

Jesus Is Worth It
Part #8 - “Set Apart”
Text | 2 Timothy 2:20 - 26

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on June 30, 2019, by Pastor Kevin Thiessen

(SHOW SLIDE 1)

He was a model of godliness, faith and humility. God used him greatly. When he died in 1982, the executors of his will were unable to trace a single member of his family still living. Not one person came forward claiming to be even a distant relation.

Yet, *The Times* obituary about him rightly noted that his influence within the Church of England during the previous fifty years was probably greater than any of his contemporaries. John Stott, who was one of the numerous influential Christian leaders whom He had led to faith in Christ, said of him: ‘Those who knew him well and those who worked with him never expect to see his like again; for rarely can anyone have meant so much to so many as this quietly spoken, modest and deeply spiritual man.’

(SHOW SLIDE 2) Why was this man – the Reverend E.J.H. Nash – so useful to God? How can you and I be useful to God? How do we become the kind of container *God can use* – a vessel set apart – useful to the Master – ready for every good work. (2 Timothy 2:21)

John Stott writes, ‘No higher honour could be imagined than to be an instrument in the hand of Jesus Christ, to be at his disposal for the furtherance of his purposes, to be available whenever wanted for his service.’ The theme from our Scripture today is being “set apart” - being people who are ‘useful to the Master’ and ‘instruments for noble purposes.’ (v.21) Living this out begins with *dedicating* your life to him and re-dedicating it regularly to his service.

A quick note that throughout this message I will use the words holy and set apart interchangeably. As we flesh out what it looks like to be set apart, I’ve broken today’s Scripture into three main parts. We are set apart to be honourable, to be pure, and to be kind to everyone.

Following from last Sunday – we are starting with the belief that a good Bible teacher operates from the fundamental conviction that the Bible is God’s truth.

As we continue this series in 2 Timothy I want to note the set up from last Sunday in verse 19, which sets the tone for today’s message. Last week, in verse 19 Paul said, “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from wickedness.” This statement – “the Lord knows those who are his” – is paralleled with Numbers 16:5, where God had reminded Moses that He knows who are His own – those who are holy and set apart. We believe that salvation does not begin with man; it begins with God. He planned it and He executed it. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4) Yet, because God has designed creation to have relationship with him, we still need to choose to follow – to trust and obey. “Everyone who names the name of the Lord” is literally those who confess the name of the Lord and have determined to be set apart for Jesus – just like young Scarlet and Sascha Parenteau this morning. Baptism is that outward sign of an inward commitment to Jesus. This is every follower of Jesus’s testimony that we have believed in Him – who He is and what He has done on our behalf – and we have declared that we are His, that we submit to his rule over our lives and that we desire to live in a way that honours Him.

(**SHOW SLIDE 3**) Writing over 100 years ago, the great preacher Charles Spurgeon used a powerful word to describe God's knowledge of our hearts. He said that everything in the heart is "**transparent**" to God. Nothing is hidden, everything is clearly seen.¹

God knows us because He created us. Let me illustrate this:

A young man was driving an old Model A Ford one night in Indiana, and right in the middle of what seemed to be nowhere, the car broke down and that old Ford would not start up again. The young man got into the motor and tried to fix it but was having no luck.

Then, a Lincoln Continental limousine came by, parked right in front of him, and an older gentleman dressed like he was either coming from or going to a high-class party – stepped out. The man walked up to the young man and asked, "What happened to your car?" The teenager was visibly upset and replied, "Well, can't you see? I can't get the thing started!" The older gentleman, with his manicured hands and looking first class, asked, "Would you like my help? Maybe I can help you start the car." The young man glanced at the older man and thought, "What could this guy know about mechanics?" So, he replied, "No thanks, I'll fix it myself." So, the old man just stood there watching him and after a while longer watching this young man struggle and still unable to get the Ford started he said, "Let me give it a shot, maybe I can get it started." The young man, in frustration, said, "Fine, give it a shot." The gentleman said, "Okay. You get inside the car, turn the key and wait a second." He put his hands inside the motor, touched a cable or two, and – because it was the old, crank motor – went and turned the crank twice and the thing started up! The young man jumped out of the Ford, went to the gentleman and said, "Who are you? How did you get this thing going?" The old gentleman replied, "I'm Henry Ford, boy. I invented this car and the moment I saw you in the motor, I knew exactly what was wrong." You know, in the same way, God is like our Henry Ford. He made us and He knows exactly what's broken and what needs to be fixed to get us working properly.

Maybe you've come to church today feeling like life just isn't working? You're doing everything you can to take responsibility and sort out your situation, but it's just not working out. Do you find yourself asking God, "What's going on? Why is everything falling apart?" My encouragement is to bring your frustrations and your trouble to God through Jesus – because He knows what you're going through. He made you. He created you. He knows how to get you running in the way you were created to. He knows your problems – and He knows exactly what is needed to get you started and working again as He created and purposed you to be.

So, what does it look like when we're working properly? First, we are set apart to be **HONOURABLE**.

(**SHOW SLIDE 4**) The choices you and I make each day either tarnish us or polish us to a lesser or higher degree of purity and usefulness.² **D. L. Moody said, "God doesn't seek for golden vessels, and does not ask for silver ones, but He must have clean ones."**

God can use only clean or holy vessels. He cannot bestow His glory – his magnificence and great beauty – upon anything evil or tainted. I want to make a distinction at the outset – on the cross Jesus died in our place, and he paid the price to ransom us from our sin. Entrusting our lives to Jesus – asking for the forgiveness of our sin – and committing our lives to his rule as both our Saviour and Lord is accepting the salvation only he can offer. When the end of days come and the Book of Life is opened and it comes to our name – it will read Jesus Christ, because he took our place. So as Christians, we believe our eternity is secure . . . yet in our day to day – we are still living in what

¹ His Eye is On The Sparrow: The Doctrine of God's Omniscience, KeepBelieving.com

² Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible reader's companion* (electronic ed., p. 842). Wheaton: Victor Books.

Barton has often described as the now but not yet. We still wrestle with our “flesh” – we still face temptation – we still have struggle and pain. Therefore, a part of this life and the sanctifying or ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to refine us and make us more like Jesus Christ - places responsibility upon each believer to maintain a pure, unpolluted life – so that we can be used by God here and now.

In verse 21, when Paul uses the phrase “if anyone cleanses himself” we see plainly that this isn’t something God does for us as we sit passively; this is a self-cleansing for service that goes beyond a general cleansing for sin. Holiness is something we pursue. Being set apart is a cleansing that comes as we trust in Jesus and His work on our behalf – as well as when we obey Him – confessing our sins, inviting and allowing the Holy Spirit to convict, cleanse, and guide us to live honourably for Jesus. 1 John 1:9 summarizes this, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Being honourable in these verses is within the context of the rest of 2 Timothy – in contrast what is *dishonourable* includes doctrinal and moral error. We have observed both these issues throughout this letter, therefore the context of being honourable includes a departure from such errors and avoiding impurity in our lives so that we can be clean and useful to God and ready for every good work. To be honourable, we need to be pure, so as we continue in today’s Scripture, how do we obtain this purity?

Paul uses the language of “flee” and “have nothing to do with” the things in our life that can defile us. The word cleanse is from a Greek word (I apologize to our Greek scholars, but I will not attempt to pronounce this) from which we get the English word catharsis. Catharsis is the process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions.

This is powerful imagery - to completely rid oneself of something unclean ... to have relief from sin ... to clean out thoroughly, to completely purge and rid oneself of something unclean. This strongly emphasizes the **completeness** of cleansing Paul calls for. This is not just a dusting off a bit of naughty behaviour ... this is a purging from that which is not right.

Cristy and I often describe our daughter Rhea as a gypsy ... meant in fun because she’s adventurous and has no problem getting dirty. Sometimes she’ll come in looking pretty filthy and I’ll ask her to wash off ... then she’ll wipe her hands or face on her shirt ... unfortunately that doesn’t get you clean ... it only spreads further! We know that if we want to get fully clean we have to wash it off.

Declaring Jesus as Lord *can* be proved to be authentic and genuine when we look at the evidence in our lives. Though there is some internal change that may be unseen – our actions and behaviours tell a story and they reveal observable and tangible evidence of the state of our hearts. In Matthew 15, Jesus states that what comes out of our mouths proceeds from the heart. If you belong to God's family, then you will be compelled to live like it and people should be able to see a difference.

How? First, **repentance is not a one-off action – it’s an ongoing attitude.** We flee from the passions that used to control us. We have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies. We separate ourselves from anything that is not right or displeasing to God. We avoid sin whenever possible. Over time, a marker of our maturity could look like something Geordon Rendle described to me. He shared his desire to be increasingly quick to ask for forgiveness when we do sin ... and increasingly long in duration between occasions of sin.

At the same time as we run from what is not right, we must run toward righteousness. We must pursue it at all cost. We pursue righteousness by pursuing Him who produces these in us. How? We study the Bible – His Word. We think about it. We absorb it, memorize it, and live by it as best we can. We spend much time in prayer, talking to Jesus, listening, and then living in obedience to what we have learned. We serve as He served. We live with the empowering of the Holy Spirit which produces in us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are all markers that we're on the path to right living and being used by God.

This week I received a note from our Fellowship President Steve Jones that practically illustrates differences that have been statistically measured.. He shared how on March 18th, a Senate special committee convened and heard from the Canadian Council of Christian Charities's (CCCC) Executive Director, John Pellowe, on "The Impact of the Advancing Religion Charitable Sub-Sector in Canada." John presented a report on the benefits religious life gives to the overall social and civil life of Canada.

John's premise was to suggest and give evidence that "very committed religious people are markedly more likely to have prosocial attitudes and behaviours than non-religious people, as a group." Canadian sociologist, Kurt Bowen, summarized his research of 20 years of surveys by Statistics Canada, declaring: "*The 'very committed' religious (attend worship services weekly) put distinctly high value on the importance and quality of their relationships, in comparison to the non-religious.*"

(SHOW SLIDE 5) They value: Belonging (69% - 53%), Friendliness (80% - 63%), Kindness (85% - 71%), Forgiveness (73% - 43%), Generosity (71% - 42%), and Concern for Others (80% - 58%).

(SHOW SLIDE 6) The stats indicate there is a clear relationship between good citizenship and one's religious commitment. Therefore, Pellowe concluded, institutions (like local churches) that develop prosocial citizens provide an important public benefit to Canada. Kurt Bowen writes, "*There is a gentleness among the "very committed" that sets them apart from other Canadians. They care about justice, but are careful to pursue justice in lawful ways. Knowing there is a God external to me whom I am answerable to, convincing me the world does not revolve around me, helps to focus my worldview on others, not just on myself.*"³

PAUSE – Let's flesh this out a bit more. In preparing this message, I sensed that at this point some of you may be hearing this and thinking – well, I guess I can't leave the house or I may get tainted by the world! Let's home school our kids, let's get into a holy huddle and isolate ourselves from the world. To be careful and clear about what Paul is instructing in this passage – as well as consider the overarching context of the Bible – I want to take a moment to review the larger context. Jesus was known as a "friend of sinners" though there is debate around what this really meant – and this is exactly the kind of topic around which Barton was addressing in regards to discernment last Sunday.

In Luke 5:32, Jesus answers the grumbles of the scribes and Pharisees telling them that he has "**not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**" Throughout the Gospels – the eye witness accounts of Jesus' life – we see that Jesus built relationships with those at the margins of society – and spent a significant amount of time with people known as sinners – tax collectors, prostitutes, adulterers, lepers, etc. In Luke 7:31-35, Jesus rebukes the "people of this generation" because they rejected John the Baptist for being too conservative and Jesus for being too liberal (literally a glutton and a drunkard). This passage is where we get the phrase "friend of sinners". Right after this account, in verse 36, is the story of the sinful woman who anoints Jesus with expensive ointment and wipes

³ Jones, Steve. <https://www.fellowship.ca/blog/213/Will-the-Federal-Government-ReCommit-to-the-Very-Committed>

Jesus' feet with her tears and her hair. When Jesus is corrected by his fellow guests for allowing this to happen he reminds those with him that **those who are forgiven much love much**. He then forgives the woman and announces, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." In Luke 15 tax collectors and sinners were "drawing near" to Jesus and the religious leaders of the day grumbled that Jesus was receiving them to eat with them. In Luke 19 Jesus goes to be the guest of a man who is a sinner in the tax collector Zacchaeus. As Kevin de Young put it, "Jesus was a friend of sinners not because he winked at sin, ignored sin, or enjoyed light-hearted revelry with those engaged in immorality." Rather, he was a friend because he had come to save the lost – and he was calling sinners to repentance – and we see in these stories people who were drawn to him because they recognized their need for forgiveness and salvation. How can those who don't yet know Jesus hear about Him if we all hide away and don't spend any time with them?

Rather, as we seek to live a life that is set apart – a life of purity – that brings honour to God – Paul reminds us to be engaged but to do so with gentleness and to be kind to everyone.

(SHOW SLIDE 7) Remember last Sunday where one of the marks of a bad/false teacher is that they are argumentative. They want to debate every fine little word and start arguments about them. As Eugene Peterson paraphrases, **"Refuse to get involved in inane discussions; they always end up in fights. God's servant must not be argumentative, but a gentle listener and a teacher who keeps cool, working firmly but patiently with those who refuse to obey."**

Satan's influence blinds the lost to the Gospel and holds them captive. So, Paul instructs us in verses 23 and 24 that there is no use "quarreling" with such persons. He advises that we be gentle with those who oppose us, realizing that only by God's grace can they escape the terrible trap they have chosen to remain in.⁴

Paul is compelling the follower of Jesus to be a peace maker. This does not mean we avoid conflict. In verse 25 we see that Paul is not advising us to *avoid*, but rather to engage with gentleness and graciousness. We need to ask the Holy Spirit's help to be these kind of people – both to avoid unnecessary quarreling as well as to be gentle, show grace and to point people to the truth of Jesus.

In verse 24 Paul's instruction is to be kind to *everyone*. That includes *everyone*! This isn't just our friends, or the people we get along with, but everyone we come into contact with – especially those we struggle to be gracious and gentle with.

Recently I led a group of people through Discipleship Explored. This is a study on the book of Philippians, another one of Paul's letters. In regards to conflict, Paul was encouraging the Philippian church that as Jesus followers we are "in Christ". Remembering this can enable us to navigate conflict more effectively and appropriately. Yet, we talked as a group that it is critical that this is more than just reciting "No, I am in Christ", as if that mantra will change the conflict. Rather, when we remember who God is (his character, his sovereignty, his faithfulness), what He's done for us (creation, mercy, salvation, freedom), and who we are in Christ (heirs, adopted children, family, saved, etc.) it can enable us to see beyond what we're not getting in a given conflict (right/wrong, struggle for control, reputation/status, etc.) We can respond in grace because of the grace we have already received. This can cause within us a posture change that enables us to be gentle, humble, and gracious when otherwise we might typically be defensive, aggressive or want to justify ourselves.

⁴ Richards, L. O. (1991). [The Bible reader's companion](#) (electronic ed., p. 842). Wheaton: Victor Books.

A couple final comments on this passage – specifically two things tucked into verse 24. Being “in Christ” also enables us to teach and to patiently endure evil. How? First, we are enabled to teach because every single one of us can share what we know - regardless of how much or how little we know. Jesus gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to everyone who believes in Him as Lord and Saviour. Because the Holy Spirit is in and with us - don't hesitate to share the hope you have in Christ even if you feel like your knowledge is limited. The Holy Spirit can give you the words to say – or guide you to know the best way to respond – whether it be to listen, or to put an arm around the shoulder, or to pray.

1 Peter 3:15 exhorts us to always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have. Practically, something that can ease your nerves or anxiety when you don't know the answers is to give a disarming response such as, “That’s a great question! I don’t know the answer, but would you be willing to look into this with me?” A humble posture and a willingness to continue to learn and grow ... along with an invitation to those who are asking the questions to join us in looking for answers can help these critical conversations continue, relationships to flourish and God willing bear fruit of faith in the questioner.

Colossians 4:3-6 is my life verse. ³*At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ ...* ⁴*that I may make it clear ...* ⁵*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the (most of every opportunity)* ⁶*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*⁵

Teaching isn't lording over people or being superior. Rev E.J.H. Nash was described as a quietly spoken, modest and deeply spiritual man, yet God used him to lead many to faith in Jesus. In reality, we don't know how or when God may change people's hearts? So be ready to serve, be patient, be in prayer, and be kind and gentle whenever you are able to share the hope that you have and point people to Jesus.

Second, how do we patiently endure evil? My goodness, I find this particularly difficult. Does patience mean we quietly and idly stand by? I know that I need to remember what verse 19 stated, “The Lord knows who are his.” The Bible tells us that God is a God of love, but He is also a God of justice. For your own further study – I encourage you to take some time – in personal study or in your Community Groups – to look at Romans 12:9-21. This is an instructive passage to flesh out “patiently enduring evil” as it reminds us to trust that God is in control and He will repay those who have done evil. This passage is also a good parallel to today's Scripture as it lays out a number of markers of a true Christian – to love genuinely, to abhor evil and cling to what is good, to show honour, to be zealous, to serve the Lord, to rejoice in hope, to be patient in trouble, to be constant in prayer, to show hospitality, to bless those who persecute you, to live in harmony and peaceably with all, to not avenge ourselves, and to overcome evil with good.

The practice of continually rehearsing who God is, what He has done, who we are in light of this, and then how we will live in obedience – this is what will help us to live as set apart – useful vessels that God can use for His purpose – vessels that bring God's name honour, that are pure and ready for every good work, and that show His kindness to everyone regardless of colour or creed, socio-economic standing, foolishness or wisdom. By God's grace and with the enabling of His Holy Spirit – let's live this out.

BENEDICTION: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever. (2 Corinthians 13:14) Amen.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Col 4:3-6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.