow the knee, No, here we are talking about Christians.

So in the church, this large house, that spreads across the world and through time, there are those who are silver and gold - and those who are wood and clay. Yes, two groups are mentioned - Some are for **noble purposes** the master's use, *and he delights in using them*, some are for **ignoble** purposes, for basic use.

So when the master comes to his house, should he not have the best furniture cutlery and crockery? Of course!

Those are the **vessels of gold and of silver**; and these have been described as men and women comparable to gold and silver for their worth and value, and preciousness in the sight of Christ, who sees them as his jewels, his

treasure; and for their excellency and usefulness in the church, for their brightness and purity, both of doctrine and of life; and for their solidity and faithfulness:

but then there are **also** articles of **wood, and of earth**: there are others who are of little value, lacking in godly character, can't be entrusted with anything, unfaithful and unavailable, lacking in the graces, not spiritually minded, easily lead, worldly, whose mind is on earthly things, like dry wood or clay.

This sounds strong stuff, Paul said the same to the church in Corinth some were spiritually minded— while others were worldly. **"No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval."** 1Co 11:19

So amongst Christians there are differences in how the Master sees us - and uses us.

This brings us to an issue we need to briefly clear out of the way.

You may rightly say *"it is all by grace"* i.o.w *"it's a level playing field"*.

Let me remind you as a Christian you are in a wonderfully blessed state for God's grace has been showered upon you. CROSS. It is a free gift, your sins have been removed and the bountiful Grace of God given. It is all of Him.

That is justification or salvation, a work completed by Christ on the cross.

However, what you then do with that is up to you. The father gives you the Spirit of His Son that you might be like him, but how much you are - depends on you. This is sanctification and a co-operation between you and Christ's Spirit within you.

And this passage clearly emphasizes that.

Here's another wrong understanding that can send us off track

Please don't think that becoming a Christian is for your own satisfaction and enjoyment. There is enough of that thinking in the world around.

That is where so many Christians go wrong and remain **wood and clay** instead of **silver and gold**.

A Christian is remade so as to be useful to the master. That is why God does his work of transformation to make us useful to him.

But here is the great irony; the God who made you, and died for you, and remade you in his image, is the God who does wish for you to be satisfied and fulfilled in your new life with Him. But this is to be found only by living as we are to now be - which is in His service. And the service of others.

As Jesus said “**He who works for the honour of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.**” Joh 7:18

✚ That is the paradox: self-centred Christians are miserable - serving Christians are happy.

So to return to our passage we as Christians are told to ²¹ **cleanse ourselves from the ignoble purposes, so as to become an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.**

Do you wish to be useful to the Master? Do you wish to be like gold?

You can be. You can be - and you should be!

Ever been to the jewelry quarter with some piece of jewelry you have been given only to find it is a base metal, and not gold at all.

You walk away disappointed, you dream of changing it, you sit down and pull out the phone and look up ‘Alchemy’, - and this is what you read:

The Alchemist is the predecessor of our modern chemist. Alchemy is the practice of changing one substance into another often employing philosophical or occultic means. While practiced widely in the middle east it is said to have arisen in the ancient Persian Empire.

They are best-known for the changing of common metals into gold. Lead (atomic number 82) and gold (atomic number 79) are defined as elements by the number of protons they possess. Changing the element requires changing the atomic (proton) number. The number of protons cannot be altered by any chemical means.

There you have it - how could lead or any other metal become gold, no way!

But this passage says you can - we can change from one to the other.. You can change from **wood and clay** or today it's the stamped out stainless steel, for common use, to being a vessel of **silver** or **gold** for the Master's use.

Making something of low value or no value, into something of high value.

- However, - this article goes on - physics may be used to add or remove protons and thereby change one element into another. Because lead is stable, forcing it to release three protons requires a vast input of energy, such that the cost of transmuting it greatly surpasses the value of the resulting gold.
- The Transmutation of lead into gold isn't just theoretically possible - it has been achieved.. Glenn Seaborg, 1951 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, succeeded in transmuting a minute quantity of lead into gold. There is an earlier report (1972) in which Soviet

physicists at a nuclear research facility near Lake Baikal in Siberia accidentally discovered a reaction for turning lead into gold when they found the lead shielding of an experimental reactor had changed to gold.

It can be done, - but it takes immense effort.

So in this morning's passage the question is how can I change and make myself useful to the Lord?

I would say the key word here is ‘**made holy**’

²¹ **If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.**

So we are useful if we are ‘**made holy**’

Let me say at this point we are not talking about natural gifting. Some are good practically, or good organisers, or good with people, or, or... what gifts do you have? We all have various gifts and abilities that God gives to all people, whether Christian or not.

✚ Don't make the mistake of confusing gifts with godliness x2

Godliness = Holiness is to be ‘set apart’ consecrated for a special use, it is often translated as **sanctified**, lit. becoming saintly, purified, made holy

How is one ‘**made holy**’?

It is something you and I have to do for it says: **If a man cleanses himself**

Being made holy is therefore cleansing yourself from all that makes you unholy / unclean.

And what does that mean?

There is a clue, this illustration sits sandwiched between two phrases; just before we have **wickedness**. And just afterwards we have... you guessed it the same here described as **evil desires**.

evil desire is wickedness

If you claim to be the Lord's, if you say you are a Christian and confess his name then it must show in that you **turn away from wickedness**

Paul tells young Timothy, **Flee** run away from **the evil desires of youth**,

Flee, pheugo fyoo'-go means ‘flee away’, or ‘seek safety by flight’, ‘to escape safely out of danger’

What are evil desires? It is not food that is evil but eating too much, do you? not drink but drinking too much, do you? not men or women but wrong

desires, lustful desires, have you? not possessions but covetousness, greed, pride, there are many other evil desires; jealousy, envy, hatred, etc. etc.

These evil desires are not the reserve of youth alone.

No-one can live a godly life without confronting & killing off these desires

- Fulfil the other Friday a rapper called 'J vessel'. He is a vessel for Jesus, **JIM** - Jesus in me.

How can we have Jesus, the Holy Son reside in me alongside evil desires and thoughts?

You have more time at home, how will you use it?

- Watching more TV? What do you watch? Judge Pinder? Jeremy Kyle? Watching riske films?

Dirty programmes make us dirty. It is pouring poison in through the eyes. If your eyes are not good - your whole body is full of darkness. Not for the Christian. In today's media world it is everywhere we are to beware, as James says **Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent**
Jas 1:21

In fact whatever we watch on TV drips into our hearts a godless worldview that is at odds with our soul and grieves the Holy Spirit.

1Pe 2:11 Peter says **Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.**

This leaves us as wood and clay

What I am saying through all of this is that to be useful to the master you and I must remove impurity from without and within.

The more Christ-like we are the more we are the glove that fits God's hand.

It is godly character that makes us like that gold vessel in the hands of the Master.

Just as the Holy place in tabernacle and temple were overlaid with Gold. It's a picture of God's glory lit as they were by the light of the lamps the Light of Christ reflected in His building, His people.

As Christians who have received the gift of the spirit of holiness how much of that is manifest in you - is up to YOU the individual.

- ✚ **Killing off that which is bad and putting on, doing that which is good.**

What to do? Stop other things and seek the Lord in prayer. Seek Him and His Kingdom, desire to know him better. Ask Lord what good work can I do for you today.

4a

A Godly life is a trained life, where in every decision you chose to Honour Him

Finale

Let me finish with an example from a man greatly used of the Lord. Hundreds, thousands of Missionaries went to China in the C19th. Now we have the harvest – The Chinese Church is the largest church on earth.

- Hudson Taylor goes to stay with a couple. The man meets him at the station to take him to his house. He had heard and thought so much about the veteran missionary, that he expected some one of imposing appearance; and when a single passenger alighted from the express and came toward him, he could hardly believe it was the visitor expected.
- "I mentioned this feeling of disappointment to my wife, but she was of quicker discernment than I, and came and said: 'Look at the light in his face.'
- "And truly Mr. Taylor did have the light of God in his face. So constantly did he look up to God, and so deep was his communion with God, that his very face seemed to have upon it a heavenly light. He had not been many hours in the house before the first sense of disappointment gave place to a deep reverence and love, and I realised as never before what the grace of God could do. Often and often had I longed to go to Keswick, but now God in His love had sent Keswick to me, and I was permitted not to listen to beautiful teaching, but to see the beauty of a life lived in abiding fellowship with the Lord Jesus. In the house he was all that a guest should be, kind, courteous, considerate, gracious. He at once fell into the routine of the household, was punctual at the meal table, studied to give the minimum of trouble, and was swift to notice and to express his thanks for every little service rendered. We could not help noticing the utter lack of self-assertion about him, and his true unconscious humility. About the Lord and His grace and faithfulness he spoke freely; about himself and his service he said nothing. Only by questioning did we learn anything of his own labours or experiences, but when he was thus drawn out, how much he had to tell!

Let's us imitate his faith – so that you and I will be men and woman greatly used of God in the situation he has placed you and pleasing to Him. Amen

END

4b