

“AN APPROVED WORKER FOR JESUS”
Psalm 63:1-8, I Corinthians 10:1-13, 2 Timothy 2:14-26
March 19 & 20, 2022

As I prepared for this message, I came upon a tremendous poem by John R. Rice. It's called *I Met the Master*. Listen to it carefully:

“I had walked life's path with an easy tread, I had followed where comfort and pleasure led;
And then by chance in a quiet place - I met my Master face to face.

With station and rank and wealth for goal, Much thought for body but none for soul,
I had entered to win this life's mad race - When I met my Master face to face.
I met Him and knew Him, and blushed to see That His eyes full of sorrow were fixed on me;
And I faltered, and fell at His feet that day While my castles vanished and melted away.

Melted and vanished; and in their place I saw naught else but my Master's face;
And I cried aloud: 'Oh, make me meet To follow the marks of Thy wounded feet.'
My thought is now for the souls of men; I have lost my life to find it again,
Ever since alone in that holy place My Master and I stood face to face.”¹

It is so easy for us to become enamored by the things of this world. We see riches and possessions and power and fame as very attractive goals for our lives, and we eagerly seek after them, only to find the emptiness of each one. When we put more thought into satisfying our bodies rather than our souls, we quickly find ourselves in dangerous spirals toward ground zero headed for destruction. All the things of this world will never satisfy the craving of the soul for the presence of God in the heart of a person.

But God's call for each person is to seek after Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. That does not mean that everyone becomes a professional clergy person, **but it does call** everyone into the ministry of Jesus Christ. We can do a variety of occupations and still be a full time minister of the Gospel. I have a very good friend, Randy Beaudin, who was a truck driver for the Lord. His occupation was driving an 18 wheeler 5 nights a week, but his passion is sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with anyone that God puts in his path. Randy has discipled more men because he has a

¹ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 160-1)

heart for serving the Lord God Almighty. While he earned a living as a truck driver, he is in full time ministry touching the hearts and lives of anyone who would like to grow deep in their faith in Jesus.

And that is what Jesus invites us to do with our lives. We are to be His followers sharing the Good News with all those we meet, all those who are in need of life changing, so that they might find hope and real life.

At the United Methodist Women meeting last Thursday I heard the testimony of a man who just 3 years ago was a drug addict headed for destruction. He had gotten to a very bad place in his life where he got to the point that he called out to God for help. And God filled his life with such energy and new life that he is now helping others who are in the same position that **he was in** so that they might have hope, too. He says he would not be here today if it were not for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And friends, that is so true for each one of us!

However that's the condition many of us have to get before we realize that we can no longer guide our lives toward anything good. Sometimes we have to be so low that all we can do is to look up, and when we look up from the depth of the pit we have created for our self, we see the Lord Jesus, with His hand extended for us to take, in order to find rest and peace. All we need do is to surrender to Jesus Christ, let Him become the driver of our life, and He will take us to the place of rescue, healing, recovery and abundant life. **Taking the hand of Jesus demands resignation of our own control in our life, and surrendering it to His control so that He can recreate us into a new person.**

Psalm 63 gives that same urgency to having the Lord God in the life of a person. David cries out, "*O God, You are my God, and I long for You. My whole being desires You; like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land, my soul is thirsty for You*" (63:1). That call for help is all we need for the Lord to begin to work in us, and then we'll see the great power and constant love that He gives to us.

Then as our lives change, we can echo David's words, Lord, "*As I lie in bed, I remember You; all night long I think of You, because You have always been my help. In the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy. I cling to You, and Your hand keeps me safe*" (63:7-8).

The promise of salvation is for every person, no matter what difference there may be among us. God has promised that “*whoever calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved*” (Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, Romans 10:13). Not everyone who claims to be a Christian will be saved, mind you, but those who sincerely and deliberately call on the Name of Jesus Christ will be saved. Just calling yourself a Christian does not guarantee us salvation. We must put our faith and trust in Jesus as Savior.

The Apostle Paul lifts this up in I Corinthians 10 when he reminds us of all of those who left Egypt following Moses. He says, “*They were all under the protection of the cloud, and all passed safely through the Red Sea. In the cloud and in the sea they were all baptized as followers of Moses. All ate the same spiritual bread and drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from the spiritual rock that went with them; and that rock was Christ Himself. But even then God was not pleased with most of them, and so their dead bodies were scattered over the desert. Now, all of this is an example for us, to warn us not to desire evil things, as they did, nor to worship idols, as some of them did*” (I Cor. 10:1-6).

Paul is calling us to be careful of what we say and what we do. **If we profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, then our words and actions need to model that of a true follower of Jesus.** If we say we are a Christian, but live according to the ways of the world, God knows that our hearts are not set upon serving Him, but on pleasing ourselves, so it is hard for Him to claim us as real followers of Jesus Christ. Our lives must reflect the attitude of our hearts.

William Barclay puts it like this. “Is it possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be a camp follower without being a soldier of the king; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one’s weight? Once someone was talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, ‘So and so tells me that he was one of your students.’ The teacher answered devastatingly, ‘He may have attended my lectures, but he was **not** one of my students.’ There is a world of difference between attending lectures and being a student. **It is one of the supreme handicaps of the Church that in the Church there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples.**”²

² (Swindoll’s *Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 162)

The Apostle Paul relays this same warning on to his disciple, Timothy, to invite all who follow Jesus to be true followers of Him. Listen to Paul's words to Timothy. This is 2 Timothy 2:14-26. (READ 2 Timothy 2:14-26).

The Lord's ways are not the world's ways, and the world's ways are not the Lord's ways. Each one of us must choose which way we will follow. There is no dividing our time in each camp, a little time with the Lord's ways and a little time in the world's ways. It has to be one or the other. So many in our world today think that if they are a member of a church that they can do whatever they want because God will certainly forgive and save them because they belong to the Church. Sorry, it doesn't work that way. **We cannot be double-minded, trying to please both sides by the way that we live. We must choose one side and serve that side!**

In his words concerning Psalm 119:113-120, Willem VanGemeran makes these pertinent comments. He says, "How different from the ungodly are the godly! The (godly) have hope. They draw near to God and find delight in His word (modeled by the words of Psalm 119): "*I love Your law*" (v.113), "*I have put my hope in Your word*" (v.114), "*that I may keep the commands of my God*" (v.115), "*I will always have regard for Your decrees*" (v. 117), and "*therefore I love Your statutes*" (v.119). The psalmist concludes this strophe on a final affirmation of Godly fear in contrast to the ungodly who "stray" (v.118) from God's decrees...The presence of God is so real for the psalmist that he responds to his God in spirit and body. His life of obedience is lived in the presence of the living God, whereas the wicked act as if God does not see or care."³

You see, being double-minded brings confusion because you are trying to satisfy one while negating the other, but at the same time claiming to follow the other with rejection of the one. It's not both/and, but either/or. A choice needs to be made. And Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:19 to follow the ways of the Lord which brings us the peace and guidance and security that we long for, while following the ways of the world brings us to destruction. Paul says it in no uncertain terms, that "*Whoever says*

³ (Frank Gaebelin, editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991) Vol. 5, pg. 755-6)

that he belongs to the Lord must turn away from wrongdoing” (2 Tim. 2:19). Our words and actions must coincide, otherwise we live our lives as hypocrites, saying one thing and doing another. The life of a Christian must be consistently following the laws and commandments of the Lord God Almighty as we seek to follow Jesus’ footsteps.

And that’s where Paul encourages Timothy (and us) to **“*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).*** If we are servants of Jesus Christ, there is much to rejoice in. There is so much good about being a follower of all of God’s commands! The world needs to hear about all of the advantages we get by being a disciple of Jesus. The joy of the Lord is not to be the best kept secret in Sheboygan, but the best proclaimed example lived before all those around us.

So how do we do that? How do we live in such a way that proclaims the joy of the Lord? Well, Paul starts us out by saying *“Keep away from profane and foolish discussions, which only drive people farther away from God. Such teaching is like an open sore that eats away the flesh...” (2 Tim. 2:16-17).*

Wow! We don’t have to look very far today to see the difference that profane and foolish discussions makes in our society. Just watch some of the talk shows on TV and you’ll get your fill of the rancor and filth and division that Paul is talking about. Criticism of what individuals think or do, angry accusation the beliefs of some, and even outright condemnation of people who disagree with a certain point of view, you’ll find it all being broadcast to millions of people as if theirs is the only perspective. There’s no uplifting of the spirit for what people are doing for the Lord, there’s little support for folks who are hurting and needing encouragement. Just outright gangrenous verbal discourse that acts like necrotizing fasciitis that devours body, soul and spirit. There’s no use for it except to destroy anyone who listens to it, or, heaven forbid, repeats it. It only kills.

The best thing to do is to turn off the TV and look around at how you might enlighten and uplift the lives of the people around you. There’s too much negativity in our world today. It’s time we start bringing the joy of the Lord to the people who live in darkness.

This is to be the bedrock of our lives. Sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the “*solid foundation that God has laid (which) cannot be shaken; and on it are written these words: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’ ...*” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Have you ever said something that later you became ashamed of? Most of us have at some time in our lives. It’s not pretty and we end up really hurting the ones we love, or those who we are trying to be an example to. But that’s the world’s ways, and we are encouraged by the world to say or do whatever we need to say or do to get ahead of anyone else or to get what we want. Some of the most horrible things have been said and done in effort to prove ourselves right or make ourselves better than another person. And it’s eating up the lives of believers and nonbelievers alike!

Paul commands us, “STOP KILING ONE ANOTHER WITH YOUR WORDS AND ACTIONS!” Rather, humble yourself and begin to treat others with dignity and grace. Wise words were spoken so many years ago by a little rabbit named Thumper, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say nothin’ at all.” Just put a lid on it and let it go, and by all means, don’t spread it around.

You see, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are to present ourselves in such a way that demonstrates the difference that Jesus makes in our lives when we let Him become our Savior and Lord. We are to “*humble (ourselves), therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt (us) at the proper time*” (1 Pet. 5:6) to show God’s love to the desperate and hurting ones around us. Criticizing and condemning one another only leads to more and more degeneration of body and spirit. But uplifting one another, building each other up, complimenting one another for the good that they do, and saying “Thank you” do so much more to stimulate joy and love.

Paul uses a great example to show us the difference. He says, “*In a large house there are dishes and bowls of all kinds: some are made of silver and gold, others of wood and clay; some are for special occasions, others for ordinary use. If anyone makes himself clean from all those evil things, he will be used for special purposes, because he is dedicated and useful to his Master, ready to be used for every good deed*” (2 Tim. 2:20-21).

The dishes of wood or clay don't really matter that much, because if they are broken or destroyed, they are easily replaced without much thought. We have some common-use dishes that have been glued back together after they have been dropped and broken.

But the dishes of silver or gold are special, because if they get damaged or scratched or destroyed, it is costly to replace them. They are used for special events and they are handled with great care because they are precious to us. No way are they going to go into the dish washer. No, when they get washed (by hand), they are dried quickly and laid out, so that they might last, showing off their beauty to all those around. Great care is taken because of their value to us.

The same is for people in God's eyes. Those who are against Him, those who follow the ways of the world, have very little value to Him because they reject His love and discard His commands. Oh, God cares for them, enough to provide a way for them to become precious to Him as they accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. But until they claim Jesus as Savior and Lord, there is not much glory in them because they choose to rebel against God's will and God's ways. If they become broken or destroyed, there is little concern from God, because they are not precious to Him.

But those who claim Jesus as their Savior, to those who recognize that the Lord God is THE God of all, they are transformed from their commonness into precious and valued vessels, ready for God to use with great delight to show the rest of the world of His great glory. And God lifts them up with great pleasure, using them for special purposes and for every good deed, to entice others to Himself, so that they might find themselves transformed from the worthless to the valuable. **God's desire is that all people would be willing to follow Him** so that everyone might be the precious and sacred vessels of God's Holy Spirit. So we make the choice of being common and worthless, or special and valuable.

It comes as we present ourselves as approved workers who serve Jesus Christ with great gladness, following and obeying all of His commands. We avoid worldly "*passions and strive for righteousness, faith, love, and peace, together with those who with a pure heart call out to the Lord for help*" (2 Tim. 2:22). We're not in it to glorify ourselves, but our Savior, Jesus. It's not about making

ourselves better than anyone else, but helping them to come to know the salvation of the Lord. It's not about winning arguments or being victorious in debates. **It's about daily demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that others might be so attracted to us that they want what we have;** not material possessions, mind you, but the peace and joy and love and life that is within us.

So the approved worker for Jesus Christ is not to engage in "*foolish and ignorant arguments*" over the things of this world (2 Tim. 2:23). They only end up in quarrels, and quarrels don't attract people; they only add to the destructiveness of the life of those involved as well as those observing the quarrel. Instead, if a party is dedicated to going against the ways of the Lord Jesus, rebellious of God's will and way, we are not to go after them to prove our point. Rather we are to focus on those who are ready to listen to the Word of God and seek His ways and want to find the joy and peace and love that He has to give.

Yet **Paul instructs us to be kind toward all people, taking the time to patiently teach others about the love of God, gently correcting those who are determined to go their own way, and helping them to find the greater way of the Lord.** In that way, we will enable them to find the mercy and grace of Jesus, giving them a chance to repent of their sinfulness and rebellion and come to know the righteous ways of the Lord (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Folks, our world needs dedicated, devoted and diligent workers who are approved by God to reach the world for Jesus Christ. Thousands, even millions, of people are dying without any hope of eternal life. **God is calling us to leave our pursuits of station and rank and wealth for our personal goals, and give in to becoming the ministers of Jesus Christ everywhere we go, handling accurately the Word of Truth for the Salvation of the world.** Are you with me on this?

Let's pray. Father, thank You for calling each one of us to be Your servants in our world today. Give us the courage to set aside all our own selfish ambitions to let You guide us and direct us to live our lives for You. The fate of the world lies in our hands, one person at a time, as we bring them to Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Make us to shine out in the darkness of our world to attract the

attention of those who are perishing, so that they might see the Light of Jesus and find life. Embolden our hearts so that as we see You face to face, we might receive and claim our position as Your precious and special workers, approved by You to do Your work of bringing others to the salvation of Christ Jesus. Guide us and use us. This we pray in Jesus Name. AMEN.