

FOR THE MASTER'S USE

"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."
II Timothy 2:21.

God has a purpose for every human life. Everyone can be of use to God. It is that which gives us our individual worth. However, this is not just an idea to lie back upon for comfort. We take it for granted that God will shape our lives and fit them into His plan, like the bits of a jig-saw puzzle. But we must not forget that we have our part to play if God is to use us. This demands a new outlook. We must face life with this purpose in mind, namely, to be used of God.

In the verse which precedes our text you will read of vessels of gold and of silver, of wood and of earth; vessels that we find in a great house. And these varied vessels are for numerous purposes, according to the will of a master who uses them -- for honorable service, vessels of gold, for menial service, vessels of wood.

We usually seek God for what He can do for us. We take to Him all our failures and weaknesses and troubles, and we ask Him for His help. That seems to be the right thing to do, but it all depends on our motive. Selfish praying is no more admirable than self-centered living. There is a far better outlook. It is to think of life as a means of fulfilling God's purpose. It is to pray that God will use us. We should face the world every day, with this desire and hope in our minds that we may be used of God. It should be the desire of each of us that our lives shall be adjusted properly to the will of God; that if our lives are adjusted to His will, He may, through us, fulfil His purposes, not for ourselves alone, but for others also. And the only possible way in which God can meet the needs of this world is through lives that are adjusted to His will and purposes.

In the passage of scripture before us, the Holy Spirit in a beautiful manner uses a vessel to represent a Christian. A vessel, as we all know, is something that is able to contain substance. We think of it as a container or some sort of a utensil. The spiritual meaning of this scripture is that we, who are Christians, are vessels for the Master's use. Our risen Lord said of the Apostle Paul, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me." That suggests that the Lord desires to possess us and to use us. We cannot all become vessels of gold or even silver vessels, but we can all be vessels unto honour and thus fit for the Master's use. The pity is that every Christian is not a vessel unto honour. I have the conviction that all of us who are genuine Christians have a sincere desire to be used in the Master's service. If we are to do so in the most effective manner, the Spirit of God must make us what we ought to be. Working for Him is not of so much importance as working with Him in the carrying out of His program. It is His intention that we shall be vessels or instruments for Him, to use as He wills for the fulfillment of His purposes.

Channels only, Blessed Master;
But with all Thy wondrous power
Flowing through us Thou canst use us,
Every day and every hour.

Now, that is God's great desire for every one of us, that we should be channels through which He can work, through which He can pour His blessings to a needy world. But why is it that there are so many who call themselves Christians who are unusable? Are you among those whom the Lord desires to use, and yet cannot use? If so, may this hour be a time of such adjustment to His will that you may go forth a usable person. What a pity that there are so many who name His Name who never seem to be of use to Him! They attend church, they say prayers, they give to the work, and they go through all the motions, as it were, but for some reason they are not being used of the Lord. We sometimes pray, "Lord, use me;" and of course,

we thus express a right desire; but one may question very much whether there is any need to pray thus. Rather I think what we should pray is this: "Lord, make me usable." The reason I say this is that God is far more anxious to use us than we are to be used.

If we are to be vessels unto honour and ready for the Master's use, there are three essential qualities which we must possess.

I. Purity.

One of the most important and most obvious reasons why some who know Christ as Saviour are yet largely unusable is that of uncleanness. God cannot use an unclean instrument. Those who are to be the vessels of the Lord must be clean. You remember that the Psalmist, after his terrible sin, and out of the agony of his conviction, cried to God and said: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow, Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee" Psalm 51:7, 9-10, 13. It was only after the cleansing, only when his heart had been cleansed that he felt God could use him. So it is well for us to let the Lord use His searchlight to shine into our hearts and to reveal to us if there by any uncleanness in the instrument which makes it impossible for Him to use us. Is uncleanness the hindrance in your life? Is that the reason why you cannot be a vessel unto honour for the Master's use? If so, seek for and receive cleansing from Him.

The first condition for a vessel for the Master's use is that it is to be separated unto Him. "And, let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity." This separation is to be from known evil unto a doing of the known will of the Lord.

A vessel for the Master's use must be a sanctified one. What does that mean? Someone says, "sanctified means to set apart, to dedicate, or to hallow." Another says, "sanctify means to purify, to cleanse, and to make holy." It is to be granted that the root idea is separation, but we must insist that the separation effected is an inner, spiritual, and drastic one. It is more than an act of commitment on our part; it is an act of cleansing on God's part.

And this separation is our safety and our witness. It marks us out as being identified with Christ, and it lets people know where we stand. And it puts us under the protective care of our Lord Jesus Christ; Paul called himself, "A servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1). Paul practiced what he preached. When he met Christ, he immediately separated himself unto Him. And it was this separation that gave him such strength of character and power for service. He named the Name of Christ and departed from iniquity.

A vessel to be "meet for the Master's use" must be a clean vessel. This has reference to the inner life of the believer. But so long as we are in the flesh, temptations come to us and sin ensnares us. We become defiled but we can be cleansed again through repentance and confession. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). We are cleansed once for all in respect to our standing. We need to be cleansed daily in respect to our state.

If we are to be vessels that the Master can use, then we must make up our minds.

that by His grace we shall be clean ones. This is a very important point and one that cannot be ignored. Satan will defile us if he can in order to make us unfit for the Master's use, and to get us out of the way.

II. Utility.

"Meet for the Master's use!" That is Paul's way of saying that it will be an instrument fashioned and fitted for service. It has reference to worth in service. It means to be very useful. This "meetness" has a double reference. The vessel is such as the great Master of the house could handle, and it is such as will be profitable for Him to use.

May God give us the ability to see that we cannot be used in a large way unless our hearts have been purged of such carnal growths as pride, self-will, self-interest, self-seeking, worldly-mindedness, and uncharitableness. It means abandonment of one's self to the will of God. It means that one cannot have a divided allegiance.

A vessel unto honour must be usable. Its capacity may be large or small. Its workmanship may be inferior or superior. The essence of the matter is that it shall be hallowed into usability for the Master.

Paul was a vessel unto honour. When he was altogether given up to the Lord Jesus, and when Jesus used him to bear His Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the people of Israel, and when he was used to be the vehicle of the inspiring Spirit in writing for our learning those oracles which now fill one quarter of the New Testament, he was a vessel unto honour.

Our Lord hath need of us. To be of service to Christ--was ever privilege more regally splendid than this? To fail Him, to withhold life and labor from Him--was ever failure more grievous and tragic than that? One of the great hindrances to our utility in the Master's service is that we are unyielded. We must be wholly yielded to Him if He is to use us. "Yield members as servants to righteousness." "Present your bodies a living sacrifice." Our Lord only uses that which we yield to Him. What we yield, He possesses, and what He possesses, He uses. If we yield all, God possesses all, and He will use all. He wants us to put ourselves absolutely at His disposal. Have you put yourself entirely over to Him without any reservation whatsoever? If so, you are a vessel "meet for the Master's use."

Dedication of life is the important thing. The vast difference between Christians today is to be found, not in their gifts and talents, but in the degree of their consecration. But that life with meager gifts, which is entirely consecrated, may amaze the world. Dwight L. Moody is a shining example of what God can do with limited training and meager gifts when the life is wholly His. To be sure He could have accomplished more with Moody had he been better equipped, but my thesis still stands that God cannot do much with an unconsecrated life. It will simply remain an earthen vessel, even though it is endowed with rich gifts.

III. Adaptability.

A vessel unto honour for the Master's use is "prepared unto every good work." We cannot expect to be used of the Lord in His service unless we are available. We need to be near at hand, instead of a great way off. Are you living close to Him, where He can find you and use you? Such ought to be the case with every one of us who are Christians. I often marvel that the church does as

well as it does with so many "far-off" Christians in its membership. Many are never near enough to be of use for anything. Oh, the pity and the shame of such a condition!

It is the messenger who waits close to headquarters who gets the business. This reminds us of the man's experience as a conductor on a street car. He applied for a job and got his uniform. He was told by the superintendent that they did not have a regular run for him, but if he would hang around there would be emergency calls. The man stuck to headquarters like a leech and he got a lot of work. Soon he had a regular run of his own. So the one who desires to be used of the Lord must have that position of nearness and that attitude of readiness to respond.

And a vessel "meet for the Master's use" must be ready to do any kind of service, however humble it may be. The servant is not better than his Lord. And the Lord Jesus Christ did the humblest tasks. He moved among the poor, the unfortunate, and the diseased. He laid His hands upon them to heal them and to bless them. He did the things that the religious leaders of His time despised. He preached the truth so clearly and so persistently that He was persecuted for it and was crucified. He left us this example, with the hope that we would follow in His steps.

A cleansed life will be useful to the Master, and willingness will add to that usefulness. A life that is clean, prepared for the Master's service, and willing has a combination which insures usefulness. His use for us is to be found somewhere among the people around us. There is no honour in life greater than that of usefulness to the Master. Being a vessel unto honour and meet for the Master's use is not alone for the pulpit, or the prayer meeting, or the mission field. We must widen our conception of its serviceableness to see that it is good in the kitchen, behind the counter, at the bank, along the pulsing arteries of trade, and in the humble ranks of toil. Stuart Holden once asked a man what his business was. "I am a cabinet-maker for the glory of God," came the quick and splendid answer. It is well for us to remember Chrysostom's translation of the text, "We should be ready for every emergency that would add to the glory of God."

So there it stands--"a vessel unto honour." Its virtues are three--purity, utility, and adaptability--and its virtues create its values. But, if you want to be a vessel unto honour in the service of your Lord, get very near to the Master and stay there.