

2019 WCCC

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Be A Vessel to Honor (1)

The life of Timothy

I Timothy 3:14 – 16 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

I Timothy 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

II Timothy 2:15 – 22 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having the seal, 'the Lord knows those who are His,' and 'everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.' Now in a large household there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

II Timothy 3:1 But realize this, that in the last days, difficult times will come.

II Timothy 4:8 In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Prayer

Our Father, we thank You that we can gather in this auspicious time. We realize when we gather here, this time has been set on Your calendar. We pray that our alpha, the Lord Jesus will gather us all into that very beginning which You desire for us. Open our hearts to understand Your will in these last days. We pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

The topic I was asked to speak upon was 'Being a vessel of honor'. We read that in II Timothy 2:20. This is a very special moment in our history because it is near the end of this age. The Lord has drawn us together. And He is drawing together those who love His appearing. These are people who have a sense of timing of the kingdom of God. This conference was called because we are at the very end. The Lord is very near. And we gather together as many Christians here tonight. But He wants to gather us all into that deep sense of His coming. Even for young people who are just starting in their lives, He wants you to have it in your heart. The decisions that you make will be based on your love of His appearing.

We found that Paul was speaking much to Timothy just before Paul was martyred. And Paul gave him this exhortation to become a vessel of honor. And so we want to compare the life of Timothy in I Timothy and II Timothy. We find that Timothy is a unique person. Our brother Timothy passed through three eras in the history of the church. And he was keenly aware of the nearness of the appearing of the Lord. According to bible scholars, II Timothy was written seven or eight years after I Timothy. The time of eight years had elapsed. The spiritual condition of the church had changed dramatically. You remember we read in I Timothy 4:1, Paul told Timothy a prophetic word of the coming of the difficult time. He told Timothy, 'but the spirit explicitly said in later times, some will fall away from the faith'. Paul was trying to prepare Timothy for what was ahead.

But by II Timothy, these features of the last days were already there. So in II Timothy 3:1, Paul wrote 'realize that in these last days, difficult times will come'. We are so fortunate that we can see in the word of God the reality of the life of the church. In the early days of the church, the church was able to overcome the world by the power of the Holy Spirit and under the headship of the dear Lord Jesus. But by II Timothy, the world had begun to make inroads into the church life. The testimony of the church was being compromised. And there were many problems in the house. In II Timothy 3:2 – 5 we read these words, 'For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless,

conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these.’ When we first read these words we said that these had to be people of the world in the last days. But when we look closely, we see that there are such people in the church. So things have changed from I Timothy to II Timothy. And we can see these further in the simple definition that Paul gave to the church.

The changes

In I Timothy 3:15, Paul said these ‘but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.’ Now Paul is not defining the church in depth but defining it in very simple terms. How wonderful is such a church! Listen to how he called it - the church of the living God. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, all three are very much involved and present every time the church gathered. He called the church the household of God. It was a family. Jesus was the head of this family. This church had a pillar of truth in the midst. Now there are different interpretations of this pillar. But one of the testimonies of this pillar is really the testimony of Jesus and His lampstand. It was the church of the living God; the household of God and the testimony of Jesus in the midst. It was the foundation of the truth and on top of all of that the saints were living according to the mystery of holiness. Jesus Christ lived in their midst and the life expressed through them was a mystery to all those around. How these sinners showed such grace and such love was a mystery of godliness in their midst. What a wonderful church life it was! The Lord was there in His church.

But now as Paul wrote II Timothy just before his departure, Paul did not refer to the church as the church of the living God or the household of God. When you look at II Timothy 2:20, you see that he referred to the church as a large house. In a large house there are not only gold and silver but vessels of earthen ware, some to honor and some to dishonor. On the one hand we praise God because many more people were being saved throughout Asia Minor. But then the church became no longer a home. It was just a large house. And the family members now had differences; some vessels of gold and honor and some of the earthen ware and even to dishonor. It seemed that there was no clear standard and no pillar in the midst. Some of the saints were serving the Lord and loved the Lord. And others were cold hearted and fleshly. The testimony of Jesus as the pillar of light, which used to stand as the flames in the garden of Eden was no longer there and shone brightly. And the house of God which used to be defined as the house of the living God was then defined by the fleshly vessels whether good or bad. Timothy had to be discouraged. Paul said he would soon depart from this world. And the situation seemed to be getting worse and worse. And then Paul said, ‘Timothy let me tell you the truth’. In chapter 2:19, he said

that nevertheless, in spite of all these problems, the firm foundation of God still stands. The Lord knows those who are His. And let all those who know the Lord abstain from sinfulness. And Timothy was exhorted to remain faithful to the ministry because there is still a firm foundation and the Lord knows those who are His. Whatever confusion there might be in the large house, yet the Lord knows exactly who is who.

The affection of His Coming

In II Timothy, we all know that Paul was ready for his departure. And as he drew close to the end of his life, he felt the Lord's appearing was so very near. He had fought the fight, he had run the race, he had kept the faith, and he said that there is a crown of righteousness laid up for him on that day. What a wonderful thought as he was ready to end his life. There is something laid up for me just ahead. But he opened up in the most extraordinary way and said that this crown is also for all those who love His appearing. Who can those be? Who loves His appearing?

Now this is not his sentimental way of saying things. Every time I sang a hymn of Christ coming back, I get so sentimental. I love the thought of His appearing. But surely the love of His appearing is something more than just the affection of the heart. Those who love His appearing are in some way affected by His return. They are serving in such a way as to hasten the day of God. Now who are these people? Who also will receive this crown of righteousness? Surely it cannot be just for apostles, prophets and preachers. There are many Christians who have different ministries and different ways of serving. Now whoever receives this crown of righteousness in these last days must be overcoming by the life of the Lord Jesus. But there are many who are last will be first. There are many people unknown in the larger way in the church but serving faithfully. People who are praying and waiting for the Lord to return. People who are helping with the sense of how much they love His appearing. Paul mentioned one man named Onesiphorus. He said here I am in a Roman jail. Everyone left me except Luke. Maybe Luke would get this crown of righteousness. But there was also Onesiphorus. You can read it in chapter one. When he came to Rome, it took him a long time to find Paul. But he found Paul and he went to him and comforted him and supplied for him. And Paul said the Lord remembers Onesiphorus for his work. Those who love His appearing are saints who love the Lord and serve in many different kinds of ministries. And before we go any further, do you love His appearing? Has His appearing adjusted the priorities of your life? Has it marked your ministry? In every decision you make, have you considered His coming? In Jude verse 21, Jude said keep yourself in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

Now what does it take to be a vessel to honor in these last days. In order to understand the challenge, I want to go with Timothy through the three stages of church life that he experienced in I and II Timothy. These three changes of environment were 1. When the church was born by the sovereign grace of God. 2. When the church was built by the apostles and master builders. 3. When the bride is perfected by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

The sovereign hand

Now we know from Acts 14 that Timothy was saved in a church born by the sovereign hand of God. We know that Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey came to Timothy's town. They went through the regions of Galatia, through the cities of Pisidia, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. And in that first missionary journey as Paul preached the gospel, Timothy was saved by grace. Timothy was prepared by his mother and grandmother who read the scripture to him when he was a boy. And so he understood his judgment unto the law and his forgiveness through the grace of Jesus Christ. A few months later, Paul and Barnabas came through these churches once again. They laid hands on the elders and encouraged the saints including Timothy to be faithful. And then Paul and Barnabas were gone. And there were these little gatherings of God's people in Lystra and Derbe. How did the Lord build up Timothy and his ministry and prepare him? There were probably no apostles there in the church. And there were no workers but just recent converts. We do not know whether others have visited these small churches. But Paul and Barnabas have not been back. And yet somehow Timothy was growing. The Holy Spirit has opened up the scriptures that he had studied and revealed Jesus Christ in the words. The elders at some point laid hands on him and prayed that he might receive gifts and serve the Lord there in their church. But basically, you would have to say that the church and Timothy grew there by the sovereign work of Jesus Christ. This company of believers was saved. All they had was the word of God. But it became their foundation. Somehow the living word was very real to them. They found this truth as their foundation. And the testimony of Jesus was their central pillar in that little church. Now they only had the presence of the Lord Jesus. Probably there were no great ministers. But they had Christ in them. The mystery of godliness, and the light of Christ were building these brothers up in that assembly. This was the sovereign work of God. Colossians 2 has a phrase that applied to this. This church grew with a growth that is from God. In Colossians 2:19 Paul said, 'and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God'. How do you explain such a vessel of honor like Timothy be raised up? There were no apostles around. Of course the church was not perfect. We know later on that the church in Galatia was susceptible to Judaizer because they were very Jewish and that part of their lives had not been brought to the cross. Maybe as a young church they wrote letters to Paul and

Barnabas and the letters went back and forth. And they had fellowship with the saints among other churches in Lystra, Derbe and Iconium. But here was the wonderful result. Timothy learned Jesus in the household of God. He saw light in the word of God. He received spiritual gifts by which he could build up others. He saw the pillar of holiness in their midst. And he lived among brothers and sisters who commended him and corrected him and ordered him. Timothy grew with a growth which was from God. This is what I call the first stage of church growth. Of course there were human vessels involved. But truly you can say the Lord Jesus was building His church there in Derbe. And this should be a very wonderful lesson for us as well. When the Lord is able to sovereignly build His church, it becomes the church of the living God, the household of God. And there is no better environment for our young Timothy and our young people than to be part of such a church where the pillar of light is shining and the foundation of Christ is laid. The Lord desires to build His church for us to live the Christ life, the mystery of godliness. There is there in that church that Jesus built, filled with His presence. So Timothy initially grew by the growth which was from God.

The Church was built by the apostles

But Timothy also lived through what I call the second stage where the church was built by the apostles. In Ephesians 2:19 - 20 Paul said, 'So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone'. Now we know God can build His church all by Himself. He does not need human vessels to perfect His bride. But it is God's good pleasure to build His church through human vessels. In Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul specifically said that God gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints. The Lord raised up such men to lay that foundation of the church. And once they equipped the saints, then the saints fulfill the ministry and the church is built up. This is done because the life of Christ indwells every believer. He is the owner and architect of the house of God. And by that life of Christ within one another, we are called to build up the church. So Timothy was there and got the opportunity to see the church being built by master builders. And when such workers are master builders, they built up the church according to Christ. Paul described how he saw how the church was to be built. He said that Christ was revealed in him, that he might preach him to the Gentiles. And Paul saw the church as the living Christ connected to His body. Now he was the master builder. And remember, it took eleven years after he was saved before the Lord sent him out as an apostle. If the Lord is going to raise up master builders like Paul, their self has to go to the cross. Their former religion has to go to the cross. The revelation that they receive has to be realized in personal

experience. And then the Lord has to break our earthen vessel so that the treasure can come out.

And you remember how Paul was finally brought after eleven years, from Tarsus to Antioch to join in this work of building the church. Even then Paul had to learn how to work in coordination with Barnabas and the other workers who were there. God found a master builder in the apostle Paul. You know the story of Timothy. On their second missionary journey, Paul and Silas picked Timothy up as they went through his church and Timothy went with them as an apprentice in this ministry. Now it was time for Timothy to see some practical outworking of this building of the church. Sometimes these young Christians got saved and we see it all as the sovereign work of God and indeed it is. But now it was time for Timothy to see the human side of this building of the church process. Can you imagine what it was like to walk with Paul? That Timothy walked with Paul carrying his suitcase. Probably he learned very quickly that Paul was a real human being. Paul was very human, just a clay vessel. I think Paul probably drove Timothy crazy sometimes. He was a very hard worker with very high demands. He was very human. But then when he stood up to preach the gospel and suddenly Timothy saw the power of God coming through a human being reaching out and saving souls with the gospel and he felt amazed. How could God do this? And there were times when they went to a town and they were rejected. And perhaps Paul was stoned and mistreated. And young Timothy could almost see the cross that Jesus experienced in Paul's life as he suffered and was persecuted for sharing the gospel.

Timothy began to see the whole human side of building that God uses vessels to master build the church of God. And we understand why this must be. It is God's will to use humans. And there are several reasons. Even if we know the anointing that dwells within, we still need someone like the apostle Paul to reveal to us the real knowledge of Jesus Christ in experience. Our Christian life is not just to be spiritual but it needs to be grounded in the real knowledge of Jesus Christ or else heresy might come into that church. And when you think of this apostolic team that went from place to place, laying the ground work and seeing the church built, you realize that many of those people had never heard of Christ, had never seen Christ, but they could see Christ through these people as they were transparent vessels of the mystery of holiness. Probably Timothy worked at Paul's side for more than five years. But we know from I Timothy that now Paul had sent Timothy off on his assignment to be a master builder. You see it in I Timothy 1:3. Paul said 'As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines'. Now Timothy was given authority to bring order to the church. He had watched Paul and Silas, the master builders. Paul often said to Timothy, 'when you build, you must build with gold and silver and precious stones.' And Timothy saw how these builders built the character of Christ into the believers. And because of his experience of the sovereign work of his church back in Derbe, he had the experience of the sovereign work of God and the use of servants in

the building of the church of God. So when Timothy was left in Ephesus, in one sense he was left alone by himself, but he was also under the coordination and the covering of Paul and Silas. But he had seen the church in his own vision. Because he had seen, he could build the church. When you read I Timothy, it is filled with certain building words. Paul exhorted Timothy to build a spirit of godliness. As he wrote in I Timothy you can see frequent mention of the ordering in the church. The church was in its order, whether it was overseers or deacons or widows. There needs to be order in the church. There needs to be holy conduct in the church. And one of his favorite words that he used throughout Timothy is the word 'good' or 'noble'. In chapter 1:18 he told Timothy to fight the noble fight; to keep your good conscience. In chapter 2:3, Paul told the men to pray for the leaders in society and in the world for this is a noble prayer. In chapter 3:1, Paul said anyone who desires to be an overseer has noble motives. In chapter 3:7, Paul said overseers must have a noble reputation in the community. In chapter 4:6, Paul talked about teaching sound doctrines as a noble practice. In chapter 5:10, he said widows must have a reputation of noble works. In chapter 6:12, Paul said Timothy must fight the noble fight of faith. In chapter 6:13, Paul said Timothy must make the noble confession like Jesus made before Pontius Pilate.

Now here is the church being built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus being the corner stone. They need to be a testimony of nobility in the church. And even though Timothy did not have the Damascus experience where Paul saw the Lord Jesus, but because he was raised up where the sovereign Lord was building up his church, he saw that the Lord is the church. The Lord not only builds the church but the Lord is the church. And so there in Ephesus, he continued the building work. Even in I Timothy, he experienced many challenges. Bible scholars believed Timothy was about forty years old when he was told he was still a youth. The older Jewish men in the church did not like listening to Timothy who was only forty years old. But Timothy was to win them over by his words and by his Christ like life. And Timothy in fact was made more aware of it in II Timothy that he was part of a very important position. He did not know it at that time. But he was the link in passing the master building of the church onto the later generations. As Paul put it in II Timothy 2:2 'The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.' Timothy went through this second phase and saw how the Lord built the church through the master builders.

And there are two lessons for us to learn from this second stage. The character of God's workers is of first importance if the church is to be built on this proper foundation. Are such workers noble? Have they experienced life in the household of God? Do they live by the standard of the pillar of the testimony of Jesus? Can they build with gold, silver and precious stones upon the foundation? How we need to pray that even in these last days the Lord will raise up noble workers to build the house of God. But the workers cannot work unless

the church is the household of God. Is the body of Christ where we meet the household of God? Can the workers talk about discipline, about order and about noble service? These are things precious in the sight of God.

Large house

But now we come to the third stage of the building of God's purpose. And we see this in II Timothy. When we see this large house as Paul pictured it, this was no longer the normal Christian church. There were some characteristics about it. In the days when the church was built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, there was one apostle teaching even Jesus Christ. But when the foundation got obscured and covered by many things, we found in II Timothy there were many doctrines being spread about. In the large house there were so many doctrines. These two guys, Hymenaeus and Philetus had preached that the resurrection had already come. And there were men teaching fables and superstitions. It is quite similar to today where many doctrines are not biblical and many theories are from human philosophy and psychology. But thank God, we have some teachers who taught the sound teaching of the bible. However, they usually just teach one angle but do not see the entire counsel of God. And not only are there many doctrines, there are many different vessels serving. I went to a seminary to study back in 1966. I was in a seminary where there were twelve hundred students studying for the ministry. Probably ten to twenty percent were not even saved. At that time if a student went to a seminary to study, he did not need to go to Vietnam. So many of the students were smoking and drinking and staying up all night and did not believe in Jesus. They were just there to hide from the draft. There are so many vessels serving today. Some are vessels of honor. They are faithful to the Lord. They have the character of Christ. Their messages are Christ centered. But we have some common vessels, dishonorable vessels. Some made a profit of their ministry like Balaam. Some built their own kingdoms like the Nicolaitans. Some are false prophets. Some are great entertainers. There are all kinds of vessels. And you wonder what young people must think when they look at the large house today. What is truth? What is real? What is Christ? You can go online and find any truth you want to find. If you google today, the most hit you find is Judas Iscariot which is more than Jesus Christ. Judas Iscariot is a hero to the new generation. He was oppressed by an evil God. He was forced to deny and then he was not to be forgiven. Some said he was a hero because he did the will of God. Now I do not recommend you to google Judas Iscariot. All I want to say is that there are so many teachings and teachers.

Paul's description of the large household reminds me of the teachings of the parables of God. When you look at the wheat and tares and the leaven and these other parables, you see the appearance of mixtures and compromises and the corruption. And yet you still see faithful vessels of honor. That's the challenge

Timothy had when he ministered to the young people. Today, can we raise up vessels of honor from our young people? Are there those among our young people who love His appearing? In this last stage in this large house, the Lord is recovering vessels of honor. The Lord is still raising up people who overcome by the blood of the lamb. People who stand by the pillar of the testimony of the Lord. And those who love the Lord's appearing even more than their own life.

Brothers and sisters, as we come so very near the end of this age, the Lord begins to move in very unusual way. His hand is upon His people. He will perfect His bride. But how can this be done today? If you agree with me that we live in an environment of a large house, how can this be done? Where are the standards? Where is the testimony? If in a large house, the presence of God is not there, how can they know how to become a vessel of honor? How can they know when there are so many teachers teaching so many doctrines of this and that? What needs to be done? We will try to answer that question next time. But I want to give you just a little hint.

When we read II Timothy, have you noticed the difference in the spirit in Paul as he wrote this in comparison with the I Timothy? You can see that when he wrote II Timothy, he was pulled back and he saw things from a fuller perspective. Give you just a few examples. In II Timothy 2:19, Paul wrote 'Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." What was Paul saying here? The Lord already has some young people and some old people who are sealed. The Lord knows who are His. He has always known. Whatever the outward confusion, the Lord always knows those who love His appearing. The Lord has His overcomers who not only name the name of the Lord but abstain from wickedness. And the Lord has some people right now on this earth, in this time of the large house, who love the Lord's appearing that it fills them with the blessed hope. It shapes their reality when they pray Thy kingdom come. And under an open heaven, this is as if their reality is about to happen. One last hint, and it is the last lesson we learn from the book of Revelation. And what is that? To His faithful bond servants, Jesus reveals His glory. You remember right at the very start of the book of Revelation, it said it is not written to everybody. Everybody can read it, but not everyone can understand it. But this is written so that the bond servants of Christ can heed, hear and obey. For those faithful vessels of honor, in the last days, the Lord reveals Himself, His glorious victory. And He even reveals that today He is in the midst of the churches as a high priest inspecting and asking for repentance even now. Are you one of those vessels of honor? Are you a faithful bond servant? This conference this weekend maybe our last call to repent and come back to our first love. We who have been blessed with so much. But now we realize all the blessings of this earth cannot be compared to the glorious coming of Jesus Christ. Have we been convinced of that? May the Lord open our eyes to see His coming soon and to live these last days as vessels of honor.

Let us pray

Lord we know that there are so much confusion today. But there is no confusion to You. You know those who are Yours. You know those who name Your name and abstain from wickedness. You know those who are watching and praying for Your return. Lord, I pray that You will gather in those who are on the outside, so that they may come in and be those who are waiting for You. We want everybody to be waiting for You by the end of this conference. O Lord, have mercy upon us and reveal Yourself to us. We pray in Jesus' blessed name. Amen.