

Useful Servants 2 Timothy 2:20-26

(Show slide 1 as soon as the sermon starts)

One of the most **dangerous** children's TV programmes is **Thomas the Tank Engine**.

There is lots of fun in this timeless classic and many a parent has enjoyed viable downtime as their little darlings have sat captivated to the puffing adventures of Thomas, Henry, George and Gordon.

However, at the heart of the cartoon lies **a dangerous message: that someone is valuable when they are useful**.

The **Hiro episode** when they found a train abandoned in a blocked up tunnel. At the end he found another way to be useful and so felt valuable. I went, "No, what a disaster!"

Change to slide 2 In this part of **2 Timothy** we are certainly confronted by the theme of usefulness.

Look at verse 20. **Read verses 20 and 21**.

There is much I want to say today about being **a useful servant in the kingdom of Christ**. However, before we dig into these precious verses I need to remind us all of the bigger Bible truth about our value.

We are valuable because we are **loved creatures of Almighty God** and, if we have faith in Jesus, then we are also **loved children of a perfect Father**.

Our value and worth don't come from what we do but from who we are.

That is the liberating principle for our existence here on earth.

Who am I? Do I matter? What's the point of me?

The Bible says all of us are loved **creatures** of Almighty God. That means we care and protect everyone regardless of their wider contribution to society, whether before they are born or as they head into their senior season.

If you are a Christian the Bible also says you are a **child** of a perfect Father. That came to pass not because we performed really well in a theological test or managed to keep all the rules in a range of ethical situations. No, we become children of God by faith in Jesus, the perfect Son, who sacrificed his life to cleanse us from our sins.

As we talk about being useful in the kingdom of Christ don't forget **the bigger Bible story**. We aren't valuable or loved because we are useful.

However, that doesn't mean we should simply live an aimless life and fill our days with whatever trivia we want.

We have one life, eternity is real and Jesus matters for everyone. The key question for every Christian needs to be, given I'm in the kingdom of Jesus, how can I be a useful servant of my master?

Look again at verse 20. **Read verses 20 and 21.**

Change to slide 3 The picture is of a grand house with various utensils made of different materials and which are used for particular purposes. Some for special purposes and some for common. Or as the **ESV** puts it, some for honourable and some for dishonourable. It's not hard to imagine the possibilities.

Precious materials are used to serve the food. Cheaper materials are used to deal with the trash and the human waste.

The apostle Paul says God's house is similar in that it contains those individuals with honourable purposes and those with their sights set on dishonourable pursuits.

Really? In the church of God? Yes, the church will always be a mixed place. Let's get our expectations right.

- Expect non-Christians to join us.
- Expect fake Christians to be with us.
- Expect worldly Christians to be with us.

Change to slide 4 Rather than looking around us at other people and seeking to identify who is who, the challenge for this morning is to respond to God's personal message to reach one of us. **Given who we are now, how will we respond?**

Are you in God's household? If not, then you need to join.

Are you in God's household but not the genuine article? If so, you need an authentic relationship with Jesus as Saviour.

If we are genuine members of God's household, how can we be the most useful servant of King Jesus? The answer from these verses of **2 Timothy** is to **cleanse ourselves** from dishonourable ways and practices.

What does that mean? **Change to slide 5**

- We are to get rid of dishonourable **beliefs**
- We are to get rid of dishonourable **behaviour**

First, we are to get rid of **dishonourable beliefs**.

Our belief system impacts our behaviour.

How we see the world, our convictions of what is wise and good, and our view of God and his position in our life affects everything.

It's vital that we cleanse our minds from convictions that are out of sync with God's word.

This is a widely taught Biblical truth.

For example, in **Romans 12:2** we were told, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

However, today I mention the need to cleanse our belief system because of everything we discovered last week about how deadly false teaching is to the soul of the believer.

Do you remember some of the statements?

Verse 16-18, "Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some."

Therefore, part of what it means to cleanse ourselves from what is dishonorable to God must be to rid our mind of teaching that is harmful and hurtful.

If we want to be useful servants of Jesus then this is essential.

If we hold onto false teaching then it will seriously hinder our discipleship.

For example:

- If we don't see the connection between our body and our soul then we can end up doing whatever we like with our bodies and think that God doesn't care
- If we think we should experience physical healing all the time then if we don't we can either end up blaming ourselves for what is wrong or being angry with God for his failure to deliver.
- If we believe everyone is a good person going to heaven then our evangelism will be non-existent.

Friends, if we want to be useful servants of the Master, prepared to do any good work, then let's cleanse our minds of dishonorable beliefs.

Second, we are to get rid of **dishonourable behaviour**.

Look at verse 22. **Read verses 22 to 25.**

These verses have particular application to those who have leadership positions within the church that involve handling the word of God, and particularly to pastors who have responsibility under Christ to protect the sheep from the dangers of false teaching.

However, there are **big principles** that still relate to all of us in God's household as we seek to be useful servants of Jesus.

We won't all be teaching and we won't all be rebuking opponents of the gospel. However, all of us can be involved in the **two big headlines** of this cleansing activity.

- We should flee the bad
- We should pursue the good

Change to slide 6 First, we should **flee the bad**.

I love the word flee. It's one of those no nonsense words of great urgency.

It's an action word that reminds us that a time to ponder and a time to wait isn't always the godly response. Sometimes the situation is so obvious and so clear that what God wants is not for us to pray and wait for his guidance but to quickly pray for his courage to get out of there.

It reminds of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in **Genesis chapter 39**. She appears to him and says, "Come to bed with me!" How does he respond? Not, "That's something I need to pray about." Or "Let me ask my small group for their experiences in this area." No, we're told he ran out of the house!

There is behaviour we are to flee from if we are to be useful servants of King Jesus.

In **verse 22** the emphasis is on the evil desires of youth. Every generation has evil desires. Don't think we naturally develop into godly and kind people as we grow older. Just hang out at a retirement home and you'll quickly realise there is quite a bit of sin all around you.

However, there are particular sins that each generation is prone to. Whatever they are, ask God for help to cleanse them from our existence.

Is it the desire to be right? Flee from it

Is it the desire to have the last word? Run away from it.

Is it a quarrelsome spirit that never seeks the wisdom of others and speaks harshly to those around us? Ask the LORD for help.

The list of potential evil desires is very long. But with God's help and for his glory, we can flee from them. The end result will be more useful servants in the kingdom of Jesus.

It's not hard to come up with examples of how this can happen. Suppose you are a keen Christian but when you're with your non-Christian mates you frequently get drunk and the content of your conversation is something you wouldn't want to be played over the sound system on a Sunday morning. Our witness for Christ is going to be seriously impacted. But imagine the difference if we changed our behaviour. Imagine we still turned up but lived as a Christian in their company. Our witness for Christ would be much more powerful. At this point our danger is that we say something like, "Well nobody's perfect. And we all make mistakes." Yep. I know that. Christ is so gracious. However, don't make that the excuse for inactivity. Instead, let's cleanse our hearts and flee the bad.

Change to slide 7 **Second**, we should **pursue the good**

This is the other side of the cleansing coin.

As we flee the bad, we are to pursue the good.

I love the word **pursue**. It's a word connected with **passion**, **priorities** and **responsibilities**.

We could be much more effective for Jesus if we took more personal responsibility for our spiritual development rather than expecting others to do all the heavy lifting for us.

What are we to pursue? Just consider the five that are mentioned in these verses of **2 Timothy**.

- Faith
- Love
- Peace
- Kindness
- Gentleness

It's not hard to see how all of these would help us to be more useful as we serve King Jesus.

They will help us become more and more like Jesus in practice. And that is an attractive person to be around.

In Conclusion

Change to slide 8 Let's remember our value and worth don't come from what we do but from **who we are**.

However, from a secure position in Jesus, let's pray that God will help us to cleanse ourselves so we will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

Let's pray.