

Approved to God: The Work of a Faithful Servant

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References: **2 Timothy 2**, 2 Timothy 4:13; Matthew 25:14-30; James 2:14-26; 2 Timothy 3:12-17; John 15:18; 2 Timothy 4:9-14; 2 Timothy 1:15; Matthew 27:46; Matthew 26:31; 2 Timothy 4:17-18; 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Introduction to 2 Timothy

So if we turn to the book of 2 Timothy, and welcome back Stella as well, and some of you. I'd like to focus on some of the points of the scriptures in the book of 2 Timothy. In particular, in 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 15. So just read that if you turn to your Bible. Let's start from 14 and 15, chapter 2.

[2 Timothy 2:14-26 NKJV]

¹⁴ Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. ¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

And that's what we're going to look at the scriptures. What does it mean to be approved, to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be **ashamed**, and also rightly dividing the word of truth.

Now to give you some background about this book, this is probably the last epistle of Paul written in the Bible to Timothy. This time, this epistle was written in a prison. And some of you perhaps had the privilege to visit this prison in Rome. This was the time before his execution, and it's actually called the **Mamertine** prison. So I have a photo that is being shown here. You can try to imagine how the situation is. It's an underground prison. So it means that it's very cold. And when you read this epistle, remember that in chapter 4, Paul said:

[2 Timothy 4:13 NKJV]

Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come--and the books, especially the parchments.

So at first, I didn't quite understand. Why do you need—you know, a cloak is like something to keep you warm. Like an outer jacket. Then you realize where he was. And you say, "Yeah, very cold." There's very little sunshine. It's like—do you see there was a hole? That's it, that's the sunshine you get. And this is an epistle, if you read the whole book, with very little about himself, like "pray for me" or focus on myself, but instead, you would not imagine that this is an encouragement letter to Timothy and also to the peoples there, to remind them, remind him of his spiritual heritage and responsibility to preach the gospel. It's all nothing focused about Paul himself. So it's lovely to know the background and to understand what is written in this book.

The Approved Worker

Let's just go into what you mean by approved workers. We read 14 and 15. We're going to continue to read the rest of the scriptures and I'll probably make some comment.

[2 Timothy 2:14-26 NKJV]

¹⁶ But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

¹⁷ And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, ¹⁸ who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. ¹⁹ Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

²⁰ But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹ Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. ²² Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. ²³ But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. ²⁴ And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, ²⁶ and that they may

come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

So let's think about "approved," the word **approved** to God. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God." What is the meaning of approved? The original word in the Bible is dokemos. This says something about the definitions. He says that a workman approved is a workman who has passed the test, has been put to the test, and meeting specifications, has won the approval of the one who has subjected him to the test.

Now if you notice the word that we read just now, there is a lot of **work**. So as someone, to Timothy, as someone who follows Christ, you're not sitting idly and doing nothing. That's a lot of work for us brethren, for the God's word and what God wills for us. We're not here just sitting and waiting for His return. Meanwhile, there's a lot of work for us to do. And Paul is encouraging Timothy that be approved, be diligent. The word **diligent** means that there's some effort to present yourself, to be a believer approved to God.

And also the second phrase I'd like to say is, "who does not need to be ashamed." Well, we are waiting for the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is coming back. When He comes back, how do you feel? We're going to meet the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. Would you be ashamed, or you will be approved to God and no need to be ashamed? So how can you be not shameful? A workman has no cause to shame when his work is being inspected. If you are sitting here and doing nothing, when the Lord comes, what would you say to Him?

Parable of the Talents: Faithfulness in Exercise

I remember a parable that our Lord Jesus Christ tells us, and it is also in the context of His second coming, in the book of Matthew chapter 25. Let's just turn your Bible to the book of Matthew 25. The whole chapter 25 implies about the Lord's coming. We have the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins, and we're going to look at the parable of the talents which is in verse 14. Just read the verse here:

[Matthew 25:14-30 NKJV]

¹⁴ "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

And when we think about a man that's traveling to a far country, we would think about our Lord Jesus Christ. He's traveling, and He's going to come back. So He called His own servants, and He says that this is a parable. He delivered His goods to them.

[Matthew 25:14-30 NKJV]

¹⁵ And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. ¹⁶ Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. ¹⁷ And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. ¹⁸ But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time, the Lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. Well, we think about the time right now—the Lord Jesus Christ will be coming back. We are in between the time when He's coming. And we all have the talent. It happened to be, I don't know the word "talent," but we all have different talents. Some of us have more, some of us have less, but all different.

We have different gifts in our assembly. And what is strange is the one that had **one**, he didn't do anything. Just dug in the ground, doing nothing. Why? I'm going to read the verse. So verse 20:

[Matthew 25:14-30 NKJV]

²⁰ "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' ²¹ His lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

He who also received two talents came and said:

[Matthew 25:14-30 NKJV]

²² He also who had received two talents came and said, "Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them." ²³ His lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

The Fair Reward of the Master

Now I want you to notice what are the words that the Lord said to them. To those who get five more talents and two more talents, it is exactly the same. Exactly the same: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

So what is the main thing that we can glean from this? The Lord is **fair**. It's not how much that you earn; it's how hard that you try. We try our best. I always tell my daughters, "I don't need you to be number one in the class. It's just important just you try your best." That matters. Don't care about whether you get first place or whether someone is better than you. You don't have to compare. Just do your best. It's the same thing; the Lord just wants us to try.

We were given talents, and some of us are able to exercise them. Some of us are able to do things that we don't know how to do. Some of us are able to exercise the talents that God gave us that we praise, we give thanks to Him that He committed this to us, and we say thank you, because it's all because we are nothing in ourself. And the Lord looks at it the same; it's fair to everyone. It's the same command to the five-talent person and the two-talent person.

Well, let's look at the one with one talent, that's verse 24.

[Matthew 25:14-30 NKJV]

²⁴ "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours." ²⁶ "But his lord answered and said to him, "You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. ²⁷ So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest."

Now when I read this, this person is laying some accusations saying that, basically, "In summary, you are not a good boss. You are not a fair boss because you are saying that you reap where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed." But that's not the truth. But if this were the truth, you would probably do something with it, not sitting idle. That's the second point in verse 26, what the Lord said: you would have deposited the money with the bankers. The "bankers" in this case could be giving to the word of God, to the missionary to support those who are in need and help the gospel, rather than doing nothing. And what is the response?

[Matthew 25:14-30 NKJV]

²⁹ "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

So it is not the work that we emphasize here. Rather, I think that if a person is truly saved, there will be, as James has said:

[James 2:14-26 NKJV]

¹⁴ What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! ²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? ²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. ²⁵ Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and

sent them out another way? ²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

The work comes with the faith. It shows—your life shows your faith. But this person here, the one with one talent, did not show his faith. His work was not consistent. It should be walked closely. As I always say in the Seekers class, if you believe this chair is sturdy and well-built, you will sit on it. Does that show your faith? But if you think that this chair is shaky and it may fall down anytime, you won't sit on it. That is consistent; that shows up your faith. And this worker, this one, unfortunately, did not. So, what is a good worker? They are put to the test, and they get the Master to say, "Well done, my servant." That's what we want to hear when the Lord returns, and we shouldn't be ashamed of ourself.

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

And also the third one that we read is "rightly dividing the word of truth." In the book of 2 Timothy, there's a lot of places emphasized, telling Timothy to continue in the things that he has learned. In 2 Timothy 3:14, if you have the Bible, you can turn to 2 Timothy. This is probably a very familiar verse that a lot of us memorize, something about the scriptures. He emphasized a lot on that.

[2 Timothy 3:12-17 NKJV]

¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

We know that he has been blessed with a good mother and grandmother who taught him about the Holy Scriptures. A lot of you, if you run the race, you don't stop. You continue to run the race towards the end. Don't stop there.

[2 Timothy 3:12-17 NKJV]

¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And you see that—wow—if you count the many good works written here in this book. We don't have time to go into the details here, but what I want to mention is Paul emphasized a lot on dividing the word of truth. And in fact, he himself as well, when I read that in chapter 4, he was longing—we know it's cold there in the underground prison, but there's one more thing he says: "and the books, especially the parchments." I'm not sure whether he's probably referring to the Bible, the Old Testament, or it could be a paper that some commentators say he likes to write some things on. He emphasized a lot on the words of God.

Living Godly and Suffering Persecution

Another thing is that he says in this book, in chapter 3, verse 12—this is probably something we don't want, because we want comfort—but Paul says:

[2 Timothy 3:12-17 NKJV]

¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

When I read this, it's not "all" but the word before that: "say yes." And sometimes when I read this, I'm a little bit ashamed. I'm ashamed because the reason why we don't suffer persecution is because we do not live godly in Christ Jesus like the way that we should. Though I don't consider them as persecutions, if you share the gospel with people, with your friends, you realize that there will be objections from your family, from your friends.

I remember the first time I shared that when I was saved in Japan. I shared that with my Malaysian circles in Japan. Wow, it was a friendly conversation—in fact, my wife was there, sitting there at the time—and then everybody just attacked me, like my face. I just wondered, "Why is this so dividing?" That's what happened to this world, because who rules the world? And that's why, the reason why—probably we don't have time to read all the details—but the Lord Jesus Christ said very clearly:

[John 15:18 NKJV]

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

So it would be expected. Even when I was in the small ministry at our local university that I was in, I was called to the Dean's office. "I heard that you share the gospel to the students. Is that true?" Well, I got a scholarship from them. I had a meeting with my pastor, and he said,

"Whether I should tell the truth?" Some would say that maybe you shouldn't tell the truth. And I said that's against what the Bible's will. I'm afraid of something like losing the scholarship and all those things, but the Lord is faithful. You just need to follow Him, and He will look after you.

Abandoned and Forsaken

So we're going to go into the next: abandon and forsaken. That, to me, is like the highest level of persecutions, being abandoned and forsaken. And that's when I read the book, I see many verses that Paul says that. For example, in chapter 4, verse 9:

[2 Timothy 4:9-14 NKJV]

⁹ Be diligent to come to me quickly; ¹⁰ for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica--Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. ¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. ¹² And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come--and the books, especially the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works.

You also must be aware of him. In fact, in chapter 1 of 2 Timothy, Paul said:

[2 Timothy 1:15 NKJV]

This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

He was in a situation that a lot of people forsook him. And I think about the news that I read lately about the astronauts of **Artemis II**. Do you know what happened? When they were in space, they could see the eclipse for one hour—not just a short time, one hour. At that time: darkness, nothing. And I think about who? I think about Lord Jesus Christ. He cried out:

[Matthew 27:46 NKJV]

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

The feeling of being abandoned and forsaken is hard. It's probably more suffering than your physical torture. And that's what the Lord experienced. Why? Because all the sins, all the load of the burden of sins was laid on Him at that time. He had been forsaken, and Paul entered into this suffering, the persecutions as well, being abandoned. Not only that, our Lord Jesus Christ says that too. Before that, you know that Judas betrayed Him. His disciples ran away like scattered sheep:

[Matthew 26:31 NKJV]

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

"I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

He was abandoned by the persons that He loved, the disciples. And Paul went through a similar situation as well.

The Lord's Faithfulness and the Final Prize

But that is not the end. You know what Paul says next? The Lord is faithful. And that's the hope we have. Despite what is the situation—despite you being abandoned by the world, by your friends, even by your family—even like what Paul went through right now, the Lord is faithful. You knew what you suffered. The Lord experienced the worst of being forsaken, abandoned, and this is what I'd like to encourage you with:

[2 Timothy 4:17-18 NKJV]

¹⁷ But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. ¹⁸ And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

Can you see that? It turned into worship and giving thanks. So what testimony would you have? We are going to either meet the Lord when the Lord comes back, or you will probably have a memorial service. Would you be able to say what Paul has said?

[2 Timothy 4:6-8 NKJV]

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Not only to Paul—what did he say? "And also to all who love His appearing." Brethren, I urge you to be an approved worker. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, and rightly dividing the word of truth. Let us stand with a prayer.

Father, we give thanks for the encouragement letter from Paul, despite thinking about the situation he's in. And we'll be able to run our race well. That when we meet our Lord Jesus Christ, we do not need to be ashamed, but be a good worker and rightly dividing the word of the truth. We give thanks to You; in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.