

A call to godliness (1 Tim. 2)

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Tonight, Godliness. We might call it a call to godliness.

My text might be Exercise Thyself Unto Godliness.

It isn't a question of looking at your neighbor or your fellow believer, but it is a personal thing. Exercise thyself unto godliness. The reason why I've turned to this scripture, this subject, is simply because we are living in a very godless age.

The perilous times of the last days are upon us already. Days when men are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, the apostle says.

[00:01:06] Days when there is a form of godliness manifested in the world, but the power thereof is denied.

Our Lord, remember, warned us that those evil and immoral practices that characterize the days before the flood in Noah's day, they would reappear in the days before the Son of Man. That is, when the Lord Jesus Christ comes in his power and majesty to set up his kingdom. But those evil, immoral practices are all around us today.

[00:02:02] So how much nearer then must the coming of the Lord to call us home be?

How near must be the rapture?

Are we expecting it? Are we looking with eager expectancy for the Lord to call us home?

I think a study of these passages that I've read will challenge our hearts and call us to a life that is more suited to our high calling.

I'm afraid I missed the first hymn this afternoon, but I understand it was the one that begins, [00:03:04] Called from above, heavenly men by birth, who once were but the citizens of earth. We seem to have forgotten that. We seem to be caught up in the spirit of the age and we're quite content with things around us. But after all, beloved brethren, we sometimes sing, and I hope we mean it, that we are but strangers here. Heaven is our home.

Well, are we living like that? Are we expecting any moment to be ushered out of this earthly scene and transported into the Father's house above?

The apostle writing to Titus, he says, [00:04:05] The salvation-bringing grace of God has appeared, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldliness, we should live soberly, that is, individually in our lives, righteously as concerning one another and before the world, and godly, there's our relationship to God. Now, let me ask, can you honestly say that is true of us today? Oh, I know it's a doctrine. Oh yes, we can quote it, it's true, we won't deny that, but is it manifest in a practical way that we are separated from the world, as we have been exhorted today, and that we are indeed heavenly citizens journeying on [00:05:10] like the children of Israel. They looked across the wilderness and they saw the glory of the Lord shining before them. Beloved friends, the glory will soon dawn. That scripture in Titus, it says the grace of God has appeared. Yes, thank God, we are the recipients of God's wonderful grace in bringing us to a knowledge of himself through the work of the Lord Jesus.

How thankful we ought to be that God has dealt with us like that. But that scripture goes on to say, looking for that blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of the great God, our saviour, Jesus Christ. [00:06:02] That's our object, and we need to have it in mind. I think our brother quoted, if I'm not mistaken this afternoon, a verse that I myself have quoted many times.

Our citizenship is in heaven whence we look for the saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our bodies of humiliation and fashion them like unto his body of glory. What a hope that is, beloved brethren. The day may dawn, well, the night may not end before the Lord comes. And then what a transformation. We shall leave this sordid scene of sorrow and suffering and we shall find ourselves at home, at home.

[00:07:02] Because our home is not here, our home is above.

We are but strangers here, heaven is our home. Let's get hold of that and let's remember that we are heavenly citizens.

We're not here to establish ourselves in this world, as we have been reminded, but to have our eye fixed upon the coming one, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who has done so much for us, the one who has redeemed us at such cost. He's coming, that his atoning work of suffering on the cross might have its fruition when he has all his redeemed ones gathered around himself. You and I will be there, thank God.

But let us say that we're here, we're here to his praise and to his glory. [00:08:09] I like that verse that the apostle speaks of himself, I'm not sure whether it was referred to this afternoon, but I'm going to speak of it just for a moment.

It's in Corinthians and it brings before us the apostle Paul's great ambition. I think you can trace about three ambitions that he had, but this is the main one. In Corinthians chapter 5, second epistle, he says, Wherefore we labour, well that's the word, we strive, we endeavour, or it can be translated, it's our ambition. It's our ambition, that was the apostle's ambition. Is it yours and is it mine? Whether present or absent, that is whether in the body or absent from it with the Lord, [00:09:06] we shall be accepted of him.

We shall be well pleasing to him. That's the point of that verse, you see. We are already accepted in the beloved, yes. But in our practical lives, are we here as those that are well pleasing to the one who has called us, our holy Lord.

And can we say that God looking down upon us, does he see his children walking in a way that is consistent with his holy nature and is he pleased with what he sees? Are we walking soberly, righteously, godly in this world?

So we shall find many a challenge thrown out in these scriptures.

[00:10:10] The theme of godliness runs throughout the epistle. It's like a golden thread going through. It appears here and appears there. But I've just selected those scriptures for our study tonight. And first of all, the apostle desires that we should offer supplications, prayers, intercessions, a giving of thanks for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority. Why? That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

Why does the apostle desire that we should make special prayer and intercession for those in authority? [00:11:06] May I tell you what I think?

I think the apostle has in mind what he warned the Thessalonians about, the mystery of lawlessness that was already working in the apostles' day, working then, and surely we can say it's increasing so today.

The mystery of lawlessness. And you'll read the second chapter of the second epistle of Thessalonians and you will find that this mystery of lawlessness will be headed up in the man of sin, the son of perdition, the Antichrist, the one who will set himself up as God [00:12:01] and all hindrances, all, no that's the wrong word, but the worship of God as such will be cast out under penalty of death. So we need to pray earnestly that God will maintain control of things here and he does that through government. In that chapter in Thessalonians we read, thank God for this, we read of the one that restrains the evil, the one who keeps everything in check, he that restrains, that's quite obviously a reference to the Holy Spirit. But it goes on to speak, or in the same chapter it does, of that which restrains. [00:13:03] So that would include and perhaps mainly refer to government and I believe that God uses the divinely institution of government to restrain the evil forces that are in the world today. Now who's behind it? The great enemy of our souls. Make no mistake, he's very busy today. Make no mistake, his time is short and he's very active, both in his subtlety and in his way of violence.

Corruption and violence characterized the days before the flood and don't they characterize the present day. Satan is very busy, but thank God we have one greater than the great enemy of our souls. We have the one who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light [00:14:05] and he is sufficient for us. But we need to pray earnestly for those that exercise authority.

You only have to think of Somalia, wasn't it? In 1992 they had enjoyed law and order under a dictator, it's true, but there was peace and order there until that dictator was deposed and what followed? Anarchy and chaos.

God restrains the evil by the measure of government under his control.

A practical point, do we remember to pray for those in authority in our prayer meetings?

[00:15:12] I have to confess that often it slips from my mind, but nevertheless let's bear it in mind and pray earnestly that God in his mercy might preserve us with a peaceable and quiet life in all godliness and honesty.

Now, I can't help noticing that there is a word about the decline of morality in this epistle.

It's true today, isn't it? One can't help being alarmed at the spread of immorality [00:16:06] and the acceptance of things that would not be tolerated 20 or 30 years ago. They are accepted now as the usual thing. I'm talking about the world around us. But we have to be careful as believers that we don't get in any way tainted by the character of the evil world around us.

And so there is a word here especially for the sisters.

I'll come to the brothers in a minute.

The sisters, well, they are exalted here, aren't they?

He says, speaking about the sisters, that they adorn themselves in modest apparel. [00:17:01] We don't see that in the world today, alas. And not with brodered hair and so on.

But he says, that which becometh women professing godliness with good works. I think Peter has a fine word about that, you know, when he says, let the women adorn themselves, let them go in for the inner adornment of the heart, I think it says, expressed in a meek and quiet spirit.

Well, that's something for the sisters to cultivate.

And I join the sisters in this, that I think we all need, to cultivate that meek and mild spirit, that dependence upon the Lord, [00:18:01] that lack of self-assertiveness and rather just quietly waiting on the Lord for his guidance that he is so willing to give to us. So, what we think of this exhortation that is open to the sisters in particular, the meek and quiet spirit, which is of great price, it says. This is something that God values, you see. What value do you put upon it? The world puts nothing upon a meek and quiet spirit, but God speaks of it as of great price. And what about Mary of Bethany?

She brought something of great price to the Lord. It was costly, that alabaster box of ointments. What did it signify?

[00:19:01] It told out her appreciation of Christ.

She knew that he was about to lay down his life. She had a sense of that in her soul. And she took advantage of the opportunity to bring her alabaster box of ointments and pour it on his feet.

Well, it was her appreciation of Christ. She loved him, and she would express it in giving this ointment that had cost her something, and she treasured it. But who so worthy to receive it as her blessed Lord? The Lord was on his way to Calvary then. We look back to Calvary.

We look back to the time when he suffered the insults of men, but not only that. We read that he

endured the cross despising the shame.

[00:20:01] Yes, cast that aside, all the insults and ill-treatment of men, their scorn and their derision. He despised the shame, but he endured the cross. Yes, he suffered under God's righteous stroke in order that you and I might be blessed eternally. We have cause to thank him, to praise him, to bring our alabaster box of ointments, our worship, our thanksgiving. He is so worthy to receive it, worthy of all homage and praise and glory, glory yet to come. But I'll tell you something more. What he values more than all the future glory or the present glory that he has is the worship of your heart and mine. Don't let's deprive him of it. Let's bring our offering and pour it out upon him [00:21:05] because he loved us and he gave himself for us.

Well, I said I'd come to the brothers, but it might include the sisters as well. Now it's about exercising thyself unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little, that is for a little time, a little while, this life only. But godliness is profitable unto all things having promise of the life that now is and that which is to come.

It's quite true that if we neglect the care of our bodies, well, we shall deprive the lord of our activity and our service.

[00:22:08] But I think it's the one, any brother that goes to extreme and gives his time and thought and energy to sport in this sport's loving age, I think he's depriving the lord of what is due to him.

Now I'm not disparaging bodily exercise. I do my daily dozen every day, but all five minutes of it actually. But we must keep things in their balance, you see.

There is something more profitable than sport. I hope you don't waste time, as we were reminded this afternoon, don't waste time indulging in watching the sport on the television. [00:23:07] I know many do, but need to be careful because there's always some branch of service that is open to us and we are told to redeem the time. And what about that lonely sister that needs looking up sometimes? What about that isolated brother that we haven't seen at the meeting for a while? What about those lonely people in homes for the elderly? They appreciate a visit. They love to talk to somebody that's prepared to listen to them. You've got to be a good listener as well as a good talker, you know, when you visit these people. But I tell you this, you'll be well rewarded because many a time I've been to visit an old aged sister or brother and I thought, well, I'll bring a little cheer to them. [00:24:04] They're so lonely and sad sometimes. But I've always come away cheered up myself and that's the way it works, you see. So I commend that little service to brothers and sisters. We were reminded this afternoon that we should let our homes manifest the Spirit of Christ.

And so here, you see, we have the exhortation to show piety at home.

This applies to young people particularly and to equate their parents for this is good and acceptable before God. [00:25:06] I believe another activity of this great mystery of lawlessness under the influence of Satan, I believe it is aimed to destroy family life.

And so this exhortation comes in, you see, to maintain piety or godliness at home, at home.

You can put up a motto if you wish. Christ is the head of this house, this family.

Or Christ is the unseen guest in this house. I've seen all these things. But the main thing is let the atmosphere of the home be manifested.

Let it be seen that it is a Christian home, [00:26:04] that there are those living whose home it is, that belong to the Lord Jesus.

They're here to represent him, to serve him, to please him. And so there is an opportunity in the home to manifest the spirit and graces of Christ. So there's a word for us all, you see, not only the young but the old as well. Now, in the last chapter particularly, we have a very solemn word.

It says, it speaks about the doctrine which is according to godliness.

[00:27:11] I believe the great enemy of our souls has made a target of Christian doctrine.

He's seeking to undermine it.

He's been very active in many cases.

But what is our resource in this?

I think we are responsible to hold tenaciously to the word of God, the inspired word of God. What we have in our hands tonight is God's own message. It's God's inspired word.

[00:28:02] And so we do need to see that we hold fast to the scriptures.

I think it's very important to judge all that we say, all that we do, according to what is written.

I don't think it's better to do that than to say, well, what does Brother So-and-So say about it? What does the scripture say? We have God's word and we need, in this day of difficulty, of many problems this day, of brokenness in the church's history, and with the many perplexing problems we have to face, we need to get back to the scriptures to base all that we say and do on what saith the scriptures.

[00:29:09] I've told this little story before, but it comes to my mind at this moment. If you've heard it before, well, forgive an old brother for repeating himself. No, it's just this, that a young brother went to visit an aged sister.

She was housebound and he found her reading the Gospel of John. He said, haven't you got a commentary to help you understand what you're reading? No, she said, I just read the scriptures. The Lord makes it plain to me. Oh, he said, you must have a commentary. So next time he went, he took along a commentary and gave it to this person and said, this will help you understand the scriptures. [00:30:03] After a while he went back and he said, how are you getting on with that commentary that I gave you? Doesn't it help you to understand the scriptures?

So she said, young man, I've come to this conclusion that the Bible throws a lot of light on that commentary.

Well, that's true. At the same time, I must confess, I owe a lot to the writings of the old brethren.

I suppose I've been on the road as long as most of you. And I have been a diligent, I trust, diligent student. The writings of William Kelly and the synopsis by J. N. Darby and the notes on the Pentateuch by Macintosh and other writings. [00:31:05] But I've come back to this. What does the scripture say? And better to depend upon the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit to make things plain. And if you have difficulty in your reading, well, just ask the Lord to give you guidance and help and I'm sure he won't disappoint you.

So, you see, Satan is out in these days to destroy, if he can, the doctrine concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. And in this very epistle, God has been pleased to show us a perfect representation of godliness.

[00:32:04] We have it in just one verse, really. Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

There you have the doctrine according to godliness. That's what we need to lay hold of, to hold fast.

Let none rob us of the truth of that wonderful verse.

God manifest in flesh.

The babe of Bethlehem. The man of Sychar's well.

The man who died upon the cross.

[00:33:06] The man who now lives in the glory of God. The one who is coming for us. The son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. That's our resource. Let Satan do his worst. Let us hang on and value, hold fast tenaciously, the truth of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are those in high positions, theological circles, ecclesiastical circles, those who are denying the very truth of scripture, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now they're even trying to undermine the truth of heaven and hell.

[00:34:13] Heaven according to the modernist, or hell rather, is just a state of non-being.

What arrogant nonsense and unbelief.

When I turned on the wireless recently to hear the news, there was a discussion going on, and a bishop, quite rightly, he was making clear that God's way of salvation was in the gospel. And the interviewer interrupted him and said, well, if that's the case then, he said, those people that are born and living out in remote areas of China or Africa, [00:35:07] they are doomed to eternal death and judgment. Again I say, arrogant unbelief, because scripture says very plainly that the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. God has his witness in creation as well as in the gospel, and he will judge righteously.

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Yes. Now, there's just another thing I'd like to mention, [00:36:07] and that is following down the chapter, verse 6, Godliness with contentment is great gain.

The apostle is warning against what has been called the cult of gold worship, the love of money.

And we need to be on our guard against this, because we're living in a very affluent age, and there is a tendency to try and keep up with the Joneses and don't let the neighbour get one ahead of you, you've got to get, you know what I mean. So we've got to be careful, and we have the warning here, the Godliness with contentment.

[00:37:03] I like that expression. Godliness with contentment, that's great gain.

And the apostle says, we've brought nothing to be in this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out, and having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. Well, I don't know how you measure up to this.

I think I like a little bit more than food and raiment. Yes, but the thing is, we mustn't set our mind on these things.

Set your mind on things above, says the apostle, where Christ sitteth, the right hand of God.

It says, verse 10, [00:38:01] the love of money is the root of all evil. Money is neutral, isn't it? It has its noble uses as well as its ignoble uses.

But don't strive after it. Don't, let your mind be on things above.

That's where our treasure is. It's not in the things of this world, when we pass from this world to the next, we have to leave everything behind, as the apostle says here. But so it's possible to be rich in this world and not be rich toward God.

Let us strive after godliness. Now, I must, I've got a little bit more to say, I think.

I'll just have a look.

[00:39:04] Oh, I'll turn off from the Timothy and just remind you of a verse in Peter's epistle.

It's in the second epistle in the first chapter, I think.

And this is what he says.

Wherefore, the rather brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.

Now, we have a heavenly calling. God has called us to his heavenly glory, the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we have to make it sure. To whom? To yourself.

You have to be assured of these things. [00:40:03] You have to be in the enjoyment of it and try and put it into practice, the fact that you are a heavenly citizen on your way to heaven. And he says, make it sure.

For if you do these things, you shall never fail. Well, it requires diligence, perseverance, energy, spiritual power and vigor.

We can learn a lot, you know, from the little lad that was trying out his new skates on the ice. Poor little fellow was falling over and bruising himself and the tears were coming down his face. A lady called out to him who was watching him and said, come off the ice now, lad. Come and watch the others. Give up and come and watch the others. [00:41:03] He was very indignant. He said, I didn't buy these skates to give up with. I bought them to learn how with. And beloved friends, God hasn't given you faith or any ability at all that you should use it on yourself. He's given it to you that you may learn how with. That is, how to put it into practice, how to get on with your brethren down here, how to be found here in all godliness, in all expectancy of the Lord's coming.

But it needs diligence, not to give up, but to put it into practice. So may God help us to be diligent in seeking to please him, [00:42:02] to exercise ourselves to godliness, to be doers of his word and not merely hearers only.